

Jane Eyre Is a Timeless Repeat Read

It is a recent discovery of mine that my favorite novel, *Jane Eyre*, is a favorite of many. I shouldn't be surprised, but I admit I was, a little. I can't speak for anyone else, but my personal favorite part is the beginning of chapter four. But I am getting ahead of myself. For those who haven't read it, I certainly suggest you do, but I want to give you some of my favorite reasons to do so. Find your copy here. But first, a synopsis.

Jane Eyre's Story

The story of *Jane Eyre* has a happy ending, but is not a happy story by any stretch of the imagination. Shortly after she is born she is orphaned, as both of her parents die in a typhus outbreak. She is taken in by her maternal uncle, who also then dies; his wife, to keep a deathbed promise to him, assumes care of her, but very regretfully. She hates the burden of maintaining a child to whom she has no familial tie, and, consciously or not, punishes Jane for it unrelentingly. After a particularly cruel incident, Jane takes sick, and the apothecary summoned to care for her suggests that she go to school; it is a suggestion Jane assumes will be readily taken up, which it eventually is. It is on the cusp of leaving to go to school that she finally musters the courage to confront her aunt about her ill treatment. It is a short triumph. After that, she goes to school, where she suffers further, and, arguably, worse, privations, but excels and progresses from student to teacher. After this, desiring a change of scene, she applies for and gains a position as a private governess. She and her employer, Mr. Rochester, form an odd friendship that turns to love, but things intervene and Jane has to leave once more. With privations more severe than ever before, she stumbles into the lives of the Rivers family, who take her in, nurse her to health, and become fast friends. There are a few interesting developments regarding the relationship between the Rivers family and Jane, but, in the end, she returns to Mr. Rochester and lives out her own happy ending.

Real and Relatable

The first of my reasons for you to read this book is that Jane Eyre, the character, is utterly magnificent. She may be “poor, obscure, plain, and little,” but she has ample moral courage, self-discipline in spades, and buckets of what my Texan mother and her family would call “sass.” And I am here for every instance of it. She is not afraid to express her opinion when she feels it is just or morally necessary, and she will always stand up for herself and those less fortunate than she is, regardless of social status or relationship. This last is a skill she had to learn early on, and is part of my favorite scene. In the beginning of chapter four, Jane can only hope that she will be sent to school; in the meantime, her three cousins ignore her, for the most part. George, the eldest and a bully, attempts his usual persecution only to find that she is in a fighting mood; he cries out when she punches him in the nose and quickly goes crying to his “mamma”. However, instead of winning sympathy and getting Jane in trouble, his “mamma” simply replies that she told him to leave Jane alone because she isn’t fit to associate with the family. And then, seemingly out of nowhere, Jane leans over the banister and shouts down to them that “they are not fit to associate with [her]”. It is, for me, the most satisfying moment of the entire novel. Afterward, Jane inflicts some sharp questioning on her aunt, who comes to discipline Jane for her outburst, and, from then on, Jane consistently stands up for what she feels is right. Her sense of justice, along with her sass, even propel the story forward in some places.

Craftsmanship

My second reason for you to read Jane Eyre is the quality of the writing and the blend of genres that Charlotte Brontë brings together. She starts with a bildungsroman, a coming-of-age tale. We follow Jane from childhood through adolescence and adulthood. Add to that the obstacles of being an orphan, living with unloving relations, and a search for both home and freedom, and the story becomes utterly relatable and compelling.

Brontë employs a first-person narrator in this novel, which brings the reader even closer to the action by letting them experience the action first-hand. Though Jane narrates her own tale, she does so from ten years after the end of the story; her distance from the action gives the novel a

conversational tone at times, because she reflects on childhood experiences with adult wisdom and is able to explain childhood events in a way that she couldn't as a child.

What Brontë does next is take Romanticism and the Gothic tradition and implements them with a gentle enough hand that they add atmosphere and drive the story forward, while not straying into the territory of cliché. I don't know about you, but a supernatural element here and there is never a reason to shut the book, as far as I'm concerned.

Timeless Themes

Third, and lastly for this post, I recommend that you read *Jane Eyre* because, like Shakespeare's plays, the themes it contains are perennial ones. The concept of bullying and ostracization, standing firm in the face of great temptation, friendship, courage, deception, forgiveness, hard work, and how to deal with hard circumstances will always resonate with us, regardless of time period, geographical location, or social class. Being able to relate to characters in literature is, I would argue, one of the main drivers of reading, and here there are plenty of them to choose from. Literature is also a way of learning lessons from others' mistakes, and a good mental exercise in putting oneself in another's shoes. We are not all orphans, or teachers, or wealthy, or clergymen, or bullies, but being able to relate to different facets of each of those characters is what makes, and keeps, us human. Reading is the easiest way to step out of our lives and experience those of others, and if we did that more often, the world would be a much better place.

If you haven't read *Jane Eyre*, or if you have and want to teach it, I have created a novel study that will guide you, or you and your students, through all aspects of the novel. You can find it [here](#).

If you want some further reading on Charlotte Brontë, I recommend the biography *Charlotte Brontë: A Fiery Heart* by Claire Harman. And if you would like to watch it, I recommend 2011 film starring Mia Wasikowska and Michael Fassbender.