

How has the  
character changed  
throughout the novel



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The character of Jane Eyre evolves and changes even as an actual woman would throughout the course of her life. Jane Eyre becomes self-sufficient; firstly as a governess, and then as the headmistress of her school and lastly as a wealthy woman by her inheritance. She has also formed her own values, and gained her own set of morals, by learning from the people she met and the adversities she endured. Lastly, she has matured, and become content with herself and her position, become what she views as an equal to Mr. Rochester. Jane Eyre grows more self-sufficient as the book progresses.

She needs to do this, as it is a part of her becoming an adult, and because her own self-sufficiency is something she feels she needs to achieve before she gains self-assurance, and a clear sense of her own worth. At first, in the novel, she is obviously completely reliant on others, as a child. She thinks “ Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely, and must turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? “. These thoughts were just before Jane Eyre’s outburst to her aunt about how cruelly she feels she has been treated, and how much she hates her aunt.

The words are very reminiscent of the literature of the time; too grand and righteous for a child, but successfully expressing the anger the author feels the child should feel. Jane Eyre, here, obviously thinks that by being put down by her aunt to the headmaster of the school she is to enrol in, she has been wronged more severely than before, and has an ideal opportunity to reply to her aunt with criticisms of her aunt’s behaviour. The fact that she does reply is a step forward for her ability to support herself; she has the confidence in herself she needs to defend herself, an important part of her self-sufficiency.

Another example of when Jane Eyre becomes more self-sufficient is when she is finished with Lowood, gaining the skills needed to become a governess, and therefore support herself financially. Just before leaving Lowood, having been offered the position of governess at Thornfield, she is visited by Bessie, her childhood nurse. Bessie inquires about her skills, and tells her something of how her aunt's family are faring, but one statement sums up Jane Eyre's achievements at Lowood quite well – “ Oh, you are quite a lady, Miss Jane! I knew you would be; you will get on whether your relations notice you or not. “.

In Bessie's remark that she is now ‘ quite a lady’, we realise that Jane Eyre has grown self-disciplined and is quite proper and decorous, which is necessary for her to be accepted as a suitable governess for children. Also, Bessie's statement that she will get by, relations or none, she affirms that Jane is now able to manage for herself, and has discarded her need for her relatives' aid.

The need for Jane Eyre to be ladylike, and the reference to needing one's relations is also very much a reminder of the time of the novel, because at that time in the past, relatives and the respectability of a person was of extreme importance, whereas it is far less appreciated today. The last affirmation that Jane Eyre has become very self-sufficient is when she inherits a large sum of money from her uncle from her father's side of the family, who she had never met. She is told this by her cousin, St John Eyre Rivers, after he has discovered her true name.

He says “ Merely to tell you that your uncle, Mr. Eyre of Madeira, is dead; that he has left you all his property, and that you are now rich – merely that – nothing more. “. This is, of course, a great shock to Jane Eyre, as she has been working as a schoolmistress, and was reduced to begging before being fortunate enough to find that job. It establishes Jane’s position as a self-sufficient young woman, wealthy enough to support herself as long as she needs to, providing that she is careful with the way she spends her money and maintains some form of income.

Jane Eyre has fully attained her goal of being a self-supporting, respectable person, and laid certain self-doubts to rest. Her self-sufficiency is also innately tied to her self-reliance. She feels she is more able to rely on herself; that she is more stable and secure as her financial status is stabilised. Another way in which the character of Jane Eyre has matured is in the knowledge she has gained from her world. By experiencing everything from poverty to wealth, and meeting people ranging from the terribly devout St John Rivers, to the arrogant noble ladies who so looked down on governesses, and indeed, nearly everyone who was not noble.

She has had many diverse experiences in life, and they have shaped her character to the woman she becomes by the end of the book. The first main stage of Jane’s life is her time at Lowood school. She is forced to endure much hardship there, but she also meets two very unique people – her friend Helen Burns, and the fanatical headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst.

