

## COMPARING ‘JANE EYRE’ IN LITERATURE AND FILM

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### Skills and strategies under development

#### Language Arts

1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
2. Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
3. Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions.
4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes.
5. Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.
6. Uses skills and strategies to read a variety of literary texts.
8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.
10. Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

#### Arts Connections

1. Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines.

#### Life Skills

1. Contributes to the overall effort of a group.
2. Uses conflict-resolution techniques.
3. Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations.
4. Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.
5. Demonstrates leadership skills.

#### Thinking and Reasoning

1. Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument.
2. Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning.
3. Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.

### Overview

In this lesson, students consider the themes and characters of Charlotte Brontë’s novel «Jane Eyre», beginning with responding to key lines from

the novel. They then engage in activities designed to guide them to deeper reading of the text. Some of the activities involve considering one or more film adaptations, including a 2011 movie version. Finally, they compare the life of someone they know, or themselves, with Jane Eyre.

### Materials

Computer with Internet access and projector, sheets of poster paper with quotations from «Jane Eyre» on them, markers, copies or the e-text of «Jane Eyre».

## Section 1: Introductory materials for home-reading and discussion

### 1.) Out of the Shadows

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/27/books/review/Benfey-t.html?ref=charlottebronte>

By CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

Published: December 23, 2009

«It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of heath», Charlotte Brontë wrote of her sister Emily’s novel, «Wuthering Heights». The Brontës brought a new emotional weather to the English novel – stormy, blasted and passionate. «I never saw a Moor», Emily Dickinson wrote, as though speaking for the whole far-flung Brontë cult. «Yet know I how the Heather looks».

«Becoming Jane Eyre», Sheila Kohler’s muted and gently probing 10th work of fiction, opens during the summer of 1846 amid the «charmless, suffocating streets» of industrial Manchester. The 69-year-old Rev. Patrick Brontë has come from his rural parsonage on the Yorkshire moors to have a cataract removed. He is attended by a hired nurse who raids the kitchen late at night and «gnaws … ravenously» at a lamb bone, «grinding on a delicious piece of gristle with her good back teeth».

Less intrusive is his prim daughter Charlotte, who receives a rejection letter for her first novel on the very day her father submits to surgery, «excruciatingly conscious of the knife’s work in that delicate place». Charlotte is 30, single, with two unemployed and unmarried younger sisters with rejected novels of their own, «a shiftless, dissipated wreck» of a brother far gone to gin and opium, and an aging father reduced to «a blind mouth». «What is she to write about now, in the silence of this darkened room?»

The spark for Kohler’s novel was a line from Lyndall Gordon’s biography, «Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life»: «What happened as she sat with Papa in that darkened room in Boundary Street remains in

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shadow». Gordon proposed that the crucial breached «boundary» was the adoption of an androgynous pseudonym, Currer Bell, which allowed Brontë to project herself beyond the confines of proper domestic womanhood. For Kohler, however, liberation comes with the sudden invention of Brontë’s fictional alter ego, Jane Eyre, the dauntless and self-reliant heroine, both «ire and eyer», of her second novel. «Sitting by her blinded, silenced father, she dares to take up her pencil and write for the first time in her own voice».

«Becoming Jane Eyre» is narrated in a continual present, the tense of «becoming». Short chapters take us back through remembered moments in Charlotte’s life, spots of time that, disguised and transformed, make their way into «Jane Eyre». From her days as a governess, she invents a bully for the opening pages of the novel. From her difficult period in Brussels, when she fell in love with a married teacher whom she addressed abjectly as «Master», she draws the contours of «the bigamous Mr. Rochester». A visit to a «house with battlements» yields a housekeeper’s story of «a madwoman ... confined up here during the 18th century», the inspiration for the bestial Creole heiress whom Rochester has locked in his attic. Some parallels between novel and biography seem more of a reach: «An orphan is not so far from a middle child».

«Becoming Jane Eyre» is divided into three parts, rather grandly called «volumes». The first, centered on the operation in Manchester, is claustrophobic, with comic relief provided by that peckish nurse. The second opens more broadly into the world of Haworth Parsonage, where tough-minded Emily offers a fresh view of her sister. Why, she wonders, is Charlotte «so preoccupied with her own small problems of love when her brother’s are so much more serious?»

