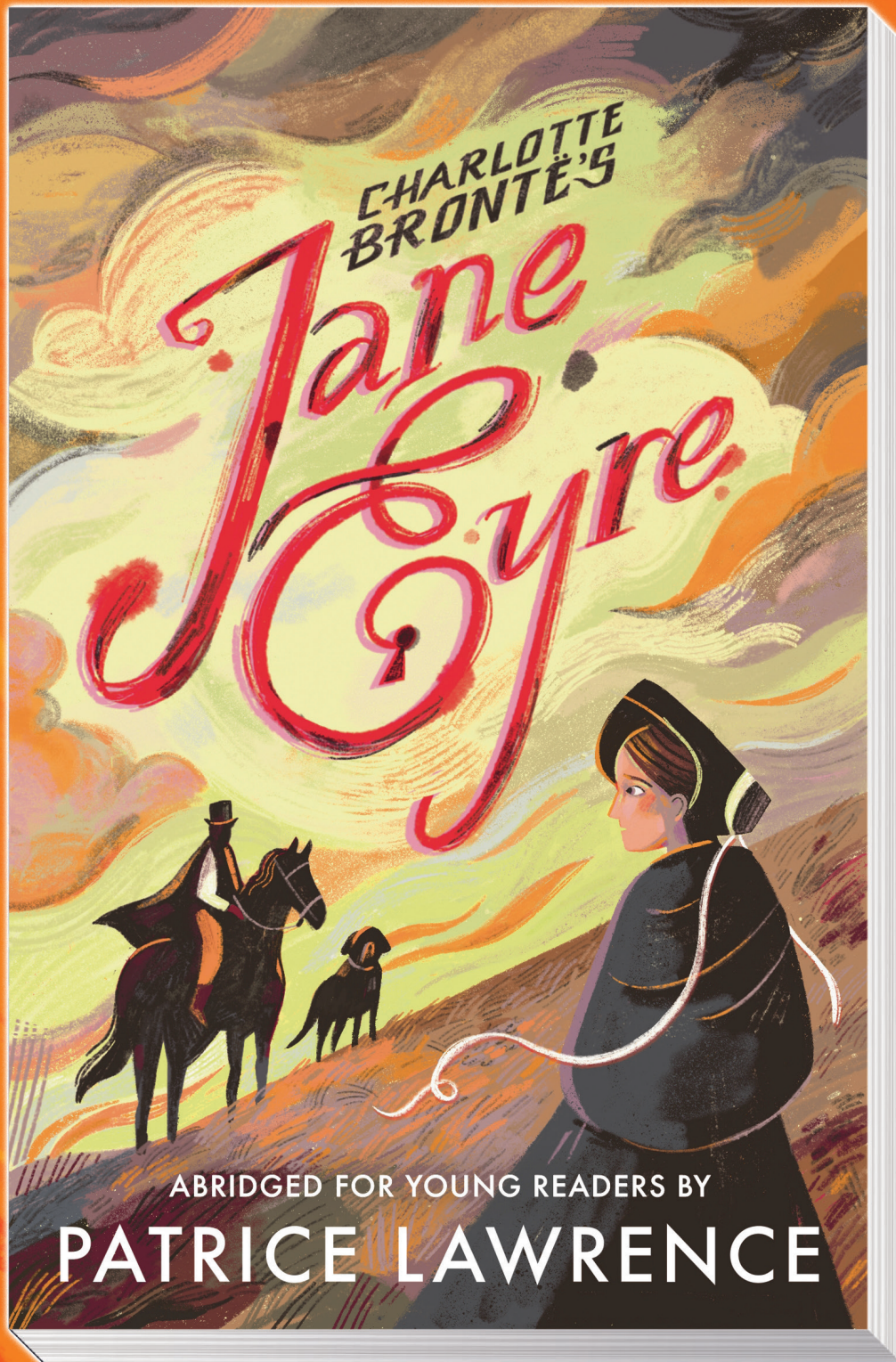


# Discussion Guide



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**PATRICE LAWRENCE RETELLS *JANE EYRE*  
AS A WALKER ABRIDGED CLASSIC**



WALKER  
BOOKS



# CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *Jane Eyre.*

ABRIDGED FOR YOUNG READERS BY  
**PATRICE LAWRENCE**

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Wonderfully abridged by Patrice Lawrence, *Jane Eyre* has been brought to a whole new, young audience. The essence of each character and the emotions of Jane's journey and struggles are deftly balanced against an accessibility and immediacy for younger readers that will quickly draw them into this classic novel without sacrificing the heart of Brontë's original. Jane, orphaned and cruelly treated by her aunt, grows up in a life of poverty and hardship. But when a chance position as a governess at Thornfield Hall arises, her life takes an unexpected turn. With the Hall shrouded in mystery and the mercurial Mr Rochester a further mystery still, Jane must confront her ambitions and her position in life, to discover what true happiness and purpose may entail.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

This abridgement of *Jane Eyre* offers huge scope for discussion and exploration – from the novel itself, to the context in which it was originally written, to the significance of bringing an up-to-date version to younger readers. Lawrence's introduction is a key insight into some of these issues and should be read with care. More broadly, there are various themes of cruelty, abuse, and familial loss that should always be treated with care. Ensure any relevant support is available for group members for whom, despite being a historical novel, *Jane Eyre* might reflect lived experience.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Getting started:

What did anyone enjoy about the novel? Why? Did anyone know (of) the story before they started reading it? Explore the group's understanding of when it was originally published – 1847. Why might Charlotte Brontë have published it under the name Currer Bell? Why is this significant? What does it tell the group about the time it was written that the author couldn't publish it under a woman's name? How does this relate to the characters in the novel?

