

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #271

The Brontë Sisters

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[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about three women, the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, authors of novels such as Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights.

[00:00:34] This is actually part three of a three-part mini-series on great authors of the Victorian era. In case you haven't listened to the first two, in part one we looked at the woman often called the queen of Victorian literature, Jane Austen, and in part two we looked at the great social and [urban](#)¹ writer, Charles Dickens.

¹ relating to a town or city

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[00:00:57] The subjects of today's episode, the Brontë sisters, come from a similar period, but developed their own very different and hugely important literary style.

[00:01:09] Indeed, these three women arguably [make up](#)² the most extraordinary family of literary geniuses in European history.

[00:01:18] So, let's not waste a minute, and get started with the Brontë sisters.

[00:01:23] As we did in the previous episodes, we'll look at four major [themes](#)³. The [novelists](#)⁴ life and [upbringing](#)⁵, the works that they wrote, the impact of these books, and their legacy.

[00:01:37] In this episode we do have three authors, not just the one, so we'll focus a little more on the lives and shared [upbringing](#) of the women, but, as you'll see, their early lives and childhood tragedy will be [instrumental](#)⁶ for an understanding of their work.

[00:01:54] First, let me [set the scene](#)⁷, to provide you with the location both for the Brontë sisters' lives, and for their novels.

² are, consist

³ subjects, topics

⁴ people who wrote novels

⁵ the way they were raised or grew up

⁶ very important

⁷ describe the situation and the conditions

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[00:02:04] The location is [rural](#)⁸ Yorkshire, in the north of England, in a small village called Haworth.

[00:02:11] Specifically, the [Parsonage](#)⁹ at Haworth.

[00:02:14] A [parsonage](#) is the name for a house given to a [clergyman](#)¹⁰, a Church of England priest. The Brontës lived in the [parsonage](#) because the girls' father, Patrick, was the village priest.

[00:02:27] [As a side note](#)¹¹, if you remember Jane Austen, you'll remember that her father also was a priest, but, as you'll see, the Brontës were very different people, and writers, compared to Jane Austen.

[00:02:41] OK, back to Haworth.

[00:02:43] If you visit Haworth now, you will find a small village surrounded by wild beauty, by big empty spaces known as the Yorkshire [moors](#)¹² – a [moor](#)¹³ is a big

⁸ in the countryside

⁹ a church house provided for a priest

¹⁰ priest

¹¹ in addition to, but less important than what was just being discussed, by the way

¹² big open areas of land that cannot be farmed and usually are left in a natural state

¹³ big open area of land that cannot be farmed and usually is left in a natural state

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expanse¹⁴ of land that cannot be **cultivated**¹⁵ and usually is left in a natural state, covered with **bogs**¹⁶, **bushes**¹⁷ and **heather**¹⁸.

[00:03:06] In the first half of the 19th century, however, it wasn't quite so **isolated**¹⁹.

[00:03:11] It would have been surrounded by small factories and workshops involved in the industries of **weaving**²⁰ and cloth making.

[00:03:20] It was a poor, hillside village. 41% of children died before they were six months old, and life expectancy was a miserable 25 years.

[00:03:32] Although the Brontës were not rich, say compared to the factory owners, they were in a relatively comfortable position financially, as their mother, Maria, had a

¹⁴ a large open area of land

¹⁵ farmed

¹⁶ soft, wet ground, swampy area

¹⁷ low plants with many branches that arise from or near the ground

¹⁸ a low plant, usually with small pink, purple, or white flowers

¹⁹ far away from other places

²⁰ the act of making clothes using threads, knitting

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small amount of money of her own which **supplemented**²¹ her husband's **modest**²² salary as a minister or **vicar**²³ of the Church of England.

[00:03:52] Patrick Brontë, the girls' father, was clearly an extraordinary man.

[00:03:57] He had been born into a poor peasant family in Ireland.

[00:04:01] Through his own intelligence, **enterprise**²⁴ and determination he had managed to **secure**²⁵ a place at Cambridge University, graduating with a first class honours degree and **securing**²⁶ access to the Church of England as a **vicar**.

[00:04:17] This was an amazingly socially **upwardly**²⁷ **mobile**²⁸ thing for the time, social classes were still pretty fixed, and to go from a peasant family to the most **prestigious**²⁹ university in the country was **astounding**³⁰.