The third section, which follows Charlotte to London after the triumphant publication of «Jane Eyre», is full of satisfying recognitions. When Charlotte, the plain country girl, reveals herself as the writer behind the pseudonym Currer Bell, her stupefied young publisher echoes Lincoln encountering Harriet Beecher Stowe. «Can this be, is it possible that this little woman is the author of ‘Jane Eyre’?»

«Becoming Jane Eyre» is driven by interesting questions. How exactly does a fictional character take shape in a writer’s imagination? What impact can an invented character have on a writer’s life? Kohler believes that writing «Jane Eyre» was therapeutic for Charlotte, a release from «stifled rage». «She writes, hardly seeing the words. Her toothache is better, and since she has been writing her bowels, so often obstructed, have moved regularly».

But the Brontës seem diminished in «Becoming Jane Eyre». One wearies of their incessant questions and exclamations, meant to reproduce their thoughts but sounding a bit too much like 21st-century anxieties. «Can

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she own these words», Charlotte wonders, «which speak of the longings of a woman for fulfillment, for love, for the same rights as a man?»

Kohler was wise to pitch the novel in a subdued mode, not vying with the passions unleashed in the Brontë novels or in «Wide Sargasso Sea», Jean Rhys’s excruciatingly gorgeous fictional evocation of the first Mrs. Rochester’s life. She has written instead a small, uncluttered novel about sibling rivalry and the various meanings of «publication» for women writers in a straitened world where women were supposed to stay private.

### 2.) Jane Eyre Discussion Questions

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/learningresources/book\\_janeeyre.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/learningresources/book_janeeyre.html)

— 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? Discuss 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 male/female relationships stay true to the author’s vision?

— 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 the way we understand them today? Does the fact that Jane ends up with the wealthy Rochester, not to mention an inheritance of her own, undermine the novel’s argument for the irrelevance of riches?

— 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 does Jane’s technique as governess say about the author’s vision of childrearing?

— 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? And what, for Jane, is the difference?

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– 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?

– 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 *tres 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?

– 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 role 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?

## Section 2: In-class Activities

### 1. Warm-Up

Before class, prepare six sheets of poster paper, each one with a quotation from the novel «Jane Eyre». (This could be done while the class is reading it or as a wrap-up activity after they have read it. It could also be adapted slightly as an activity to introduce the novel.)

The quotes might include these:

*«It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it».*

*«I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too,*

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*seemed swept off into vague space: ‘Then,’ I cried, half desperate, ‘grant me at least a new servitude!’»*

*«[I]f others don’t love me I would rather die than live – I cannot bear to be solitary and hated».*

*«Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart!»*

*«I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will».*

*«I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine».*

You might include a seventh sheet, left blank, for students to write down the quotes of their choice.

When students enter, tell them to take a marker and rotate through the stations (for the sake of order, you might assign small groups to begin at different points and tell them when to move to the next station). Their task is to jot a comment on the quotation on the poster. They may also respond to their classmates’ comments, effectively having a «conversation on paper» with the text and with one another.

When students are finished cycling through the stations, have them retake their seats, and review the completed posters. Ask: Looking at what was written, what do you notice? What responses strike you most and why? What interpretations do we have of Jane Eyre and «Jane Eyre»?

Now tell the class they will now read an article about a new film adaptation of «Jane Eyre».

### 2. Reading and discussion

#### **Another Hike on the Moors for ‘Jane Eyre’**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/movies/06eyre.html>

By CHARLES McGRATH

Published: March 4, 2011

CARY FUKUNAGA, the director of the new movie version of «Jane Eyre», which opens Friday, joked recently that there was an unwritten law requiring that «Jane Eyre» be remade every five years. It sometimes feels that way. Of all the classic 19th-century novels, Charlotte Brontë’s «Jane Eyre» has been by far the most filmed, outstripping even the ever-durable «Pride and Prejudice».

So far there have been at least 18 film versions, going back to a 1910 silent movie, and 9 made-for-television «Janes» – so many that they

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sometimes seem to quote from one another as much as from the novel. Several, including the current one, were even filmed on the same location: Haddon Hall, an ancient, battlemented manor house in wind-swept Derbyshire that gets pressed into service whenever British filmmakers need someplace old and dank looking.

