

Wuthering Heights

Emily Brontë



About the author

Emily Brontë was born in 1818 into a clergyman's family of five girls and a boy. The family lived in Haworth, a moorland village in West Yorkshire, northern England. Their mother died in 1821 and four of the sisters, including Emily, aged 6, were sent away to a boarding school, where conditions were so bad that two of them died. After this, the remaining children stayed at home, where the girls largely educated themselves. They all read widely and invented stories to amuse themselves in the remote area in which they lived. Emily was especially fond of the moorlands, which have a powerful presence in her writing. Emily's sisters Anne and Charlotte also wrote, and together they published a book of poems in 1846, using male pseudonyms as writing was not considered a suitable activity for women. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* came out the same year. She died the year after, shortly after the funeral of her brother, Branwell, whose problems and drug habits had caused the sisters much distress. Charlotte described her sister as independently minded and courageous, especially during her last illness. Though she only wrote one novel, Emily is recognized to be one of the most important figures in nineteenth century English literature.

Summary

Mr Earnshaw finds a homeless child on the streets of Liverpool and takes him to live with his own children at Wuthering Heights on the beautiful, wild Yorkshire Moors. This generous deed has terrible consequences not only for his own family but also for the neighbouring Lintons.

Heathcliff, the child, becomes a wild and passionate youth who falls desperately in love with Catherine Earnshaw.

After old Mr Earnshaw's death, Heathcliff is treated badly by Catherine's brother, Hindley. Then, when he overhears Catherine say she will marry Edgar Linton, Heathcliff disappears, swearing to get his revenge on the two families.

Three years later, now rich and respectable, Heathcliff sets about his destructive business. First, Hindley's weakness for alcohol and gambling enables Heathcliff to gain control of the Earnshaw estate and Hindley's son. Then, to her brother Edgar's horror, he marries Isabella Linton. Catherine is also greatly upset by this; she becomes ill and dies after giving birth to her and Edgar's daughter, a second Catherine, but not before Heathcliff and she have sworn undying love for each other. Finally, when Heathcliff's own son comes to Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff sees how he can also acquire the Lintons' property. But revenge, after all, isn't so sweet. Tortured by memories of Catherine, he is overcome by guilt and madness. With his death, all ends happily.

Chapters 1–4: Mr Lockwood is a new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, an isolated estate on the windy moors of Yorkshire. His landlord, Heathcliff, lives on a nearby estate, Wuthering Heights. He is a surly though educated dark-skinned man. On his first visit to Wuthering Heights, Mr Lockwood finds a hostile environment inhabited by a rough young mistress, Catherine, who is the widowed wife of Heathcliff's son, a rough young man, Hareton, who is the mistress's cousin, a kind woman-servant, a rough old man-servant, Joseph, and a hoard of fierce dogs that attack him.

A heavy storm forces Mr Lockwood to stay overnight. In his room, he finds 25-year-old handwritten books and has a look at some fragments. They are authored by a Catherine Earnshaw or Linton and narrate episodes in which she and Heathcliff are abused by Catherine's brother, Hindley. During the night, Mr Lockwood has a terrible nightmare and the ghost of a Catherine asks him to let her in. This awakes Heathcliff, who violently sends him out and stays in the room desperately calling Catherine's name. Lockwood's trip back home under the snow makes him sick, and his housekeeper, Nelly Dean, eases his stay in bed by narrating the history of their neighbours.

Chapters 5–10: Hareton's father, Hindley Earnshaw, his sister Catherine and their parents live in Wuthering Heights. When Hindley is 14, Mr Earnshaw brings home from Liverpool a starving boy, Heathcliff, whom he

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adopts as his child. Hindley resents his father's love for the newcomer, and Heathcliff seizes every opportunity to turn Mr Earnshaw against him. Catherine, however, becomes Heathcliff's inseparable companion. When Mr Earnshaw dies, Hindley, now married to Frances, takes his revenge on Heathcliff by treating him badly and making him an outcast. He becomes even worse when Frances's death, shortly after Hareton's birth, leads him to gambling and heavy drinking.