²¹ added to

²² not large in amount

²³ minister

²⁴ ability or creativity

²⁵ succeed in obtaining or having

²⁶ succeeding in obtaining or having

²⁷ towards a higher social class

²⁸ moving

²⁹ much respected and admired

³⁰ very impressive

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[00:04:32] His wife, Maria, was from a much wealthier family.

[00:04:36] Both parents were highly cultured people. At the [Parsonage](#) they had a very good library, were [engaged](#)³¹ politically and raised their family in what must have been a highly [stimulating](#)³² environment.

[00:04:50] They had six children, all born between 1814 and 1820. Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne.

[00:05:00] The most famous are Emily, who wrote Wuthering Heights, and Charlotte, who wrote Jane Eyre.

[00:05:07] Sadly, by 1855 the only surviving member of the Brontë family was the father, Patrick.

[00:05:16] All six children and the mother would be dead.

[00:05:19] So, let's [rewind](#)³³ a bit, back to the early 1800s, to the sisters' [upbringing](#).

³¹ involved in (politics)

³² encouraging or causing interest and enthusiasm

³³ go back

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[00:05:26] We now need to **dive into**³⁴ the **tempestuous**³⁵, **traumatic**³⁶ and **colourful**³⁷ story of these six Brontë children, so that you can get an idea of their shared experiences growing up.

[00:05:38] Disease and death will, I'm sorry to say, **feature**³⁸ **prominently**³⁹, we'll come across a lot of this.

[00:05:45] As you'll know, in this era, even for families like the Brontës who were able to afford such luxuries as servants, early death through disease was just a fact of life.

[00:05:58] The first to die was the wife and mother, Maria, who suffered a short illness before dying of cancer aged only 38 in 1821, the year after the birth of her youngest daughter, Anne.

[00:06:12] As you might imagine, the children's father was **distraught**⁴⁰, he was incredibly sad and desperate.

³⁴ become involved in it with excitement

³⁵ characterised by strong feelings, emotional

³⁶ causing emotional shock and pain

³⁷ full of interest, exciting

³⁸ have a strong presence, are presented

³⁹ in a way that can easily be seen

⁴⁰ extremely worried

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[00:06:19] **By all accounts**⁴¹ it had been a happy marriage, but the man was now left **widowed**⁴² and with 6 young children to look after.

[00:06:27] His wife's sister, the children's aunt, came to live with them and help raise the children, but Patrick felt that he needed to find a **boarding school**⁴³ for the older girls.

[00:06:39] A **boarding school** is a school where children are sent to live, **in effect**⁴⁴, for weeks or even months at a time.

[00:06:47] The problem was that the Brontës didn't have much money, and **boarding schools**⁴⁵ weren't cheap.

[00:06:53] Patrick managed to find one where the **fees**⁴⁶ were reduced for members of the **clergy**⁴⁷, for children of priests. It was called Cowan Bridge School, and the four older Brontë sisters were sent there to study.

[00:07:07] The school was **a living hell**⁴⁸, it sounded terrible.

⁴¹ according to all of the different descriptions

⁴² having lost his wife through death

⁴³ a school in which students lived and studied

⁴⁴ in reality, in fact

⁴⁵ schools in which students lived and studied

⁴⁶ amount of money paid for the service

⁴⁷ religious officials

⁴⁸ an extremely unpleasant situation

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[00:07:11] Children had to share beds, there was no warm water, they were only given **burnt**⁴⁹ toast, and were often **beaten**⁵⁰ and **punished**⁵¹ terribly.

[00:07:21] As if this wasn't bad enough, the two older girls, Maria and Elizabeth, **contracted**⁵² **tuberculosis**⁵³ at their **boarding school**.

[00:07:30] They returned home, but both died **in quick succession**⁵⁴, aged 11 and 10.

[00:07:37] Charlotte and Emily were quickly taken away from this unhealthy and cruel school, but clearly **chilling**⁵⁵ memories of it would stay with them for life.

[00:07:47] If you read Jane Eyre, Charlotte's most famous novel, there's a terrible, cruel school called Lowood school which has **striking**⁵⁶ similarities with Cowan Bridge School.

⁴⁹ destroyed by heat, overcooked

⁵⁰ physically hurt, hit

⁵¹ caused to suffer when they did something wrong

⁵² caught or developed

⁵³ a serious infection or disease

⁵⁴ following one right after the other

⁵⁵ frightening, causing fear

⁵⁶ very noticeable or obvious

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[00:07:59] So much so, in fact, that the real school threatened to [sue](#)⁵⁷ the publishers of Jane Eyre for their [portrayal](#)⁵⁸ of the school in the novel.

