

Literary Lives: The Brontës

1. What was Patrick Brontë's original name, and why did he change it?

2. What happened to the family shortly after they moved to the parsonage in Haworth?

3. Why was Cowan Bridge School not a happy experience for the Brontë sisters?

4. What were the names of two of the imaginary worlds created by the Brontë siblings?

5. Why did Charlotte and Emily go to school in Brussels?

6. What were the pseudonyms the sisters originally published their books under? Explain which pseudonym belonged to which sister.

7. What were the titles of the debut published novels of the three sisters?

8. What was terrible about the months from September 1848 to May 1849 for the family?

9. Give two examples of celebrated novelists Charlotte Brontë met in later life

10. How did Charlotte die in 1855?

Extension

What impact do you think their childhood had on the Brontë sisters?

How did the Brontë sisters draw on their life experiences when writing their works?

What are your impressions of the Brontës? Have they changed since reading about them? Use evidence from the text to explain your answer.

Literary Lives: The Brontës Answers

1. What was Patrick Brontë's original name, and why did he change it?
Patrick Brunt. He changed it when he went to Cambridge University, because he thought Brontë sounded more impressive.
2. What happened to the family shortly after they moved to the parsonage in Haworth?
Maria Brontë, wife to Patrick and mother to the six children, died of cancer.
3. Why was Cowan Bridge School not a happy experience for the Brontë sisters?
Among their experiences there, the girls were forced to eat burnt porridge, wash in freezing bowls of water, and were humiliated by staff and other pupils. There were also constant illnesses and medical attention was not effective or kind.
4. What were the names of two of the imaginary worlds created by the Brontë siblings?
Angria and Gondal.
5. Why did Charlotte and Emily go to school in Brussels?
To learn modern foreign languages to prepare them for running their own school from the parsonage in Haworth.
6. What were the pseudonyms the sisters originally published their books under? Explain which pseudonym belonged to which sister.
Currer (Charlotte), Ellis (Emily) and Acton (Anne) Bell.
7. What were the titles of the debut published novels of the three sisters?
“Jane Eyre” (Charlotte), “Wuthering Heights” (Emily) and “Agnes Grey” (Anne).
8. What was terrible about the months from September 1848 to May 1849 for the family?
During this time Branwell, Emily and Anne all died of tuberculosis.
9. Give two examples of celebrated novelists Charlotte Brontë met in later life.
William Thackeray and Elizabeth Gaskell.
10. How did Charlotte die in 1855?
It is not certain. She could have died of tuberculosis, or excessive morning sickness (Hyperemesis Gravidarum).

Extension

What impact do you think their childhood had on the Brontë sisters?

Answers could include reference to:

- the early tragedy of losing their mother (many of their works are tinged with tragedy);
- their father's encouragement to read widely, which may have prompted an interest in writing themselves;
- Charlotte and Emily's unpleasant experiences at boarding school;
- the isolation of the children, which led them to create their own imaginary worlds.

Students may explore the idea that the sisters were lonely and isolated, and also dependent on each other.

The scientists on Antarctica were some of the first to draw attention to global warming and climate change. Find out more about the 'ozone hole' over the Antarctic. What did scientists believe caused it?

The 'ozone hole' develops each year over the Antarctic and is the area where the layer of ozone (O_3) has become the weakest. Ozone protects us from the more harmful aspects of the outer atmosphere and the sun and scientists became concerned about the impact of this 'hole'. They found that CFCs or chlorofluorocarbons were responsible and, since the 1970s, the use of these has been phased out completely.

How did the Brontë sisters draw on their life experiences when writing their works?

Answers should explore how all of the sisters' novels use personal experiences within the narratives, including:

- the miserable experiences of life at boarding school portrayed as Lowood School in "Jane Eyre";
- Charlotte and Anne both worked as governesses, and governesses feature in "Jane Eyre" and "Agnes Grey" (as well as their other novels);
- "Jane Eyre" features a young woman falling in love with her employer, as Charlotte fell in love with Constantin Heger;
- Emily Brontë set "Wuthering Heights" on the Yorkshire moors, where she grew up.

What are your impressions of the Brontës? Have they changed since reading about them? Use evidence from the text to explain your answer.

Answers should give personal opinion, backed up by evidence in the text. They may include references to the fact that all the siblings held many different jobs, apparently finding it hard to settle in one occupation; the fact that their life was repeatedly tinged with tragedy; the enduring nature of the novels.