Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Jane Eyre

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Plot

- Gateshead: the orphaned Jane lives with her cruel aunt, Mrs Reed. She is locked in the 'red-room' as a punishment, where she panics and faints.
- Lowood: at a harsh charity school run by the hypocritical Mr Brocklehurst, Jane befriends the gentle, religious Helen Burns, who dies of **consumption** (tuberculosis). Jane later becomes a teacher there.
- Thornfield: Jane becomes **governess** to Adèle and falls in love with her employer, Mr Rochester, despite strange events such as a fire in his bedroom. At their wedding, it is revealed that Rochester is already married, to Bertha Mason, who is locked in the attic. Jane refuses to become his mistress and leaves.
- Moor House: Jane, starving, is taken in by the Rivers family. She inherits money and discovers they are her cousins. St John Rivers asks her to marry him and become a missionary in India, but she refuses a loveless marriage.
- Ferndean: Jane returns to find Thornfield burned down by Bertha, who died in the fire. Rochester was blinded and lost a hand trying to save her. Jane marries him.

Themes

- **Independence** and self-respect, social class, gender and equality, love and passion against duty and morality, religion, and freedom and confinement.

Context

- Published in 1847 under the male **pen name** Currer Bell. Middle-class women had few options apart from marriage, or low-paid work such as being a **governess**.
- Charlotte Brontë went to a harsh school like Lowood; two of her older sisters caught tuberculosis there and died.

Key quotations

- 'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?' (Jane to Rochester).
- 'I am no bird; and no net ensnares me' (Jane).
- 'Reader, I married him.' (Jane).

How to get top marks

- Have a big idea about **independence**: Jane insists on being treated as an equal, which was bold for a woman in the 1840s.
- Use the first-person voice. We see everything through her, and she speaks to the reader directly.
- Use **Gothic** elements, such as the red-room and Bertha, as images of what happens when women are confined.

Key terms

Bildungsroman	A novel about a character growing up.
Governess	A woman employed to teach children in a private household.
Gothic	A style of fiction with mystery, secrets and dark settings.
Pen name	A false name used by a writer.
Consumption	An old name for tuberculosis.
Independence	Being free to make your own choices.
First-person narrator	A narrator who tells their own story using 'I'.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Where does Jane live as a child?
2. What happens to Jane in the red-room?
3. Who runs Lowood school?
4. What does Helen Burns die of?
5. Why does Jane go to Thornfield?
6. Who is locked in Thornfield's attic?
7. Why does Jane leave Thornfield?
8. What does St John Rivers ask Jane to do?

Answers

1. Gateshead, with her cruel aunt Mrs Reed
2. She is locked in as a punishment, panics and faints

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3. Mr Brocklehurst
4. Consumption (tuberculosis)
5. To work as a governess
6. Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife
7. Rochester is already married, and she won't become his mistress
8. Marry him and become a missionary in India

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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