

The presentation of education at the end of the novel

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

Education is an important theme throughout the novel. The activities below will help you understand the presentation of this theme at the end of the novel.

Morton village school, chapters 30 to 32

In Chapter 30, St John Rivers reminds Jane of the school's situation if she accepts the post of village schoolmistress:

'But you comprehend me?' he said. 'It is a village school: your scholars will be only poor girls - cottagers' children - at the best, farmers' daughters. Knitting, sewing, reading, writing, ciphering [numbers, arithmetic], will be all you will have to teach. What will you do with your accomplishments? What, with the largest portion of your mind - sentiments - tastes?' 'Save them till they are wanted. They will keep.'

Chapter 31 opens with Jane's assessment of the school's first day:

I had twenty scholars. But three of the number can read: none write or cipher. Several knit, and a few sew a little. They speak with the broadest accent of the district. At present, they and I have a difficulty in understanding each other's language ... I must not forget that these coarsely-clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy.

Chapter 32 opens some time later, describing how Jane and the other students have settled into school life together:

I had amongst my scholars several farmers' daughters: young women grown, almost. These could already read, write, and sew; and to them I taught the elements of grammar, geography, history, and the finer kinds of needlework. I found estimable characters amongst them - characters desirous of information and disposed for improvement - with whom I passed many a pleasant evening hour in their own homes.

Look closely at the extracts from the novel and answer the questions below:

1. What seems familiar to you about the school and its subjects compared with your own experiences of school? Why are some subjects so different, e.g. knitting then, IT now?
2. How do you feel about Brontë's presentation of Jane's changing feelings towards her students? What did Miss Temple teach Jane about how to treat her students?

Extension tasks

1. How does Morton village school compare to Lowood, where Jane was a pupil? Remind yourself of Lowood by rereading the first three paragraphs of Chapter 6.
2. What made Lowood change in the end to be more like Morton village school? Remind yourself by rereading the first three paragraphs of Chapter 10.

Adèle's schooling, Chapter 38

Read the following extract and highlight in two different colours the advantages and disadvantages of the two schools mentioned.

You have not quite forgotten little Adèle, have you, reader? I had not; I soon asked and obtained leave of Mr Rochester, to go and see her at the school where he had placed her. Her frantic joy at beholding me again moved me much. She looked pale and thin: she said she was not happy. I found the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of study too severe for a child of her age: I took her home with me. I meant to become her governess once more, but I soon found this impracticable; my time and cares were now required by another - my husband needed them all. So I sought out a school conducted on a more indulgent system, and near enough to permit of my visiting her often, and bringing her home sometimes. I took care that she should never want for anything that could contribute to her comfort: she soon settled in her new abode, became very happy there, and made fair progress in her studies.

Summarise the advantages and disadvantages in the boxes below:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Her present school		
Her new school		

1. Which school sounds similar to Lowood and which to Morton?
2. Do you agree with the decision to move Adèle to a different school?
3. Comment on the style of the extract. Do you feel that Brontë is addressing the reader as a friend, as someone she regards as familiar with the story? What effect does this have on you? Also comment on the first person narrative, direct address, present tense and question to the reader.