[00:08:09] So, we now have four remaining children after the death of the oldest two. Charlotte, Branwell – who was the only son, the only male child – Emily and Anne.

[00:08:21] The rest of our story will [deal with](#)⁵⁹ these four surviving siblings.

[00:08:27] From a young age, perhaps as a way to escape the misery of the real world, the surviving Brontë children [came up with](#)⁶⁰ their own, highly detailed, imaginary worlds.

[00:08:39] Of course, there's nothing particularly unusual about children creating their own imaginary worlds, and every [novelist](#)⁶¹, [to a certain degree](#)⁶², creates their own stories with their own worlds, their own characters, they create their own reality.

⁵⁷ take legal action against

⁵⁸ presentation

⁵⁹ be about

⁶⁰ invented, thought up

⁶¹ a person who wrote novels

⁶² to a certain level or point

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[00:08:55] What was **splendidly**⁶³ **bizarre**⁶⁴ and unusual with the Brontës was that these imaginary worlds not only were incredibly detailed and developed, but that they continued through into adulthood, and they would **go on**⁶⁵ to form the basis for the sisters' novels.

[00:09:13] We know from family letters how, for example, Emily and Anne would pass the time on a railway journey discussing the various things that happened in their own imaginary world.

[00:09:26] These imaginary places inspired much of the early writing that allowed all the Brontë children to develop their own **craft**⁶⁶, their own skills, as writers.

[00:09:36] The Brontë sisters would **set**⁶⁷ poems, plays and short stories in these **self-contained**⁶⁸, imaginary worlds, and discuss what the inhabitants of these worlds would **get up to**⁶⁹.

⁶³ extremely well

⁶⁴ very strange or uncommon

⁶⁵ continue

⁶⁶ art

⁶⁷ arrange, present

⁶⁸ complete, having all that is needed in themselves

⁶⁹ be involved in

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[00:09:49] The most **influential**⁷⁰ of these imaginary, mythical landscapes was the one which Emily, helped by her younger sister Anne, created, which went by the name of Gondal.

[00:10:00] This was a place inhabited by men and women with high passions who did extreme and wild things – violent romances and extreme actions took place in this exotic land of the mind.

[00:10:15] Perhaps **unsurprisingly**⁷¹, Gondal, would become an essential part of the inspiration for Emily's only novel, the magnificent “Wuthering Heights”.

[00:10:25] Now, moving on to the education and early careers of the four surviving Brontë children, I need to **emphasise**⁷² that most of their education was through the **fertile**⁷³, creative atmosphere of the **Parsonage**, their family home.

[00:10:41] It is perhaps not surprising that their **formal**⁷⁴ education was relatively brief, given the terrible experience that had resulted in the early deaths of the two older sisters. There was some **formal** schooling, but it played a relatively small part.

⁷⁰ having a lot of influence or effect

⁷¹ in a way that was not surprising

⁷² show that it is very important

⁷³ producing new ideas, creative

⁷⁴ public, official

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[00:10:57] Perhaps the person for whom it was most important was Charlotte, whose unusual experience attending a school in the capital of Belgium, Brussels, was [formative](#)⁷⁵ in two ways.

[00:11:10] Firstly, she had an [inspirational](#)⁷⁶ literature teacher, who taught her how to put much more [discipline](#)⁷⁷ into her writing and also [ensured](#)⁷⁸ that she had an excellent [facility](#)⁷⁹ with French.

[00:11:22] The other reason why her time in the school was so important was [sentimental](#)⁸⁰ or having to do with the emotions.

[00:11:31] She fell in love with her teacher, Monsieur Constantin Heger, who was the husband of the [headmistress](#)⁸¹.

⁷⁵ having a big effect on her development

⁷⁶ making her feel full of hope, encouraging

⁷⁷ control or order

⁷⁸ made certain that

⁷⁹ ability, skill

⁸⁰ relating to the emotions

⁸¹ a woman who was in charge

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[00:11:38] She believed that he was the first man to have [taken her seriously](#)⁸² on an intellectual level, and after she left the school she wrote him letters where she [hinted](#) [at](#)⁸³ her true feelings for him, hoping that he would respond [favourably](#)⁸⁴.

[00:11:54] But, at least from the letters that have remained, he seemed to have got scared, and he stopped writing back to her.