In the meantime, Catherine makes friends with their neighbours at Thrushcross Grange, the elegant Lintons. Isabella, a young girl, becomes very fond of her and Edgar falls in love with her. Catherine is divided between her wild nature and passionate love for Heathcliff and her awareness of her social position and warm love for Edgar. When Heathcliff overhears her telling Nelly that marrying him would degrade her, he leaves too soon to hear her say how much she loves him. Three years later, Catherine marries Edgar.

Chapters 11–20: Three years after Catherine's marriage, Heathcliff returns, a wealthy, elegant and good-mannered man, intent on taking revenge on those who ill-treated him and separated him from Catherine. He settles down in Wuthering Heights, finances Hindley's gambling and brutalizes Hareton. He marries Isabella, which makes Edgar furious and Catherine seriously ill, and becomes extremely cruel to her immediately after their marriage. After a final encounter in which Catherine and Heathcliff blame each other for their unhappiness and feel unable to part from one another, Catherine and Edgar's daughter, Cathy, is born, and Catherine dies. Heathcliff is heart-broken. Isabella escapes and has a son, Linton. Hindley dies, and Heathcliff becomes the owner of Wuthering Heights.

Chapters 21–28: After twelve peaceful years, Isabella writes to Edgar. She is ill and wants him to take charge of her and Heathcliff's son, Linton. So at her death, Edgar sets out to fetch him. In his absence, Cathy sees her chance of exploring the moors, escapes and is invited to Wuthering Heights, where she meets Hareton. Soon afterwards, a pale, feeble and moody Linton arrives at Thrushcross Grange and is immediately claimed by Heathcliff, who plans to educate him and marry him to Cathy, which will give him control over Thrushcross Grange. Cathy, unaware of Heathcliff's nature and plans, and keen on socializing, uses different stratagems to see Linton, who becomes increasingly weak and unable

to oppose Heathcliff's pressure to marry her. In the meantime, Edgar falls ill.

Chapters 29–38: With the excuse of Linton's weak health, Heathcliff manages to have Cathy and Nelly visit Wuthering Heights, where he keeps them prisoners until Cathy marries Linton. Soon after the marriage both Edgar and Linton die and Heathcliff gets control over Thrushcross Grange. Cathy is forced to move to Wuthering Heights and earn her living as a servant. Hareton is both attracted to her and hurt by her conceited manners. Heathcliff looks for a tenant for Thrushcross Grange, Mr Lockwood, and Nelly's narration reaches the point at which the novel opens.

Mr Lockwood goes back to London but returns after a few months to find a different Wuthering Heights – open and aired, alive and peaceful. Nelly tells him that after he left, Catherine became more affectionate towards Hareton and started his education, and Heathcliff, increasingly fixated with his memories of Catherine, abandoned his revenge and spent his time in the company of Catherine's ghost, which he said had haunted him since her death. He dies. Cathy and Hareton, now in love with each other, regain control of their families' properties. The dead rest in peace.

Background and themes

Wuthering Heights is a richly imaginative and thematically complex novel. It has been made into a film four times, the first being the 1939 version starring Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier. There is also a pop song – 'Wuthering Heights' by Kate Bush (1978).

The clash of the elements: Unlike other Victorian novels about the evils of city and town life, *Wuthering Heights* is set in the remote moorland region Emily Brontë knew well. Wuthering Heights is a closed world that doesn't welcome the intrusion of strangers. The wild beauty of the countryside and the extreme weather form an important backdrop to the conflicts and passions of the characters. Rocky moors and green meadows, storm and calmness underline the clashes of lovers, families and social classes.

Love, both romantic and fraternal, is explored throughout the novel. The love between Catherine and Heathcliff goes beyond passion to a form of spirituality lasting beyond death and the material world, which inquires into the human need to transcend and adds supernatural elements to the story.

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A more brotherly and earthly form of love is scrutinized in the form of a number of family issues: the effects of the abuse of children and how the children try to defend themselves, the use of illness as a method of control over other people, addictions to alcohol and gambling as a form of escape from depression, perhaps like that of Emily's own brother.

