



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2024 Study Guide



Charlotte Brontë

- Born April 21, 1816 in Thornton Yorkshire, England, Charlotte was one of six children of Irish-born Anglican clergyman Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell Brontë.
- Charlotte and her five siblings lost their mother to cancer in 1821 and their aunt Elizabeth Branwell moved in full-time to help with their upbringing.
- At age 8, Charlotte and her sisters were sent to a boarding school for girls where they suffered from harsh conditions resulting in the death of her two elder sisters. This traumatic experience inspired the setting of “Lowood Charity School” depicted in *Jane Eyre*.
- Upon her return home, Charlotte began writing poetry and fiction, went on to work as a governess for various families, and spent time in Brussels as a pupil-teacher.
- In 1845 Charlotte along with her sisters Emily and Anne published a volume of poems using the pen name Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Emily went on to write *Wuthering Heights* and Anne wrote *Agnes Grey* & *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.



About the adapter: Elizabeth Williamson

- A Bay Area native from Berkeley, California whose earliest memory of theater-making is creating a political farce about the Watergate scandal with her stuffed animals at the young age of 7.
- An OBIE Award-winning director, producer, dramaturg, and adapter who currently is the Artistic Director of Geva Theater in Rochester, NY.
- Internationally known for her work developing and premiering major new plays and musicals, which have won the Tony Awards for Best Musical and Best Play, and the Olivier, Critics Circle, Evening Standard, GLAAD, and Drama Desk Awards for Best Play.



2024 costume design for *Jane Eyre*
in , by Ulises Alcalá.

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research writer Charlotte Bronte. These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/charlotte-bronte>
<https://youtu.be/uSw-rhEtrl>
2. Research Gothic early mid-19th century literary form. This and other websites provide information:
<https://www.hartfordstage.org/jane-eyre/stage-notes/inhabiting-the-gothic-in-jane-eyre/>
3. Research the legend of The Green Man. These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/The-Green-Man/>
<https://medium.com/@TheHappyHippyCo/thegreen-man-9ba90a107edb>
4. Research the Victorian era (1837 - 1901). These and other websites provide information:
<https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/the-victorians/>
<https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/victorian-era-timeline> ,
5. Research the class system in Victorian England. These and other websites provide information:
<https://historicalbritainblog.com/class-system-in-victorian-england-guest-post-by-richard-marrison/>
<https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/social-life-in-victorian-england/>
<https://backinthedayof.co.uk/the-victorian-class-system>
6. Research Victorian Charity Schools.
<https://raggeduniversity.co.uk/2012/08/08/history-ragged-schools-2/>
<https://www.tastesofhistory.co.uk/post/victorian-schools>
7. Research the life of a governess in Victorian England. This and other websites provide information:
<https://www.dawsonenglishjournal.ca/article/the-profession-of-the-governess-in-19th-century-england-as-it-pertains-to-jane-eyre/>
8. Research illegitimate children in Victorian England. This and other websites provide information:
<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/unmarried-mothers>
9. Research mental healthcare in the Victorian era. These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/medicine/victorian-mental-asylum>
<https://collegeofphysicians.org/programs/education-blog/victorian-mental-health-and-women-part-three-treating-depression>
<https://editions.covecollective.org/content/mental-disease-and-victorian-asylums>



2024 costume design
for Mr. Rochester
in *Jane Eyre*, by Ulises Alcalá.

After seeing/reading the play

1. How do Jane's experiences at Lowood Charity School influence her development and worldview? Why does Jane feel her only way out of her life at Lowood is being employed as a governess?
2. Why is Jane surprised to be treated like a guest upon her arrival at Thornfield? What about the position and social status of a governess would make her think she would be treated less than? What does Jane hope to gain from being a governess?
3. Why is Mr. Rochester initially so drawn to Jane when he first meets her out on the road? What about Jane makes him think she's otherworldly or out of a fairytale? How is Jane different from the typical Victorian women of her social class?
4. What particular qualities does Jane possess that allow Mr. Rochester to trust her? How does Jane's demeanor positively affect Mr. Rochester when he's being critical and callous towards her and others around him? What compels Mr. Rochester to confide in Jane, "an inexperienced girl," the scandalous secret of his connection to Adele?
5. What was Jane's reaction to the revelation that Adele is in fact Mr. Rochester's illegitimate child with a French opera singer? How is Jane's point of view revolutionary for its time? What insightful compliment does Mr. Rochester give Jane in response to her unwavering commitment to Adele? How does this interaction with Mr. Rochester ultimately make Jane feel more at home at Thornfield?
6. Refer to your research on illegitimate children in Victorian England. What social challenges and stigma would have been thrust upon Adele's mother? What options were offered to unmarried, single mothers at the time? What consequences did fathers of illegitimate children face? How did the challenges and stigma affect the illegitimate Adele? Mr. Rochester?
7. What motivates Mr. Rochester to dress-up like a fortune-teller and insist on reading Jane's palm? What does this reveal about Mr. Rochester and his feelings towards Jane?
8. Why does the summons from Jane's aunt, Mrs. Reed, cause her so much inner turmoil? How does Mrs. Reed justify sending Jane away to Lowood Charity School instead of taking care of her like one of her own? What social norms in Victorian England support Mrs. Reed's actions? What prohibits Mrs. Reed from showing Jane any love or kindness even on her deathbed?

9. Refer to your research on mental health in the Victorian era. Why does Mr. Rochester keep his wife Bertha Mason hidden away in the attic rather than seek treatment for her "madness"? What would have been some acceptable treatment options at this time to manage Bertha's mental illness? What keeps Mr. Rochester from divorcing Bertha and moving on with Jane?



10. What would Jane ultimately sacrifice if she decides to live as Mr. Rochester's mistress instead of as his wife? Why does Jane outright refuse to even consider living with Mr. Rochester without getting married?
11. Refer to your research on the class system in Victorian England. How does the inheritance Jane receives upon her uncle's death dramatically impact her social status? Why might it be in Jane's best interest to marry Sir John? Why is Jane's desire to marry for love not practical or the norm in the Victorian era?
12. How does Sir John's marriage proposal motivate Jane to seek out Mr. Rochester after months of no communication? What circumstances ultimately allow Jane to forgive Mr. Rochester's betrayal and accept his marriage proposal? Jane decides to marry Mr. Rochester at his lowest point, physically broken and blind, what does this say about her personal beliefs and values?



The Eyre family resided at the grand North Lees Hall.

The Class System in Victorian England

1837 - 1901



Victorian poverty, 1856, Wikimedia Commons



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LOWER /WORKING CLASS

Classified by mainly skilled and unskilled workers, which made up the majority of the Victorian-era population. They were excluded from political affairs and lived in impoverished life-styles due to poor-quality housing, food scarcity, lack of public healthcare, and unstable incomes. Education was optional since children also worked for extra family income and married with in their class, creating a perpetual cycle of poverty.

MIDDLE CLASS

Classified by earned wealth, either owned or managed large businesses. The industrial revolution increased their job opportunities, decent earnings, and access to better education

UPPER CLASS

Classified by inherited wealth; possessed titles, riches, land or all three. They also controlled local, national, and imperial politics.

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