So moviegoers may be forgiven if in recollection all the «Jane Eyses» seem to blend together in one continuous loop, with Joan Fontaine, the 1943 Jane, suddenly becoming colorized and morphing into Susannah York, while Rochester turns, like a character in a horror film, from Orson Welles into George C. Scott and then Timothy Dalton.

Certain moments occur over and over again: the stool at Lowood, the miserable boarding school for orphans; Rochester skidding and falling from his horse; the screams at night, the burning bed chamber; Jane running across the barren countryside; the voice calling her across the moors. And it always ends the same way: She marries him of course, though the movie Rochester is seldom the pitiable, damaged creature he proves to be in the book, where he loses both an eye and a hand.

If there has never been a definitive movie «Jane Eyre», there has never been a truly rotten one. Even the sentimental 1996 Franco Zeffirelli version, with William Hurt embarrassingly miscast as a Rochester more nearly a mild eccentric than a brooding, Byronic type, has its moments. A couple of the movies have lingered a little on the sultry, Creole ancestry of Rochester’s first wife, Bertha Mason, and on a theme of colonial exploitation, but so far the one truly ground-breaking version is John Duigan’s 1993 film of «Wide Sargasso Sea», the Jean Rhys novel that tells the story from the point of view of Bertha, the madwoman locked in the attic.

So why another «Jane Eyre», then, with so many perfectly serviceable ones already available on DVD or download? The simplest answer is that movies get remade all the time, and the great 19th-century novelists – Austen and the Brontë sisters especially – have proved to be an inexhaustible and almost foolproof resource.

Douglas McGrath, who has directed movie versions of both Austen’s «Emma» and «Nicholas Nickleby», by Charles Dickens, wrote recently in an e-mail message: «What makes a classic a classic is that the story always has relevance to whatever generation is reading it. If it didn’t, it wouldn’t be a classic – it would be forgotten. And I think that what gives them relevance is the human dilemma at the center of it. The period details – the pretty (or not) costumes, the great or dingy houses, the carriage and candlelight and long-lost customs – are all icing, but they are not the cake».

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Talking about classics of romantic literature, he added, «Part of the appeal is that the language still has a rich, sometimes poetic phrasing that a modern film has a tough time matching».

In the case of «Jane Eyre», as Alison Owen, who was the producer and driving force behind the new one, pointed out recently, there is also a simple, pragmatic reason: As period costume dramas go, «Jane» is relatively cheap to make.

«It's set in a house in the middle of a moor», she explained. «Jane Austen can be quite expensive. You need horses, carriages, houses, gowns. But on the whole ‘Jane Eyre’ is much more starkly peopled than most period movies. You don't need swaths of costumes. And scenery costs nothing. Point a camera at those moors, and it looks like a David Lean film».

But a deeper reason for wanting to make the movie, she went on, was simply her affection for the novel, and just about everyone involved in the production, which stars Mia Wasikowska and Michael Fassbender, felt much the same way. «Jane Eyre» came out in 1847, a little more than 30 years after «Pride and Prejudice», and yet as Mr. Fukunaga pointed out, a world of difference separates the two books.

«Jane Austen is like ‘Gossip Girl,’ and Charlotte and Emily were like Goth twins», he said. «It's a totally different sensibility. The emotional world that Charlotte inhabited is much darker and more dangerous».

It's also a world that modern readers may more readily identify with. The story of an orphan who becomes a governess, sticks up for herself and finds true love in a spooky, haunted-seeming mansion, all the while pouring her heart out on the page in prose that is lush, romantic, almost hypnotic, «Jane Eyre», is both a Gothic horror story and arguably the first and most satisfying chick-lit novel.

«It's been my favorite book since I was 11 or so, and I've always felt that it has been under-served by the movies». Ms. Owen said. «One reason is that Jane has so often been cast as an older woman, not a girl. But it's not written from that viewpoint, which is why it so appeals to young girls. It makes a huge difference to have someone in the part who is pre-womanhood. Mia was 19 when we made this, which is exactly Jane's age».

Moira Buffini, who wrote the screenplay, recalled recently that when she heard Ms. Owen was remaking «Jane Eyre», she immediately said to herself, «Oh, my God». She went on: «It was instinctive. I just chased the job».

