

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Jane Eyre
by Charlotte Brontë

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Chapter 1

1. In the following excerpt young Jane Eyre describes her surroundings as she sits on a secluded window seat.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day. At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.

Jane is told to separate herself from her “contented and happy little cousins” Eliza, John, and Georgiana, so she sits in the window seat. In a similar paragraph, write a description of a place you like to go when you need to seclude yourself from others.

2. John abuses and tortures young Jane. She is aware that she is being badly treated, but is unable to defend herself. She writes,

Accustomed to John Reed’s abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult.

Write a letter to Jane giving her some advice on how to resist or respond to John’s abusive behavior.

3. While quietly reading a book, Jane is confronted by John Reed. He sticks his tongue out at her, insults her, and throws a book at her. Even though the entire incident is John Reed’s fault, Mrs. Reed punished Jane.

Pretend you are Jane’s best friend. Jane calls you on the telephone very upset over her mistreatment. Your job is to console her. Record your telephone conversation here:

Jane:

You:

Chapter 2

4. Jane must listen to the same criticisms of her character over and over again. In the following excerpt, Bessie is criticizing Jane for her lack of gratitude to Mrs. Reed. Bessie thinks Jane should be a very good little girl, because she is the recipient of Mrs. Reed's generosity.

“You ought to be aware, Miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poor-house.”

I had nothing to say to these words: they were not new to me: my very first recollections of existence included hints of the same kind. This reproach of my dependence had become a vague sing-song in my ear; very painful and crushing, but only half intelligible.

Can you understand how tired Jane is of hearing the same criticisms? Write a conversation between yourself and someone you know who criticizes or nags you repeatedly about the same problems.

5. Jane is locked in a room where Mr. Reed died. Jane worries that his spirit may haunt his old bedroom. Because she is already frightened, Jane becomes terrified by a beam of light.

I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern, carried by some one across the lawn: but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world.

Write a diary entry about a time in your life when you felt frightened by an ordinary occurrence because your “mind was prepared for horror.”

Chapter 3

6. In the following passage Jane describes the distress she experiences after being released from Mr. Reed's bedroom.

Next day, by noon, I was up and dressed, and sat wrapped in a shawl by the nursery hearth. I felt physically weak and broken down: but my worse ailment was an unutterable wretchedness of mind: a wretchedness which kept drawing from me silent tears; no sooner had I wiped one salt drop from my cheek than another followed.

Have you or anyone you know experienced this kind of misery? If so, write a letter to Jane letting her know you understand how she feels. Use specific references from your knowledge of events to illustrate your compassion.

7. At the very end of this chapter, Bessie and Abbot discuss Jane's situation. They both agree that under the same conditions, they would pity Miss Georgiana, but not Jane. Miss Georgiana, one of Jane's cousins, is very beautiful with long, curly hair and blue eyes. Since Jane is rather plain in appearance, Bessie and Abbot admit that they treat her differently.

Write an editorial for your school newspaper in which you give reasons why all people should be treated equally, no matter their looks or income. Incorporate several reasons and remember to provide examples for each.

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8. Bessie sings a familiar song to Jane. The melody usually uplifts Jane and makes her feel better, but today, Bessie sings with a low pitch and tone, thus making the song seem sad. The melody upsets Jane, and she begins to cry.

Write the lyrics of a song that is special to you and tell why that particular song is so important. Is there a certain song that reminds you of someone in your family who is gone? Did a loved one sing a special song to you when you were a child? Do you listen to a particular song when you feel lonely or sad? Have you ever invented a song of your own to suit your own needs? Do you have a secret favorite song about which no one knows? How is it that music can affect us so profoundly?

9. Jane tells Mr. Lloyd that she is very unhappy at Gateshead; she is also upset that she has no other family. However, when Mr. Lloyd asks Jane if she would like to live with her poor relatives, if they could be found, Jane declines, stating that she does not understand how poor people can be kind or happy. She equates poverty with degradation.

Write a short chapter for a self-help book in which you provide instructions on how to be happy in life. What, specifically, should one do in order to be happy? Does one's level of happiness depend on one's level of income? Describe specific things that one can do to ensure happiness.

Chapter 4

10. Mrs. Reed decides that her children are no longer permitted to associate with Jane because she believes Jane is a bad influence on them. Jane becomes angry at this rule. She knows that if her uncle were alive, he would not permit his wife to treat her so poorly. She shouts at Mrs. Reed, “What would uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive?”

Write a dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Reed in response to Jane’s question. Imagine that you are Mr. Reed and include what you would say to your wife at this point in the story?

11. Mrs. Reed decides to send Jane to a boarding school. Jane is unhappy with Mrs. Reed’s home and hopes for something better for her life. Then Jane witnesses Mrs. Reed talking to Mr. Brocklehurst, the head of Lowood School.

“Mr. Brocklehurst, I believe I intimated in the letter which I wrote to you three weeks ago, that this little girl has not quite the character and disposition I could wish: should you admit her to Lowood school, I should be glad if the superintendent and teachers were requested to keep a strict eye on her, and above all, to guard against her worst fault, a tendency to deceit. I mention this fact in your hearing, Jane, that you may not attempt to impose on Mr. Brocklehurst.”

As Jane, write Mr. Brocklehurst a letter of explanation so that he might understand your life as it has been at Mrs. Reed’s and why he should not believe her criticisms of you.