The Victorian family: The history of the Earnshaws is a penetrating insight into the psychology of a poorly-functioning family existing in isolation from the rest of society. This setting, together with the neighbouring, more elegant and educated Thrushcross Grange, displays a portrayal of the patriarchal Victorian family in which the father is all-powerful and has total control over the family resources, while the women and children are economically vulnerable and powerless.

Victorian society: In the portrayal of Heathcliff we see a number of beliefs which were current in the nineteenth century. Dark-skinned and often called a 'gypsy', his character shows traits that were popularly associated with the lower classes and black people, namely that they were criminal and filthy, irrational, and superstitious. The importance of education can be seen in Heathcliff withholding it from Hareton as Hindley had withheld it from him, as well as in Hareton's change under Cathy's patient tuition. The two houses, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, represent opposite poles of order and civilization versus chaos and ignorance.

Intense suffering and revenge are also major themes in the novel. Heathcliff finds some peace of mind and the long-awaited encounter with Catherine only when he abandons his plans of revenge, which extend throughout the novel. The intense suffering that led him to his extreme cruelty brings to the surface the complexity of the origin and co-existence of good and evil in human nature.

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–4

Before reading

- Discuss:** Tell students: *On page viii of the Introduction we read that the public of the nineteenth century found it difficult to accept that a person could be both good and evil. Then ask them to discuss: Can a person be both good and evil? Should we be understanding and tolerant to an evil person who has undergone great pain?*
- Guess, logical puzzle:** Give students the following information and have them answer the questions.

These are some of the characters in this section: Mr Heathcliff (H), Catherine Linton Heathcliff (CLH), Hindley Earnshaw (HiE), Hareton Earnshaw (HaE), Catherine Earnshaw Linton (CEL).

If ...

- one has a dead son and no wife (she isn't mentioned in the narration yet),*
- one has a dead husband,*
- one is dead and had a husband whom we haven't met yet, and a daughter, who is alive,*
- two were brother and sister,*
- and HaE and CLH are cousins, ...*

who are the people in sentences a-d and how are they connected?

Remember that in the case of married women, the family name is written before the married name.

After reading

- Group work, read carefully:** Discuss with students how authors may use the weather and the scenery to create atmospheres in their stories. Ask them: *How does Emily Brontë use the weather and the description of places to create a climate of anger and unfriendliness? Find passages in Part 1 that describe bad weather and unattractive places. What else, in your opinion, helps to create a negative climate?*
- Pair work:** Students work in pairs to write the list of all characters mentioned in Part 1, both alive and dead, and classify them by age into 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation, from oldest to youngest. Pairs compare their lists and explain what information they used to classify them.
- Role play, write:** In pairs, students read the second part of page 9 to the end of the episode (page 10, second line). They write and act out the conversation between Heathcliff and Catherine on that Sunday. Then they write Catherine's entry in her book about their walk on the moors in the rain.
- Discuss:** Ask students: *Do you think this will be a ghost story? What kind of story will it be? Have them debate: Do people's lives end with death or do they continue to be and sometimes communicate with people who are alive?*
- Artwork, research:** Students draw a picture of Heathcliff. Then they search the Internet for images of the films with Laurence Olivier and Ralph Fiennes, and discuss which film shows a Heathcliff that is nearer their own picture of him.

Chapters 5–10

Before reading

- Group work:** Ask students: *Have you ever been in a situation in which you have had to choose between what you thought was better for you and what you really wanted? What did you choose? Are you happy about your choice? Who do you think will have to make such a choice in the story? Students share their experiences and ideas.*

