

Discussion Questions

- 1 Central to Jane Eyre's struggle for fulfillment is her ambition to transcend the limits placed upon women in Victorian society. How does Jane navigate the gap between society's expectations and her innermost desires? In what ways do traditional gender roles both hinder her progress and help her achieve a measure of contentment? Do the obstacles Jane confronts have parallels to the barriers faced by women today?
- 2 Discuss the sexual politics in the novel. How do other women in Charlotte Brontë's novel respond to Jane's freethinking ways? Does the film's portrayal of the male-female relationships stay true to the author's vision?
- 3 The protagonists in *Jane Eyre* are products of a class-conscious society in which financial security shapes personal freedom. In what ways are Jane and Mr. Rochester constrained by their social positions? Does *Jane Eyre's* England allow for genuine social mobility? How does Brontë's message of empowerment threaten the existing class structure? How are the class distinctions of Brontë's day different than those of today? Does the fact that Jane ends up with the wealthy Rochester, not to mention an inheritance of her own, undermine the argument for the irrelevance of riches?
- 4 Bound by honor and a sense of duty, Mr. Rochester brings young Adele to Thornfield. Is she universally embraced? How does her character contrast with—and complement—Jane Eyre's? As portrayed in the novel, what role do children play in Victorian society? In what ways does Jane's own troubled childhood influence her adult philosophies? What do Jane's techniques as governess say about the author's vision of childrearing?
- 5 Despite her adherence to a strict moral code, Jane is not excessively pious. What do her characterizations of Mr. Brocklehurst, St. John Rivers, and Eliza Reed communicate about her feelings toward established religion? How do her years at Lowood School contribute to her sense of alienation from the Church? Is this handled differently in the book and the film? Is it religion or virtue that impedes Jane's union to Mr. Rochester? For Jane, what is the difference?
- 6 When he arrives on the scene at Thornfield, Edward Rochester is shrouded in mystery. What is the nature of his secret? Why does he go to such lengths to prevent its discovery? Do his actions at concealment contradict his stated intentions, not only toward Jane Eyre but also toward his ailing wife? Why does he refer to Thornfield as a prison? What accounts for the sense of powerlessness that fuels his desperation and spurs his restless travels?

- 7 Discuss the role of physical beauty in *Jane Eyre*. What does the author suggest about its importance to individual happiness? How does outward vanity reflect on the inner character of Jane's cousin, Georgiana Reed? How does Jane respond to the young Adele's obsession with all things *très jolie*? What makes Mr. Rochester reject the glamorous Blanche Ingram? What does Mr. Rochester mean when he tells Jane that he and she are like "twins"? What is the significance of Mr. Rochester's average appearance, which finds its match in Jane Eyre's plainness? How does lack of physical beauty enable each of them to express their truest selves?
- 8 Though possessing an inner strength that sustains her during the most difficult times, Jane also relies on the love and support of those around her. How does her friendship with Helen Burns ease Jane's transition to Lowood and inspire her intellectual achievement? Is the depth of their relationship fully realized in the film? How does Mrs. Fairfax's welcome of Jane at Thornfield contrast with the treatment she receives at Gateshead? What roles do Diana and Mary Rivers play in restoring Jane's will to live after she abandons her post at Thornfield? What does Jane mean when she tells St. John that, though she has always known herself, Mr. Rochester was the first to recognize her?

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë, was first published in 1847. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *Jane Eyre* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/janeeyre/>.



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