Charlotte Bronte

- Was born of Irish ancestry in 1816
- Lived at Haworth, a parsonage (church)
- Mother died of cancer when Charlotte was 5 years old.

Charlotte’s Religious Views

- Father, Patrick Bronte, was an Anglican clergyman
- Due to her upbringing, she often wrote about religious hypocrisy—those who preach one doctrine but live by another

The Bronte Sisters

- Charlotte had four sisters and one brother.
- After their mother’s death, Bronte and her sisters were sent to the Clergy Daughters’ School.
  - The food was bad
  - Discipline was harsh
  - Disease was rampant
- Bronte’s two older sisters (Maria & Elizabeth) died of tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis

- Tuberculosis was a common killer during the Victorian era.
- Tuberculosis often destroys its victims’ lungs, resulting in a bloody cough.
- If untreated, sufferers may die of tuberculosis because their lungs are so badly damaged.

All in the Family

- The Clergy Daughter’s School at Cowan Bridge would become the model for Lowood, the fictitious girls’ school in Jane Eyre.
- Charlotte’s sisters Anne and Emily Bronte both became successful writers.
- In 1846, Charlotte & her sisters started publishing poems and began writing novels:
  - The Professor was Charlotte’s attempt to fictionalize her love for a college professor she had met at Brussels.
  - In 1847 Wuthering Heights was sister Emily’s first success. Charlotte followed with Jane Eyre.
- Charlotte’s brother, Branwell, was a gifted painter.

All 3 Bronte Sisters...

- Used a masculine pen name because women writers were not taken seriously at that time in Victorian England.
- Charlotte used the name Currer Bell.
Marriage Bells

- In 1854 Charlotte married her father’s curate, Arthur Bell Nichols.
- The next year, she became pregnant, then ill.
- She died a month before her 39th birthday.

THE NOVEL

Jane Eyre was published in London in 1847.

Key Facts

- All events are told in the past from Jane’s point of view.
- The setting is early 19th Century England.
- Jane Eyre is classified as both a Gothic and a Romantic novel.

Jane Eyre

- Our protagonist
- Orphaned as a child
- Becomes governess at Thornfield
- A feisty young child, who grows into a strong woman.
- Embody the English working-class woman.
- Will marry . . . . ?

Edward Rochester

- Jane’s boss at Thornfield
- Gruff and rude
- Made wealthy by family money
- Benefactor to Adèle Varens
- Very secretive and sometimes deceitful

Reed Family

- Jane’s family on her father’s side
- Mrs. Reed is Jane’s cruel aunt who sends Jane to Lowood; she locks Jane in the “Red Room” for punishment
- John, Eliza, and Georgiana are Jane’s spoiled cousins; they are rude and selfish; they either torment Jane or ignore her
Rivers Family

- Jane’s caretakers when she leaves Thornfield – are her cousins on her mother’s side.
- St. John – Minister at Morton, tries to get Jane to be his missionary wife
- Diana and Mary – kind and independent women, serve as role models for Jane (we only see one of the sisters [Mary] in the movie)

Bertha Mason

- Bertha is locked in the attic at Thornfield
- Starts the bedroom fire, and eventually burns the house down
- Kills herself in the house fire
- Exotic, sensual personification of the Orient
- Why is she at Thornfield?

Mrs. Fairfax

- Housekeeper at Thornfield
- Serves as a mother figure/role model for Jane
- Tells Jane about secrets of Thornfield and the Rochesters.

Other Characters

- Helen Burns – Jane’s friend at Lowood, teaches her character, dies in Jane’s arms
- Mr. Brocklehurst – cruel and dishonest master of Lowood School
- Miss Temple – Jane’s favorite teacher, positive female role model/mother figure

Other Characters (Cont.)

- Grace Poole – Bertha’s mysterious keeper, serves as Bertha’s scapegoat
- Adèle Varens – Jane’s pupil, daughter of Rochester’s old mistress, Celene
- Richard Mason – Bertha’s brother, exposes the secret marriage
- Blanche Ingram – socialite after Rochester’s money, opposite of Jane

Charlotte’s Gothic Influence

- Jane Eyre displays some characteristics of the gothic novel:
  - Imprisoned women
  - A heroine who faces danger
  - Supernatural interventions at crucial moments in the plot
  - A romantic reconciliation
Jane Eyre’s Romantic Heritage

- **The Romantic Movement**
  - Came into play in at the end of the 18th Century.
  - Championed for the rights of the individual over the demands of society.
  - Believed that humans were inherently good.
  - Valued imagination over reason.
  - Inspired by nature.