And only after she got the job did she discover how to go about it. «I started off going from A to Z, dramatizing every important scene», she said. «Each one is 8, 9, 10 pages of dense prose, and trying to distill all that, I realized before I got to the end of the first draft that this wasn't going to work». That's when she hit on the idea of telling the story mostly in

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flashback, beginning with Jane’s yearlong stay with the sanctimonious missionary St. John Rivers and his sisters, an interval that comes quite late in the book and that most films either compress or leave out altogether.

«That’s such an important part of the book», she explained. «Jane spends a whole year there, agonized with longing, and that’s when she begins to see what the alternative to Rochester is: a loveless marriage or spinsterhood. It’s a sort of spiritual journey, and it tells you so much about that world, where people with great souls had to struggle with small lives».

Mr. Fukunaga, a 33-year-old American, also sought after this «Jane Eyre», even though he had made only one other feature, «Sin Nombre», a movie filmed in Spanish about Central Americans trying to make their way illegally into the United States, and which he researched by personally riding freight trains with illegal immigrants.

«Filmmaking is a gamble», Ms. Owen said about choosing him, adding that she had been partly guided by her experience in making the Cate Blanchett biopic «Elizabeth», which was directed by Shekhar Kapur. «It proved a great success to have a director from a different culture», she said. «I didn’t want to go the establishment route, because sometimes they’re a little cowed by English history and too worried about being faithful to the Brontës. You need to shake things up a bit».

Mr. Fukunaga grew up watching Robert Stevenson’s 1943 black-and-white version with his mother. That one (which was partly written by Aldous Huxley) is the most literary of all the «Janes» – it begins with pages turning over and actual prose from the book in voice-over – and also the one that tilts most heavily in Rochester’s direction, with a swarthy-looking Orson Welles mumbling and declaiming in Brando-esque fashion and leaving Joan Fontaine with little to do except look dewy eyed. But Mr. Fukunaga said that what he learned from it was the importance of balancing the various elements of the story.

«Do you make this a standard period romance drama?» he said. «Do you make it a horror film? How do you walk the line between the two? In literature, because of the scale, you can shift tones and atmospheres. You can almost shift genres. But in a movie it’s a balancing act. That’s why I revere the Bob Stevenson version». He added, «I guess it will be up to fans who are keen judges of adaptations to say if I’ve succeeded».

Everyone involved with the production agrees that Ms. Wasikowska’s performance was crucial. It was also fortuitous. «They did suggest another actress», Ms. Buffini said. «I won’t say who, but it was someone I felt was going to be less exciting».

Ms. Wasikowska, as it happened, had just finished filming Tim Burton’s «Alice in Wonderland», and had returned to her native Australia with a

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reading list of books she hoped to catch up on. «Jane Eyre» was at the top, and after just five chapters she called her agent and asked if there were any scripts in development.

«What I loved about Jane is that she has this innate sense of self-respect, and there's really nowhere it should have come from», she said. «It's not like she had a loving upbringing. Everything she has achieved, it's because she made it for herself».

Ms. Owen said: «The reason so many people love ‘Jane Eyre’ is that they can identify with her. She's not beautiful. She's small and plain, and yet she finds romantic happiness. It's a fairy tale for the insecure and unconfident – the ordinary woman».

### Questions for discussion and reading comprehension:

- Why has «Jane Eyre» been adapted for film numerous times?
- How does Cary Fukunaga, who directed a new adaptation, compare the literary worlds created by Jane Austen with those created by Charlotte and Emily Brontë?
- Why does the new movie use flashbacks to tell the story?
- How has this technique made this one different from the other films based on «Jane Eyre»?
- How do the filmmakers characterize Jane Eyre?

## Section 3: Activities

### *Activity 1. Updating the Novel.*

Students imagine what would happen if Jane Eyre were freed from her time and place and dropped into the present day, retaining the characterizations, themes and basic conflicts, but modernizing the setting and details.

### *Activity 2. Debating the Canon*

Return to the line in the article about «Jane Eyre» being a «classic» with enduring relevance. Do students find that the novel resonates with them today? Students debate whether «Jane Eyre» should be kept on school reading lists.

