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Impressions of Lowood

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In her biography of the Brontës, entitled, *The Brontës*, Juliet Barker makes the following comments about Charlotte Brontë's description of Lowood:

The story of the young Brontës at the Clergy Daughters' School has become inextricably entwined with that of the young Jane Eyre at Lowood School. Charlotte's account of the sufferings of Helen Burns and Jane at the hands of Mr Brocklehurst and Miss Scatcherd is written with such raw passion and such a burning sense of injustice that it is impossible not to identify with the girls against their persecutors. There is also no doubt that the novel was based upon Charlotte's real experiences at the Clergy Daughters' School, so it is easy to fall into the trap of believing that the fictional characters and place are accurate representations of the people at Cowan Bridge and the school itself. This is to do less than justice to both the much-maligned Carus Wilson, who is seen as the villain of the piece, and Charlotte herself, who, while protesting the truth of her account, also clearly recognized that it was not impartial ...

Lowood is seen through the eyes of the child suffering there, not the dispassionate adult. On the other hand, the novel clearly struck a chord in those who knew the Clergy Daughters' School.

From: *The Brontës*, published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson © 1994, Juliet R V Barker

1. Do you agree with Barker's statement that the school episodes are written with 'raw passion and ... a burning sense of injustice'? You will need to find evidence in the text in support of your views.
2. Do you, as a reader, 'identify with the girls against their persecutors'? Again, ensure you have textual evidence to support your ideas.
3. How easy is it, in your opinion, 'to fall into the trap of believing that the fictional characters and place are accurate representations of the people at Cowan Bridge and the school itself'? Do you agree that it is 'a trap' or is it unimportant whether or not we accept these episodes as accounts of real events?
4. In what way does it affect our reading, and understanding, of the school scenes if we accept Barker's assertion that, 'Lowood is seen through the eyes of the child suffering there, not the dispassionate adult'? Do you agree with her comments? In what ways might her suggestion affect our view of Jane Eyre as a narrator? Ensure you root your views in textual evidence.