[00:12:01] This theme of [unreturned](#)⁸⁵, or as it's called, "[unrequited](#)⁸⁶" love, would be a [recurrent](#)⁸⁷ one in Charlotte's novels.

[00:12:10] What about the young boy, young Branwell?

[00:12:13] This episode is about the sisters, so what happened to their brother?

[00:12:17] Well, he was thought to be a talented painter and [pursued](#)⁸⁸ the life of a portrait painter for some time. He was also considered to be a talented writer and had hopes and dreams of writing for serious [journals](#)⁸⁹.

⁸² considered her worthy of attention

⁸³ talked about in an indirect way

⁸⁴ in a way that showed his approval

⁸⁵ not responded to, not given back

⁸⁶ not responded to, not given back

⁸⁷ appearing again and again

⁸⁸ followed or went after

⁸⁹ newspapers or magazines

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[00:12:33] Unfortunately, Branwell proved to be a massive disappointment to everyone, in particular to himself.

[00:12:40] He tried various jobs, then started working as a [tutor](#)⁹⁰ to a young boy in a house called Thorp Green, where his sister Anne was [tutoring](#)⁹¹ the daughters of the house.

[00:12:51] Here Branwell found himself in serious trouble.

[00:12:55] He started an [affair](#)⁹² with the mistress of the house, a woman almost 20 years his senior, 20 years older than him. It seems that her marriage with her husband was an unhappy one, and the two [struck up](#)⁹³ a relationship.

[00:13:11] Their affair was discovered, and Branwell was [sacked](#)⁹⁴ in disgrace.

[00:13:16] In love with Mrs Robinson, the mistress, and ordered not to have anything to do with her, he was desperately unhappy.

⁹⁰ private teacher

⁹¹ teaching privately

⁹² sexual relation

⁹³ started, began

⁹⁴ dismissed from employment, fired

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[00:13:24] He sunk deeper into depression and became heavily addicted both to alcohol and [morphine](#)⁹⁵. These twin addictions would [lead him to an early grave](#)⁹⁶, aged just 31.

[00:13:37] So, let's get back to the Brontë sisters, the surviving three: Charlotte, Emily, and Anne.

[00:13:44] They are most famous for their novels, but all three of them worked as something called [governesses](#)⁹⁷.

[00:13:50] A [governess](#)⁹⁸ was a [blend](#)⁹⁹ between being a private [tutor](#) and a babysitter or [childminder](#)¹⁰⁰.

[00:13:58] See, for all the [talents](#)¹⁰¹ of the sisters, the era in which they were living meant that the potential careers open to women were extremely limited.

[00:14:08] The so-called “ideal” situation, as we explored in the Jane Austen episode, was for a woman to have enough money from her family so that another wealthy man

⁹⁵ a drug made from opium

⁹⁶ lead him to an early death

⁹⁷ women whose job was to teach privately and babysit

⁹⁸ a woman whose job was to teach privately and babysit

⁹⁹ mixture, combination

¹⁰⁰ babysitter, someone who looks after young children

¹⁰¹ natural abilities or skills

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would want to marry her, and she could live in [suitable](#)¹⁰² style with her money and her husband's money [funding](#)¹⁰³ the family's comfortable life, without ever needing to do a day's work.

[00:14:30] This was simply not possible for the Brontës, as they were not rich, therefore their [marriage prospects](#)¹⁰⁴ were not good.

[00:14:39] So they prepared for the only respectable career available to them, which was being a [governess](#), this strange mix of private [tutor](#) and childminder.

[00:14:49] [Governesses](#) would usually live in the large houses of their wealthy employers.

[00:14:55] They would [be in charge of](#)¹⁰⁵ anywhere between one and five children.

[00:15:00] As well as being poorly paid, their status in the home was not high, and slightly strange.

[00:15:07] Although they would be highly educated and, in effect, private [tutors](#)¹⁰⁶, they would be treated no better than the higher-ranking family servants.

¹⁰² fitting, appropriate

¹⁰³ providing for

¹⁰⁴ possibilities or chances for a good marriage

¹⁰⁵ be responsible for

¹⁰⁶ private teachers

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[00:15:16] However they would be seen by the servants of the house as being of a [superior](#)¹⁰⁷ education and social class and would therefore have none of the friendship, the [camaraderie](#)¹⁰⁸, that those servants would have with each other.

[00:15:31] It's not surprising that the miserable condition of the [governess features](#)¹⁰⁹ so often in Brontë novels, and that the Brontë sisters continued to be very close as adults, with their shared “status” as [governesses](#).