### *Activity 3. Analyzing Scenes*

Students do a close reading of a single scene in the novel and then compare it with how that scene was portrayed in the 2011 film or another movie adaptation. For example, it may be a famous proposal scene. You may find lots of the screen versions following the link <http://eyreguide.awardspace.co.uk/compare.html>.

### **Activity 4. Comparing Portrayals.**

*Warm-up Opinion survey: Which is your favorite «Jane Eyre» adaptation?*

- [ ] 1934 Virginia Bruce
- [ ] 1944 Joan Fontaine
- [ ] 1970 Susannah York
- [ ] 1973 Sorcha Cusack
- [ ] 1983 Zelah Clarke
- [ ] 1996 Charlotte Gainsbourg
- [ ] 1997 Samantha Morton
- [ ] 2006 Ruth Wilson
- [ ] 2011 Mia Wasikowska

### **Susannah York on playing Jane:**



At the time I was asked to play the role of Jane, I was quite hot, so to speak. Offers were coming fast and furious, so I was delighted when I got the part. I loved the book and it was a part I had always wanted. I was bewildered and upset, however, when people said I was too pretty to play a plain governess. I have always thought of myself as a character actress and I longed to be noted for my acting ability and hated it when people paid attention to my appearance.

I've never thought of myself as pretty and truly felt I was Jane. She's not a showy character, but she is still passionate, and that's what I liked about her. People are also saying that Ruth Wilson is too pretty. But I think she has just the right qualities and seems to have the same view and feel of, and feeling for, Jane that I did.

My co-star, George, was a big, craggy, gruff creature, and he was great for a chat. But our approach to filming was totally different. I liked to rehearse, but he would do a scene in one take then go back to playing

backgammon. I thought he made a pretty good Rochester, though, as he had a real presence – although he was perhaps a bit too old. I must confess that I have yet to see my perfect Mr Rochester. Even Toby Stephens in the current adaptation, while a great actor, is not the Rochester of the book as he’s a bit too young.

I wouldn’t say I was typecast, but people tended to see me as a more serious actor afterwards. As a result, although I refuse to accept it when people put limitations on me, I’ll admit that it hasn’t always been easy to get roles since.

I don’t regret playing Jane, though. It was a brilliant part. Usually I curl up with embarrassment when I watch my performances, but when I watched my version of Jane Eyre, it seemed to me that I had struck the right note.

### Sorcha Cusack on playing Jane:



Jane Eyre was my first TV job and, to be honest, I felt I was rather hopeless. With no major roles under my belt, my performance was flat. I was very lucky to get the role in the first place and I think I got the part because I’m plain-looking and, because I was born and bred in Ireland, I was ten years behind other girls in terms of sophistication. Both were key ingredients to the character.

As a child, people were always saying, «Isn’t Sinead [her actress sister] gorgeous?» But my look was perfect for Jane. Rochester, Michael Jayston, said, ‘After this you’ll be huge,’ and, while we were filming, I did go to my bank manager and say, ‘I won’t need the overdraft any more.’ But I did need it as I didn’t get any big breaks afterwards. There was plenty of work, but not a role that changed the course of my career. Lots of theatre work followed, but several years after playing Jane, I put my career on hold for a while to return to Ireland to care for my late mother, who had heart problems. It’s nice looking back on the whole Jane Eyre period, and it’s lovely that I still get letters saying, ‘You’ll always be my Jane.’

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### Zelah Clarke on playing Jane:



Jane Eyre is the ultimate poisoned chalice. Everyone remembers the Rochesters, but no one recalls the Janes. I hoped the role might be a springboard – I never thought it would force me to retire. Before Jane Eyre I had done lots of TV costume dramas, but not a lead role, so I was thrilled when I got the part. Tim Dalton wasn’t a superstar then – in fact, I had more TV experience than him.

It was depressing when things suddenly stopped after Jane Eyre, especially as I had no idea why. But then I got married and my life changed. There is something undignified about old actors scraping around for work. I would never go back into the theatre; it ruins your social life and breaks up families. If I hadn’t done Jane Eyre, perhaps I’d have felt that I hadn’t proved myself. But I did and I have. Now, looking at the series, it seems old-fashioned, but I was pleased with my performance. Between roles I became interested in art, so perhaps I didn’t have such a desire to be a famous actress after all».

