

## English 11 Summer Reading Guide for *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte

Generally considered the epitome of a Romantic novel, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* sits at the juncture between the Romantic and Victorian eras in literature. When we hear the word "romantic," we tend to think of love stories. However, the Romantic Era of 18th and 19th century England refers to a literary and artistic movement that arose as a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the excesses of the Industrial Revolution. Romanticism celebrates the individual over society, childhood over adulthood, passionate emotion, imagination, and the supernatural over reason, and Nature, especially wild nature, over the orderly world of people—indeed the environmental movement gets its start during this era. In terms of love, the Romantics go way over the top—they give us the Byronic Hero, the bad boy with a deep capacity for passionate love that you find in pretty much every single teen movie you have ever seen!

The Victorian era shows more restraint and more realistic views. While still exploring the split between the public world of society and the private world of the individual, Victorian literature places more emphasis on the importance of family, in particular, the reconstitution of family in a harsh world; think, for instance, of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, in which Scrooge, after a visit from three ghosts—of Christmas past, present, and future—reunites with the family from whom he had become estranged while also restoring to health the family of Scrooge's clerk Bob Cratchit (father of the sickly Tiny Tim).

The themes of both these literary eras find their way into *Wuthering Heights*, which explores the ideas through the stories of its central characters, Heathcliff, Catherine Earnshaw, Hindley Earnshaw, Hareton Earnshaw, Edgar Linton, Isabella Linton, and Catherine Linton.

*Wuthering Heights* unfolds through multiple narrators – a format that can be confusing!

- The narrator for chapters 1-3 is **Mr. Lockwood**, a wealthy young man who has rented a large house called Thrushcross Grange from a man named Mr. Heathcliff. Lockwood visits Mr. Heathcliff at his home, called Wuthering Heights, and becomes intrigued by the odd assortment of characters (and even a ghost!) that he meets when he gets snowed in at the house.
- Midway through Ch. 4, **Nelly Dean**, the housekeeper of Thrushcross Grange, takes over and narrates the majority of the novel. She has known the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights all her life and tells Lockwood the intense story of Heathcliff's childhood with the Earnshaw family. In some chapters, her narration recounts the narration of other characters, so keep track of who the "I" voice is. Eventually we learn how an adult Heathcliff came to own both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The story Nelly tells involves love, betrayal, prejudice, and revenge.
- The novel ends with chapters once again narrated by **Lockwood** as he tells us the fates of the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.
- The novel jumps around in time, with some narrators flashing back to events that occurred twenty years ago. Take notes in the margins to help keep track of the setting.

**Setting:** While the novel was first published in 1847, it opens in 1801 and spans the late 1700s to the early 1800s. Set in the northern English countryside, the novel frequently mentions the "[moors](#)," open, uncultivated, and hilly land covered with heather. The word "wuthering" in the novel's title refers to the intense wind and weather common on the moors. Lockwood explains the term in more detail within the first pages of the novel.

**Recommended Edition:** Norton Critical Edition (ISBN-13 978-0393284997) because it features great footnotes, particularly some translating the speech of one of the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, Joseph, who speaks in a broad Yorkshire dialect. Also, some editions are broken up into volumes, while this one is not, so while the text of the novel is the same, the chapter numbering will be different.

### Study Questions:

#### Chapter 1-2

1. Describe Lockwood. Who is he? Why is he there? Where is he staying? Why do we have to care about Lockwood?
2. Describe Heathcliff
3. Who are “Mrs. Heathcliff” and “Hareton Earnshaw” in Ch. II? Note, they are characters in the present; remember them for much later in the novel.

#### Chapter 3—Things get really weird

1. The bed! The images below come from Ponden Hall, the house that inspired Bronte. Note the bed is actually an oaken case, creating a private space within a larger bedroom. In showing Lockwood to the room, why does Zillah tell him to hide his candle?



2. Who taps at the window in Lockwood’s second weird dream?

#### Chapter 4 and onward—The Narrative Voice Changes—Nelly Dean takes over

1. Where does Heathcliff come from and how does his presence affect the Earnshaw household at the Heights?
2. In Ch. VI, a central event occurs, narrated to Nelly by Heathcliff, in which he and Cathy Earnshaw sneak out and spy on Thrushcross Grange. Consider the new characters introduced, the description of the house, and the results of the escapade on the plot going forward.
3. As you read, look for these themes:
 

a. Socioeconomic status	e. Childhood and adulthood	i. Imprisonment
b. Nature	f. Illness and health	j. Dreams, supernatural
c. Love in its many forms	g. Violence and cruelty	k. Physical manifestations of emotions
d. Parenting	h. Obsession	

#### Chapter 30-34—Lockwood takes over the narration again

1. Given the dramatic build-up, the novel ends in a surprising way. Why?