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After reading

- 9 Debate:** Students read the ending of Chapter 5, on page 18. Then they debate whether in the conflict between Hindley and Heathcliff there is a victim and a victimizer or whether both boys are victims of their personal histories.
- 10 Read carefully, discuss:** Write the following on the blackboard. *'As she grew up, Catherine had to face the conflict of becoming either who she felt she should be or who she felt she would like to be.'* Have students:
- Discuss whether they agree with the statement, and compare Catherine's decision to their discussion in activity 8, if relevant.
 - Find fragments in this section of the text that illustrate both 'sides' of Catherine's personality and discuss how they relate to her choice.
 - Decide which type of music would be appropriate for a screening of some of the fragments they have identified. They may play the music they choose in class.
- 11 Write, pair work:** Students define the conflict between Catherine, Hindley, Edgar and Heathcliff in a paragraph. Then they make a list of TV soap operas that they have watched or heard of in which the central conflict is similar. Are there many? If so, why? Pairs share their lists and ideas.
- 12 Discuss, research:** Students look up the word 'stereotype' in their dictionaries. Then they read the first lines on page 22 and identify the stereotype that is brought up there – gypsies. They share what they know about gypsy culture and see if their ideas match the stereotype in the book. For the following class, they search the Internet for information about gypsy culture and Hungary, and share the information with the class.
- 13 Group work, game:** Make cards with the following sentences: *Mr Earnshaw opens his coat and there is Heathcliff! / Hindley wept aloud when he saw the drum was broken. / Heathcliff tries to free Cathy's leg from the guard-dog's mouth. / Cathy returns home, dressed as a lady, and is very careful about her dress. / Edgar cries loudly when Heathcliff throws an apple pie at his face. / Hindley comes in completely drunk, seizes Hareton and drops him down the stairs. / Heathcliff is listening when Catherine says that it would degrade her to marry him, and leaves.* Divide the class into groups. Give one member of each group a card. They have to mime the scene, using no words. The group that identifies the scene in the shortest time wins.
- 14 Role play, discuss:** In pairs, students role play Hindley telling a friend about his pain after his wife's death and about his sad memories of his childhood. Then the whole class discusses if their perception of Hindley has changed after they have tried to express his feelings.

Chapters 11–20

Before reading

- 15 Discuss, guess:** Tell students: *Here are two fragments from this section. Do you agree with them? Who do you think the speakers are talking to? Under what circumstances?*
- Isabella says: '... but violence wounds those who use it.'
 - Heathcliff says: 'We'll see if one tree won't grow as twisted as another, if it is blown by the same wind.'

After reading

- 16 Write:** Divide the class into two groups. Tell them: *Think of what happens in your mind when you're thinking. 'Stream of consciousness' is the name of a way of writing that tries to express the feelings, thoughts, ideas and memories that go through the mind. To imitate thought, it uses practically no punctuation and takes the form of an interior voice.* Ask groups to write Catherine and Heathcliff's interior monologues when Heathcliff left Thrushcross Grange at the end of Chapter 11. Students then share their paragraphs and discuss the differences in their perceptions of Catherine and Heathcliff's feelings that their paragraphs reveal, if any.
- 17 Discuss, research:** Write the following on the blackboard: *'Out on the wiley, windy moors / We'd roll and fall in green. / You had a temper like my jealousy / Too hot, too greedy. / How could you leave me, / When I needed to possess you? / I hated you. I loved you, too.'* Tell students that this is a stanza from the song 'Wuthering Heights' by Kate Bush. Ask them: *Who do you think is speaking to whom? Is it Catherine or is it Heathcliff? Could it be either? Why?* Students then search the Internet for the song and find out.
- 18 Group work, write:** Ask students to read the last paragraph on page 63. Tell them: *Gypsies have traditionally been associated with curses. Is this a gypsy curse? If so, will it come true?* Then ask groups to write curses that Heathcliff might have thrown upon Edgar and Hindley.
- 19 Debate:** Divide the class into two groups. Ask them to think about Catherine and Heathcliff's love for each other and have them debate the following: *Passionate love is a selfish feeling. A person in love doesn't want the loved-one's well-being and happiness but the personal joy experienced when they are together.*
- 20 Role play, discuss:** In pairs, students write and role play the scenes in which:
- Heathcliff asks Isabella to leave with him.
 - Heathcliff promises to punish her until he can get hold of Edgar who, he thinks, is to blame for Catherine's death.

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Then, in pairs, half the class makes a list of Heathcliff's good points or anything that might excuse his behaviour, and the other half a list of his bad points and evil actions. After the lists are read out, the class decides if Heathcliff is a bad person.