### Charlotte Gainsbourg on playing Jane:



«The book wasn’t part of my culture», says Charlotte Gainsbourg cautiously. «Of course I’ve read it now but I’m quite thankful it wasn’t a big deal for me, because I was more free than someone who had loved it all their life. Jane has a strength to her that is very appealing to play. She puts up a defensive barrier to other people because of the terrible disappointments of her childhood».

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### Samantha Morton on playing Jane:



For a modern young woman like Ms. Morton, slouching on a sofa in the library of the Regency Hotel in New York, wearing trousers and a leather jacket, the self-possessed Jane in her sweeping, long skirts and tight corsets is from another world. «It's like playing an alien», says the actress, who grew up in Nottingham, in the north of England.

To find her Jane Eyre, Ms. Morton went again and again to Charlotte Bronte's 1847 classic novel, taking notes and keeping them close by during the five-week shoot. «By reading the book you have a clear picture of how she walks, how she sits, how she addresses people, how she smiles, how she dresses», Ms. Morton says. «It's so easy; it's given to you on a plate.

### Mia Wasikowska on playing Jane:



«It's an honor to portray Jane. What I love about her character is, despite all the hardship that she faces throughout her life, she has this innate sense of self-respect and an incredible ability to do what's right by herself as an individual. I believe that is key for people, especially women, to remember; it's important to do what's fulfilling for you as an individual, even when it can be easier to do what's comfortable».

Mia Wasikowska assesses Jane Eyre as «timeless in her relevance – and her resilience. Instead of letting her situation grind her down, or becoming

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damaged, she becomes a stronger person. Jane always challenges herself and follows her gut feeling as well. She knows what’s important for her to do. As hard as it might be, she gets on and does it». When asked what audiences should take away with them from Jane’s story, Wasikowska states, «It is about having self-respect and finding self-fulfillment».

*Questions for discussion:*

- How has Jane Eyre been played and portrayed through time?
- How have different actresses represented her?
- How do these portrayals contribute to our impressions of the character?

*Essay Writing:*

Students look at photos of different Jane Eys and watch, if possible, at least two movie versions, and write a comparison-contrast essay.

***Activity 5. Writing Reviews***

Half the class writes book reviews of the novel, and the other half writes movie reviews of the 2011 film. They then pair up with partners from the other group and swap reviews for peer response.

***Activity 6. Looking Through a Feminist Lens***

*Questions for discussion:*

- How is it significant that «Jane Eyre» was written by a woman, Charlotte Brontë, who at the time of publication posed as a male writer named Currer Bell?
- What «types» of women are represented in the story?
- Where else in literature, film and popular culture have they seen these types represented?
- Where else in our culture have women felt the need to seem more masculine to be taken seriously?
- How much has society changed for women since Brontë’s time?

*Profile Writing:*

Students write personality profiles of Brontë as well as Jane and the other female characters in the novel, and then hold a discussion forum on these questions.

***Activity 7. Emulating Brontë***

Students write a piece of short fiction in the vein of Charlotte Brontë, imitating her writing style.

***Activity 8. Personal Essays***

Students write personal essays called «My Jane Eyre», about a real person they know who embodies aspects of Jane’s character or who has had experiences in which he or she encounters one or more of the same

## **Comparing ‘Jane Eyre’ in Literature and Film**

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conflicts, challenges and struggles that Jane does in the novel, like balancing the desire to find love with the need to retain personal liberty or participate in the world of a social class to which they themselves do not belong.

Essays should also explain how the person’s outlook on life, interactions with others, dreams and personality correlate with Jane’s, drawing on both the text and their «Jane’s» real life to support their points.

Alternatively, they compare their own lives and outlooks with Jane Eyre’s. In what ways do they connect with her as a person? In what ways does her life and outlook seem foreign?

### **Section 4. Going Further**

Students are proposed to prepare personal projects on intertextual and intermedial reworkings of *Jane Eyre*.

#### *Pool of possible topics*

Jane Eyre Parodies (e.g. <http://eyeguide.awardspace.co.uk/parody.html>)

Novel adaptations (e.g. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*)

Visual Adaptations (e.g. Children in films; illustrations; etc.)

Opera and Drama Stage Adaptations

(By *Shannon Doyne and Holly Epstein Ojalvo*,  
From *The New York Times Learning Network, March 10, 2011*)