Helen Burns introduces the young, impulsive Jane to the idea that what seems cruel may have a purpose – “ But that teacher, Miss Scatcherd, is so

cruel to you? " Cruel? Not at all! She is severe; she dislikes my faults. " Both girls know that Miss Scatcherd dislikes Helen, and punishes her excessively for every small error, but Helen decides she deserves such punishment, and must use it to try and rectify her behaviour, while Jane automatically feels that Miss Scatcherd is simply mean, as a child might. Helen explains to Jane why punishment should be taken, in her view; that God has a reason for everything that happens to a person.

Mr. Brocklehurst, in his turn, speaks of one of his beliefs to Jane's class - "-: My mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string on hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven: these, I repeat, must be cut off -". Jane has been confronted with this extreme view, and she must come to her own conclusions about it; why he is wrong; how he has become so against any possible form of vanity.

Also, if she had been slowly introduced to the views of Mr. Brocklehurst, she might not have set herself against them, but as it is, she has felt immediately that he must not have the right of it. The second main stage of Jane's life is her time at Thornfield as a governess. The people there are quite kind to Jane, and she feels that it is home, as Lowood was not, even after Mr. Brocklehurst's influence was lessened. The first main incident of influence on Jane is the time when the Ingram ladies staying at Thornfield discuss governesses, and their failings, knowing they are within Jane's hearing.

The eldest Lady Ingram states “ I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class. “, when told that the governess of Adele has heard her denounce all governesses. Jane must accept the criticism without retaliating; however, she has had some of her passionate impulsiveness taken from her at Lowood, and in any case, she is quite nervous of beautiful ladies, seeing them as somewhat above her. However, she is forced to see by their own belief of their superiority that they are not superior to her at all; and their appraisal of governesses is far from true.

Later, as the young women comment on how they plagued their governesses as children, Jane must recognise they cannot even see how foolish they are, and are far from superior to her. The second main incident is much more significant to the storyline: as Jane discovers that Mr. Rochester is already married, and chooses to leave him. This is a very hard decision, and Jane has obviously matured and grown out of the passionate idealism she had as a child, to decide that she must leave, and Mr. Rochester should settle his affairs himself - “ Sir, your wife is living; that is a fact acknowledged this morning by yourself.

If I lived with you as you desire - I should then be your mistress. To say otherwise is sophistical - is false. ” She says clearly to Mr. Rochester, though it pains her. She is very formal, and though the novel states her distress, as is fitting in that time, she attempts to be as proper and unemotional as she can. Jane Eyre has been placed in a position where she has a clear opportunity to do what her society views as right; or what they view as wrong. It takes much strength and character for her to overcome her

personal wishes to follow her conscience, and shows her great personal strength.

The third and last main stage of Jane's life is when she lives with her cousins as a schoolmistress. In this stage, she is learning to live without Mr. Rochester, having resigned herself to a life without him. There is only one main incident here which she must learn from; her proposal of marriage from St. John Rivers, which she finds quite an unpleasant surprise. St. John Rivers is Jane Eyre's cousin, and she views him as family, after she finds out that he and the sisters Diana and Mary are her cousins. He has expressed previously an intent to go to India as a missionary, and that Jane might accompany him in going there.

She does not refuse; in fact, she agrees to be his assistant, and help him, but he wishes her to marry him, in order for him to decently be with a young woman alone, or 'only among savages'. She cannot understand his feelings, and is dismayed at the thought of marrying him - "Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No, such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. As his sister, I might accompany him - not as his wife: I will tell him so.

The short speech is very reminiscent of Jane's passion and righteousness; the way she speaks of it is dramatic; much the passionate part of Jane Eyre speaking, a strong part of Jane that has survived since childhood, through Lowood and Thornfield. She states her inability to cope with such hardship, and that she could not bear it; it would be extremely hard on the character of Jane, because, as a romance character, she has an innate need for love,

and St John would simply go through the motions, as if he loved her, but Jane would be incomplete, and unhappy with this.

Overall, Jane learned from this situation of being presented with a person so determined to be perfect in the eyes of God; to repress all human faults, and again, being forced to assess him; to evaluate him against her morals, and she finds that he is, in fact, virtually free of sin, as it is defined by the Bible, but she herself finds it hard to accept him as the perfect person, sees him as too devoid of emotion, and the very human imperfections that she sees as good qualities in a person. This differing of standards between the Bible and her own views is somewhat difficult for her to comprehend, but she does understand.

