

Explore the development of Jane Eyre in the opening twelve chapters

Look through the essay below, which was written in response to the above essay title. Use the specification and assessment objectives for your exam board to mark the essay. Don't just tick the essay at the end or write 'well done'; highlight or underline sentences or phrases that you think are particularly effective and make a note as to which of the assessment objectives they fit. If you are studying *Jane Eyre* for an oral assessment, such as the Oral Commentary for IB, consider from where in the novel the examples are selected; consider whether it is a key moment in the novel and how you might use the ideas suggested here to develop an oral response to that extract.

Once you have finished assessing the essay, compare your ideas with others in your group.

This is a novel which connects time with place. There are five main chunks of time and each is portrayed in a different setting. Both time and place are important, place especially so because you know how Jane feels as to how she sees the place she's living in.

Gateshead holds the first part of the story. Here Jane spends her childhood being both physically and mentally tortured by her cousins and her aunt, 'You ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us.' Jane's situation at Gateshead is somewhat desperate because as an orphan child with no money, she is at the mercy of her aunt and expected to be grateful for being fed and clothed. It is not said why the aunt and cousins resent her, probably because they feel her to be a burden, or they believe they are fulfilling their duty sufficiently by giving her a place to live.

This treatment makes Jane resort to using her imagination as an escape, which makes her extremely independent, in that she can amuse and make decisions by herself, 'of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own.'

On one occasion Jane is sent to the red room after being blamed for fighting with Master John. This is quite a significant event in Jane's life because it is the point where she refuses to take any more of the unfair treatment, 'Hold her arms, Miss Abbot: she's like a mad cat.' The red room is the chamber where Jane's kind uncle died. As the chamber is cold, dark and furnished in mahogany and 'blood red' scarlet, Jane's fruitful imagination begins to think about her dead uncle, and wonders whether his ghost still inhabits the room.

Here she shows particular strength of character, whereas most young children would be screaming and banging on the door to be let out Jane thinks about it rationally, 'superstition was with me at that moment: but it was not yet her hour for complete victory.' Some time later Jane, owing to lack of food, heat and general neglect and nervousness, actually faints after seeing the reflection of a light on the wall. It is after this series of events that it is decided that Jane should attend boarding school.

Throughout Jane's period at Gateshead Hall, she never describes it fully, she just makes passing comments that lead you to imagine it as large and unfriendly with a cold reserved atmosphere, 'which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur.' This is how Jane's aunt and cousins make the house with their unfriendly attitudes and Victorian manner, 'She lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her 'darlings' about her.'

Gateshead Hall was in fact meant to be a magnificent house, as Mr Lloyd the apothecary says, 'Don't you think Gateshead Hall a very beautiful House? Are you not thankful to have such a fine place to live at?' Jane, however, felt that Gateshead Hall was not a home, but a prison, where she was imprisoned by people who did not wish to imprison her, but did so because they had no choice. She herself has no choice and realises she will be kept miserable and against her will for a very long time, 'If I had anywhere else to go, I should be glad to leave it; but I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman.'

A way out comes in the form of Mr Brocklehurst, who accepts Jane into his strict charity boarding school. Jane's aunt tells Mr Brocklehurst all her fears about Jane's character. Most of them are unjust and not usually found in a small child. But having endured all these cruelties, Jane's character, if anything, was strong, 'I was left there alone – winner of the field.' It is the first time she has won a battle with her aunt and it gives her both courage and hope.

Lowood School is bleak and institution-like with the girls dressed in the same plain clothes and the same haircuts. The food is of poor quality and there is not much of it, but it is an overall improvement on Gateshead Hall.

Here Jane makes her first friend, Helen Burns, who is even more hardened than Jane. Helen gives Jane some advice which stands her in good stead for the future. Jane finds Helen's advice difficult to understand because she has only just learnt to stand up for herself and not be abused by other people, 'But I feel this Helen; I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly.'

Although Jane is quite adamant that you must resist unjust treatment, she uses Helen's advice when Mr Brocklehurst sees fit to victimize her in front of her fellow scholars, 'There was I mounted aloft ... I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool.'

Jane is indeed stronger than she looks, small and frail, her strong will helps her through a typhoid epidemic. Rather like the weeds that grow on walls, determined to hang on no matter what. Her friend Helen is not so lucky, but Jane is with her providing her with comfort in her final moments, thus binding the friendship for eternity, 'My arms around her neck, I was asleep and Helen was – dead.'

For Jane Lowood School is not an unpleasant place, neither is it without its hardships. But the trials of not having enough food and losing a best friend strengthen Jane's character even more.

Jane went on to teach at Lowood and became the kind and sympathetic teacher the school needed. Eventually she grew tired of her uniform life and wished for a change, 'Grant me at least a new servitude!' A position at Thornfield as a governess is acquired and the third chapter in Jane's life begins. We can tell from Jane's first impressions of Thornfield that she feels happy and content because she describes it using comfortable and friendly words, 'A snug small room; a round table by a cheerful fire.' It seems from the first few moments at Thornfield that Jane will be happy and accepted there, 'I little expected such a reputation; I anticipated only coldness and stiffness.'