



Youth Reads: Jane Eyre (Charlotte Brontë)

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The recent DVD release of the 2011 film *Jane Eyre* makes this a good time to revisit the book on which the movie was based. Written by Charlotte Brontë in 1847, *Jane Eyre* is the story of a plain-faced orphan who experiences much suffering but eventually finds love.

At the beginning of the novel, Jane is a ten-year-old orphan who lives with her aunt Sarah Reed. Constantly mistreated by her relatives, Jane has a thoroughly unhappy childhood. When she is sent off to a supposedly Christian boarding school, her situation improves only slightly. Self-righteous and hypocritical Mr. Brocklehurst runs the school, keeping the students cold and hungry. Harsh teachers such as Miss Scatcherd punish the students for even the slightest infraction.

However, Jane finds a friend in her fellow student Helen Burns. While Jane at first struggles with forgiving those who have hurt her, Helen quietly accepts her own suffering. Jane learns much from Helen, growing in maturity and in her Christian faith. Miss Temple is another ray of sunshine in Jane's dark world. A loving and compassionate teacher, she inspires Jane to follow in her footsteps and eventually become a teacher at the school.

Several years later, Jane leaves the school to become a governess at Thornfield Hall. There she hears strange things, such as ominous laughter in the night and whispered tales of a dark secret. Yet slowly, Jane falls in love with Mr. Rochester, the master of Thornfield Hall. Jane thinks she has found happiness at last, but Rochester's secret threatens to destroy it forever.

Jane Eyre fully deserves its place among the great classic novels. Well-written and absorbing, the book tells a delightful story that upholds Christian truth. Jane is a sincere Christian with an unwavering view of right and wrong. Throughout the book, she resists temptation and consistently does what is right.

Jane learns as a young woman to forgive her spiteful relatives, showing love and kindness to them even while they reject her. During her courtship with Mr. Rochester, Jane continues

to resist compromise. When Mr. Rochester pleads with her to live with him as his wife even though there is an obstacle to their actually getting married, Jane refuses.

Thus, while Jane is a strong and independent woman, she is quite the opposite of most modern feminist role models. Her strength lies in resistance of temptation rather than an embrace of it. She exercises her independence by helping those in need, by working successfully as a teacher and governess, and by living within her means. She finds freedom in forgiveness rather than revenge.

Jane's strong Christian faith is particularly remarkable given her upbringing. Jane spent much of her life surrounded by teachers and relatives who claimed to be Christians while acting very differently. However, Jane is able to see through their hypocrisy without rejecting faith. Even as a teenager, she learns to live a life of true Christian piety while avoiding the self-righteous pretenses of those around her.

Unfortunately, some modern readers may struggle with the length and density of the book. Most editions of the book are at least a few hundred pages long, and the writing style will be considered formal and old-fashioned by many teens, particularly those who aren't used to the classics. However, readers who enjoy other 19th-century novels, such as those by Jane Austen or Charles Dickens, will surely appreciate this one as well.

If readers can handle the dense writing style, they will find a beautiful story of love, courage, and redemption.

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