

## Deep Read Assignment: *Jane Eyre*

This example of a deep read assignment originally appeared as part of Joshua Gibbs's blog post "The Kind of Test They Will Ask for Again." You can read the entire post on the CiRCE Institute website: <https://www.circeinstitute.org/blog/kind-test-they-will-ask-again>.

Before asking students to complete a deep read assignment, show them how. Put a copy of the kinds of questions you're looking for in their hands. Here's an example I wrote for *Jane Eyre*.

Jane is hotly in love with Mr. Rochester, but finds moments before they are to wed that her husband-to-be is already married to a woman who went insane years and years ago. Rochester tends to this woman, but they do not exactly live as husband and wife. When Jane finds he is married, she knows she must quit Rochester. He tries to persuade Jane to become his mistress, though, arguing that he is not truly married to his first wife. A long debate ensues wherein Rochester tries to convince Jane there would be nothing sinful in her becoming his mistress.

If Jane leaves Rochester, she has nowhere to go. She will be destitute. If Rochester is not there to care for her, then who will? While thinking through this question, Jane responds:

I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. —from Chapter 27 of *Jane Eyre*

This passage is fifty-two words long. Here are fifty-two questions about it.

1. Is it selfish or proud for Jane to care for herself?
2. Would she not be better off caring for someone else as opposed to caring about herself?
3. Is it possible she is caring for Rochester in caring for herself?
4. Why will Jane respect herself more if she goes solitary, friendless, and unsustained?
5. Is there an historical precedent for righteousness growing out of solitary friendlessness?
6. Is the monastic life righteous on account of its solitude?
7. If a life of solitude is not necessarily righteous, but could lead to righteousness, then what conditions and motives for solitude are necessary that it would lead to righteousness?
8. Does Jane's desire for solitude and friendlessness seem monastic in nature?

9. What does Jane have in common with notable monks, like St. Francis or St. Anthony of Egypt?
10. If a certain kind of friendlessness can lead to righteousness, can a certain kind of friendship lead to wickedness?
11. St. James teaches that “friendship with the world means enmity with God.” Would staying with Rochester constitute friendship with “the world”?
12. In what ways has Brontë drawn Rochester to resemble “the world”?
13. When Jane refers to being “unsustained,” what does she mean? Emotionally unsustained? Physically unsustained? Spiritually unsustained?
14. What does Scripture teach about physical sustenance? Can spiritual sustenance be gained through the loss of physical sustenance? Can physical sustenance be gained through the loss of spiritual sustenance?
15. What laws of God have been “sanctioned by man”?
16. Sanctions are threats of penalty for breaking the law, so what penalty awaits Jane if she does as Rochester asks?
17. Is she resisting Rochester simply because she fears the penalty of the law?
18. What words and deeds typify a person who cares only that they not get caught?
19. Do Jane’s actions depend entirely on her fear of God? Do the penalties enforced by man for breaking God’s law merely help her to remember God’s law?
20. Does Jane have motivations for quitting Rochester that she is unwilling to admit?
21. Has Jane told her readers all that she thinks and feels about Rochester, or is she holding back?
22. What does Jane mean when she says she is “mad”?
23. From a certain standpoint, Jane seems to be thinking quite clearly. This desire to live according to the law of God—how is this madness?
24. Jane seems to speak as two persons: a reasonable woman from the past and a madwoman from the present. Which is the real Jane?
25. Do we find examples in Scripture of persons torn between warring identities?

26. Is this what St. Paul means when he writes, “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do”?
27. Is Jane simply trying to do what she wants to do (flee) and not what she hates (violate God’s commands)?
28. Or is it that Jane’s flesh is warring against her spirit?
29. Is it that in her flesh, she wants to take Rochester to bed, but in her spirit, she wants to be pious?
30. Does Jane hate the idea of going destitute, but would do it for the sake of God?
31. Did St. Paul intend this ambiguity in his famous maxim?
32. Can this maxim be read in two completely opposite senses?
33. If Jane is able to view herself objectively and see herself as “mad,” where does she stand in order to do so?
34. How has she escaped her very self, such that viewing her very self is possible?
35. Is Jane actually declaring herself mad, or has some voice other than her own lent her this knowledge?
36. Has God lent her this knowledge?
37. Is the Holy Spirit speaking through Jane to Jane?
38. Is this something like what Christ refers to when He says, “You will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:19–20)?
39. Jane is concerned about “caring” for herself and “respecting” herself: Is this the same thing as loving herself?
40. What has driven Jane “mad”?
41. Is she mad with love for Rochester?
42. Love is the greatest virtue, so how can it lead to madness?
43. Is she mad with lust?
44. What in the text suggests she merely lusts after him?

45. Are her feelings toward Rochester at the end of the book different than her feelings for him in chapter 27? Does she behave differently toward him in the end? Merely speak of him differently? Both? Neither?
46. Can Rochester see the struggle that is going on within Jane?
47. Does he understand that her flesh is warring against her spirit, or does he mistake her wavering for some other material concern? Mere trepidation, the inexperience of youth, or fear of what is unknown or uncommon?
48. Why does Jane want to hold to the principles she received?
49. Why does she not question the authenticity of those principles?
50. What within her own behavior tips Jane off to the fact that she is mad?
51. What kind of habits of mind can a person cultivate so that they will know when they are being tempted toward madness?
52. Does this scene reference another classical temptation scene?