### 1. The Red Room

'Soon I know the ghost will come. The door has been locked and there can be no escape for me.' – p.11

Consider the opening episode of the 'red room' together – how did it make anyone feel? How would anyone feel if they'd been made to stay in the red room? What effect does it have on Jane? Why might the book start this way?

### 2. Jane

"It is my sad duty to tell you that this girl, while so young, is an agent of evil." – p.58

Ask the group to describe Jane's character, her personality. What is she like? Why? Do members think she is typical of girls and women of her time? How, or how not? Throughout the book she is regularly treated very badly, and sometimes very well – ask for examples of both. What impact do these experiences have on her?

### 3. Helen Burns

*'It is then that I see it, a trace of a tear glistening on her cheek.'* – p.51

Her earliest true friendship is with Helen Burns. How is Helen different to Jane? What does Helen represent, to the reader, or to Jane? You might like to consider how happy Helen seems with her lot in life, despite her illness and incredible hardship. We learn that Helen's grave is a grassy mound for fifteen years, but then a 'grey marble tablet' will mark the spot – what does this glimpse into the future suggest?

### 4. Thornfield Hall

*'Candlelight gleams from one window; all the rest are in darkness.'* – p.81

What does the name Thornfield Hall suggest to anyone? Is it a significant name? Why, or why not? Consider whether Jane's experiences could be compared to a field of thorns, for example. What are Jane's immediate impressions of Thornfield? Are they accurate? How does Thornfield compare to Gateshead, or to Lowood Institution?

### 5. Mr Rochester

*'His face is stern and serious, his gathered eyebrows revealing his anger and frustration.'* – p.98

Does Mr Rochester treat Jane well? What did group members think of him? Why? How is he different from other characters, particularly men, in the book? Does his character change throughout the book? Or does Jane's understanding of him change? Why does anyone think Jane loves him? Is it 'necessary' for Mr Rochester to be so badly injured and blinded in the fire, in order for him to eventually end up happy with Jane? Why? Discuss as a group.

### 6. The Fortune Teller

*"So you want your fortune told." Her voice is as harsh as her looks.'* – p.150

What is significant about episode with the 'fortune teller' – Mr Rochester in disguise. Why does he do it? What impact does it have? What is 'fortune' in this sense? How would the fortunes of a woman like Blanche Ingram compare to someone like Jane Eyre? What does Jane expect from life? Introduce the idea of 'entitlement' – what does this mean? Is it fair? How does this compare to today?

### 7. Cousins

*'They love me as little as I love them... We have nothing in common to bind us together.'* – p.13

Jane meets two sets of her cousins over the course of the novel – the Reeds at Gateshead and, much later, the Rivers at Moor House. How are they portrayed differently? What is the importance of family? (Consider that Mrs Reed always knows who Jane is, and yet the Rivers only later discover their connection, having already taken Jane in. Is St John Rivers a good man? Why? Why would he propose to Jane when she, and the reader, know he doesn't actually love her?)

### 8. Social standing

*'I am Jane Eyre. I must remember my place.'* – p.122

What is social standing? How does it affect the novel? What causes it? Does it exist today? If so, how is it different to in Charlotte Brontë's day? How unusual might it be for someone like Jane to break down what we would now call social barriers? Look again at Lawrence's introduction – she mentions her 'uniqueness and braveness' – how is she unique and brave? Can anyone think of characters from stories that have come since that might owe a debt to Jane Eyre?

### 9. Confronting the Past

*'Bertha was the beautiful daughter of a rich plantation owner.'* – p.178

Lawrence also highlights some of the issues with the original text, in a modern context – can anyone identify some of the elements of the novel that would be treated differently today? What do we learn of Mr Rochester's first wife? Or where his fortune comes from? The place of women in society? Why is it important to read these books, and understand how the world was presented in times gone by?

## 10.Divine Intervention

*"You dreamed that Thornfield Hall was in ruins, you once told me."* – p.172

Across the novel things happen which might be considered a coincidence, or serendipitous (check understanding here), and then towards the end is an incident that seems supernatural. What events conspire to bring Jane to Thornfield Hall in the first place? And what then causes her to return? How realistic is it that the only people willing to help her in her darkest moment would turn out to be her long-lost cousins? And how could Jane and Mr Rochester hear one another, from so far apart, at the moment when Jane was about to make a terrible mistake? Discuss what the term 'divine intervention' means – does the author suggest that God had a hand in what happened? Is it significant that Jane hears Mr Rochester just after she asks for a sign that marrying St John is the right thing to do? Are there higher powers at work in this book? If so, why is it significant that Jane enjoys so much suffering, and Mr Rochester suffers such injuries?