To conclude this part of Jane's life, she has learned from many things; all of these incidents have helped shape her perceptions of life; whether by providing a new conception of an incident that may make her feel it is not as wrong as it appears, or by presenting her with an opinion so extreme that she must build her own ideas regarding it, and strengthen them so she may oppose it, or providing her with a view that she cannot share; but nor can she oppose as wrong, or immoral, such as that of St John Rivers.

This has been a part of the way she changes throughout the book by the way she is forced to change her own views as she understands others' reasons for their own views; however much they disagree with her own, and in whichever way. The last, and possibly the most important way in which Jane Eyre has matured and developed in the novel is that she has gained self-confidence, and a lack of doubt in herself and her position.



By the end of the novel, she is no longer reliant on Mr. Rochester for money; as she has now inherited a fair amount, she need not be dependant on him, which was a source of discontent for her. Also, as Mr. Rochester's wife at the end, she is completely content with herself and her place with him, and there is no inequality in their marriage, as there might have been should she have gone directly from his charge's governess, and his 'paid subordinate' as she refers to herself, to his wife.

The inequality between Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester, as Jane sees it, becomes a minor obstacle between them. One part of this is Jane's lack of money, while Mr. Rochester is wealthy. Jane feels uncomfortable that he is almost completely supporting her; as mentioned earlier, she places a fair amount of importance on being self-supporting. An example of this is when they go shopping for Jane's wedding dress - "the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation... it would, indeed, be a relief, if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester... I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched,".

Jane, again dramatising, exaggerates both the situation and her feelings about it, but essentially, it is a fair summation of how she feels. She thinks of herself as still his governess; worries that he sees her only as an employee that has caught his eye, to be showered with gifts and romance for a time, then discarded, which is probably not completely untrue. The later inheritance she comes into gives her security; she can view herself as a respectable woman in her own right, not as a dependant of Mr. Rochester, <https://assignbuster.com/how-has-the-character-changed-throughout-the-novel/>

and he, in his turn, no longer supports her fully, and so cannot be superior to her.

Also, Jane had to leave behind any thoughts of herself as unequal to him in order to truly be his wife; if she had married him with both Mr Rochester and herself viewing her as his governess and dependant, she would have been wife in only name, and mistress in everything else. Jane states her fears once to him, “ Do you remember what you said of Celine Varens? - of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Celine Varens. I shall continue to act as Adele’s governess; by that I shall earn my own board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides.

I shall furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing -“. She has tried to correct matters here, by refusing to accept his gifts, and become his mistress. But this was not quite the best way for her to go about it; she could not go on working as his governess and then make the sudden transition to his wife, not and gain the equality between them that she so desires. Going immediately from subordinate to equal would have simply made the shift even more difficult. However, neither could she have accepted every gift he offered, and acted as if she was his mistress.

Although not the most pleasant way for Jane and Mr. Rochester to become equals, Jane’s departure and the experiences she gains are really the best way for them to be balanced partners. Jane’s development in becoming, in both her and Mr. Rochester’s eyes, an equal to him, has been vitally important to her growth in life. She could not live happily with him without removing the barrier of superiority; even if she had not returned to Mr.

Rochester, she would have always been discomforted by her view that she was somehow not as important, or equal to, a noble, or rich person. That view would have encumbered her, and made her less strong and sure of a person.

To conclude, Jane Eyre's evolution throughout the novel has been a very necessary part of the story; the way in which she views herself in relation to others, the development of her morals, her personal strength and her self-reliance. It has decided her actions, and is an inherent part of the direction of the storyline. Jane Eyre has become self-sufficient, formed her own values and morals by life's lessons, and matured into her finishing role as the wife of Mr. Rochester. She has grown strong and secure in herself, and it is very unlikely that she will ever lose this.

Her knowledge, and her morals and values can never be taken from her; her money, and thus her self-sufficiency and some of her self-reliance may disappear, but she cannot lose her skills as a governess, and thus will always have some means of finding employment and re-establishing self-sufficiency. Her belief in her equality to others cannot be taken from her, because it is an inherent part of her knowledge and values. Overall, she has grown from an impassioned, undisciplined, and hasty child, into a mature, strong, careful woman, secure in her belief in herself.