Remind students of their conclusions in activity 1.

- 21 Pair work:** Elicit from students what the weather was like when Heathcliff left and when Catherine was buried – there were violent storms. Discuss with them how Emily Brontë makes the weather be in harmony with Catherine and Heathcliff's feelings. Have them discuss in pairs the following questions: *If there were descriptions of the weather in the following periods, what would it be like? Why?*
- the first years of Catherine's marriage*
 - the three years that Heathcliff spent in Gimmerton*
 - the two months Heathcliff and Isabella were absent*
- Pairs compare their answers and discuss any differences of opinion.

Chapters 21–28

Before reading

- 22 Guess:** Remind students of the situation at Wuthering Heights when the novel opens. Have them discuss in groups how events could have evolved from the situation in these chapters to that one.

After reading

- 23 Role play:** Tell students: *Imagine Catherine's ghost came back and saw what Heathcliff was doing to her daughter and nephew, and to her husband's nephew. Have them role play the conversation between Catherine's ghost and Heathcliff.*
- 24 Discuss:** Tell students: *When Cathy paid her second visit to Wuthering heights, Hareton washed and dressed himself as Heathcliff had done when Edgar and Isabella visited Catherine, and was scorned by Cathy as he had been by Edgar. Heathcliff felt both delight and a sense of identification. What do you think were his feelings? Why?* Divide the class into two groups and have them discuss whether revenge takes away pain or only keeps it alive.
- 25 Guess, role play:** Show a scene with Hareton from one of the films without the sound on. Ask students to identify the scene. Have them write a dialogue to fit the images and role play it as if dubbing the film. Students compare their dialogues with the original.
- 26 Group work, write:** Divide the class into groups. Each group writes four of the short letters or messages that Cathy and Linton Heathcliff exchanged and were found by Nelly. They don't write the date on the letters. Collect all letters and messages and put them on your desk. Groups have to find a sequence of four letters that were written by another group and put them in order. They have to explain what elements in the text helped them to identify the four letters as a

sequence and determine the order in which they were sent. The first group to have all four letters and be ready to explain wins.

- 27 Write:** Have students imagine that Cathy and Linton Heathcliff had access to the Internet. At the school ICT room, a cyber-café or at home have them use Messenger, Skype or any other similar programme to role play the argument between them on pages 94 (bottom) – 95 (top) via chat. If students chat outside the institution have them print the dialogue or copy it as a document and send it to you via e-mail. Then have the class decide who has defended his/her parent more passionately.
- 28 Artwork, game:** Divide the class into groups. Have them choose a dead character and make a tombstone for him/her using any small cardboard box. The tombstone must in some way represent the spirit of the character and have no name on it. Ask groups to put a card with the name of the dead character and some sweets in the box. Groups show their tombstones to the class, and the first student to guess whose it is gets the sweets.

Chapters 29–38

Before reading

- 29 Discuss:** Have students discuss the following: *Should we keep truth from a person to avoid his/her suffering, or do people always have a right to know any truth that concerns them? Is it the same if the person is ill? Who do you think may hide the truth from someone in the coming chapters? Why?*
- 30 Guess, game:** Tell students: *These sentences hide the name of the person that they speak of. Look up in your dictionary any word you don't know. Try to find the name and the rule used to hide it.*
- a** He accepted reality, evil treatment, offensive names.
 - b** He eagerly awaited the hot coffee, lonely, ill, feverish, faithful.
 - c** Everybody loves loyal, excellent nurses.
- Students can then try to hide a name in a sentence.

After reading

- 31 Research, discuss:** Ask students to search the Internet for the Married Women Property Acts of 1882 and 1893 or information about them, and discuss:
- a** how the story would have been different if these laws had been passed forty years earlier.
 - b** how the property inherited both by wife/husband and children should be most fairly shared.
- 32 Pair work:** Remind students of their conclusions in activity 15b. Then have them discuss who seems to be more like Heathcliff in personality, Hareton or Linton, and whether they think personality is formed by nature, nurture (the home environment) or both. Pairs report their conclusions.