



HOLTON-ARMS
SCHOOL

Introduction to *Jane Eyre* Required Summer Reading, entering Grade 9

Jane Eyre tells the story of an orphan girl's efforts to make her way in the world. The novel divides into several sections set in different, important locations. The first, Gateshead Hall, introduces Jane as a young girl. From there, she goes to Lowood School, a dark and dismal place of deprivation. Later, she becomes a governess and moves to Thornfield Hall where the adventure picks up and lots of spooky things happen. Jane must travel again to other locations before the novel comes to a resolution.

A long novel, *Jane Eyre* has a tight **plot**, multiple **settings**, and numerous **characters**. The **point of view** is **first person**—Jane Eyre is the narrator. The novel delves into many important themes, including **human cruelty and suffering, personal morality, a woman's nature, the relationships between men and women, the human mind and its education, reason vs. passion,** and **paganism vs. Christianity**. Jane herself, strongly imbued with the tenets of Christian thinking, nevertheless exhibits strong ties to Nature and pagan supernaturalism—**animism**—the belief that all objects possess a natural life or vitality.

As you read, also consider Jane's journey through life. What forces shape her? How do her experiences influence her values, her worldview, and her sense of herself and others? The novel is a *Bildungsroman*, the story of a young person growing into adulthood. The *Bildungsroman* originated in Germany in the seventeenth century but became a popular form in literature everywhere. In its early form, it typically detailed the life of a young man, so we must see *Jane Eyre* as an early feminist novel in that Charlotte Brontë appropriated the form to tell a woman's story. The novel, indeed, offers a **feminist critique of society, women's roles, and gender relations**. The novel also examines **themes of socio-economic class divisions, injustice, and religion**. As you read, keep in mind these important themes and look for passages relating to them.

Finally, as you read, also look for motifs—repeated images—that occur throughout the novel. Imprisonment is one such image; look for all the different kinds of imprisonments Jane undergoes, both actual (the red-room) and metaphoric. Note, for instance, the frequent use of the word *sequestered* in the novel. Jot down other images you notice on the inside back cover of the novel as you encounter them.