**Introduction**

- Jane Eyre is an orphan in 1800s England.
  - Jane’s parents died of typhus when she was a baby.
  - Mrs. Reed, her aunt, has agreed to raise her, but she and her three children treat Jane cruelly.
  - Yet, Mrs. Reed expects Jane to be thankful.

**Jane Eyre: Introduction**

When Jane tries to stand up for herself, her aunt is furious.
She calls Jane an ungrateful child and sends her away to a boarding school called Lowood.

**Life at Lowood**

- The superintendent of Lowood School is Mr. Brocklehurst.
- Jane immediately makes friend with a girl called Helen Burns.
- She also admires her head teacher Miss. Temple.
- As a consequence of bad conditions, typhus breaks out. Many girls die, including Helen, Jane’s best friend.
- Jane stays at Lowood eight years as a pupil and then two years as a teacher.

**Jane Eyre: Introduction**

At Lowood the girls . . .
- sleep two to a bed,
- get up before dawn,
- bathe in ice-cold water,
- get burnt porridge for breakfast,
- and are taught to suffer in silence.

**Typhus**

- Jane Eyre’s Lowood suffers an outbreak of typhus, a disease that is spread by fleas, ticks, and lice.
- causes headaches, chills, rashes, and fevers that last up to three weeks.
- Both tuberculosis and typhus are diseases associated with crowded, unsanitary conditions.
- The threat of catching one of these diseases is a major concern for the characters in Jane Eyre.
Thornfield Hall

- After posting an advertisement in a local paper, Jane becomes the private governess at Thornfield Hall.
- Her pupil is a young French girl named Adele.
- Thornfield Hall belongs to Mr. Rochester
  - Jane does not meet him for months.
  - Finally, Mr. Rochester returns home and stays longer than usual at Thornfield Hall.

Role of the Governess

- With the new stress on female education, governesses were in demand.
- Pay was poor, but it was one of the only jobs available to educated, yet impoverished young women.
- Employers & other servants often shunned the governess because they felt they were "putting on airs."
- Their employers would often ignore them, too, because they had a superior education, which intimidated many people—especially men.

Jane Eyre: A Ground Breaking Novel

- The heroine is small, plain, & poor.
- The heroine is the first female character to claim the right to feel strongly about her emotions and act on her convictions.
- This romantic ground had previously been reserved for males.
- Such a psychologically complex heroine had never been created before.

Byronic Hero

- This term is created by the famous poet George Gordon, Lord Byron.
- Characteristics are...
  - Proud
  - Gloomy
  - Mysterious
  - Passionate
- Mr. Rochester is an example of this type.

Social Class

Jane often feels inadequate compared to many of the other main characters in the novel. Jane feels that her love for Rochester is wrong because she isn't from the same class. Class segregates Jane from her cousins on both sides, although it is more obvious on the Reed side. Blanche Ingram is the class opposite of Jane.

Love

Jane is constantly in a search for love. She is searches for romantic love in Rochester, motherly love through Miss Temple and Mrs. Fairfax, and friendship through the Rivers siblings, Helen Burns, and Rochester. Jane's search for love might stem from the scorn she felt as a child.
Religion

Religion plays a huge role in this novel. Helen Burns taught Jane a view of faith and God that she could understand. Mr. Brocklehurst’s Evangelical view had negative effects on Jane, as did St. John River’s Empirical view. Even the once cruel Eliza Reed joins a French convent.

Mother Figures

In her search for love, Jane also looks for the mother figure that she missed as a child. Jane finds the characteristics she is looking for in:
- Miss Temple
- Mrs. Fairfax
- Rivers sisters

Red Room

The room at Gateshead where Uncle Reed died, and where Jane was locked up to be punished. This punishment haunted Jane for the rest of her life. Memories of the night in the Red Room occur when Jane is at a crossroads in her life.