[00:15:45] So, [to recap](#)¹¹⁰, we have these three sisters: Charlotte, Emily, and Anne. They have grown up creating their own imaginary worlds, they have known great tragedy, and their [prospects](#)¹¹¹ in life are limited.

[00:15:59] They had written some poetry from a young age, but when they tried to publish a collection of their poems the collection sold a grand total of three copies.

[00:16:10] They decided to try to each publish a novel, and so it was that in 1847 they published three books, two of which would go down as some of the finest novels ever written in English.

¹⁰⁷ higher

¹⁰⁸ trust and friendship

¹⁰⁹ has a strong presence, is presented

¹¹⁰ to sum up or repeat the main points

¹¹¹ good chances

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[00:16:24] Charlotte published Jane Eyre, Emily published Wuthering Heights, and Anne published Agnes Grey.

[00:16:30] When the novels were published, however, the surname Brontë was nowhere to be seen.

[00:16:36] They published their books under [pen-names¹¹²](#) - taking the identity of male authors.

[00:16:43] Charlotte adopted the name Currer Bell. Emily, the name Ellis Bell, and Anne, Acton Bell.

[00:16:50] So when the three novels had been published, by Christmas of 1847, they were known as the Bells.

[00:16:58] Although there was [considerable¹¹³ speculation¹¹⁴](#) as to who the Bells were – and some questioning as to whether they were actually male – their identity remained hidden.

¹¹² name chosen to use instead of their real ones

¹¹³ a lot of

¹¹⁴ guessing, theories

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[00:17:09] Of the three novels published in this extraordinary year, the most successful in terms of the reading public and the [critics](#)¹¹⁵ was Charlotte's extraordinary work, Jane Eyre.

[00:17:21] This remarkable piece, narrated by a [governess](#), Jane Eyre, has become for many readers across the globe one of the finest examples of the romantic novel - the romantic novel [par excellence](#)¹¹⁶.

[00:17:34] It has all the necessary ingredients – frustrated love, [betrayal](#)¹¹⁷, [imprisonment](#)¹¹⁸, physical danger, [trials](#)¹¹⁹ and separation.

[00:17:43] Although the journey to eventual happiness for the narrator and heroine, Jane, is a dangerous one, it does reach a happy [conclusion](#)¹²⁰ when Jane gets her man.

[00:17:54] Emily's extraordinary work, Wuthering Heights, which was based on this imaginary world of Gondal we mentioned earlier, was a similarly extreme tale of violent passion, murder, [revenge](#)¹²¹ and ghosts.

¹¹⁵ people who judged the characteristic of the artistic works

¹¹⁶ best example of its kind, better than others

¹¹⁷ the act of not being loyal

¹¹⁸ the state of being kept in prison

¹¹⁹ formal examinations or hearings of a criminal case in a court of law

¹²⁰ the ending or final part

¹²¹ the action of hurting someone in return for a wrong suffered at their hands

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[00:18:09] Now, we could spend hours or days talking about Wuthering Heights, but there's one point I really want to [stress](#)¹²² about this novel, and its importance.

[00:18:18] And that is because it was one of the first novels in English that really dealt with the [spectrum](#)¹²³ of human emotions, and showed that both men and women were capable of the same kind of feeling and passion.

[00:18:33] To compare it to the work of Jane Austen, for example, Jane Austen's works typically deal with love and marriage, whereas the themes in Wuthering Heights range from race to class, morality to religion, really addressing deep, [fundamental](#)¹²⁴ questions about what it is to be human.

[00:18:54] And as a reminder, this is all set in this imaginary world that Emily has been developing, in collaboration with her sisters, from a very young age.

[00:19:05] Anne's first novel, Agnes Grey, was much more [restrained](#)¹²⁵ and deals with a less extreme world.

¹²² give particular importance to

¹²³ wide range or scope

¹²⁴ basic, very important

¹²⁵ controlled, limited

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[00:19:12] Her second book, [incidentally](#)¹²⁶, a book called The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, was considered to be so "[coarse](#)¹²⁷", so [rough](#)¹²⁸ and rude, that it was barely sold or read for almost 150 years because the material, which included [domestic abuse](#)¹²⁹, alcoholism and [adultery](#)¹³⁰, was considered to be too extreme for the public audience.

[00:19:35] It really started to be read and analysed again in the late 20th century, and it is now widely considered to be the first "feminist" novel, with Anne considered by many [critics](#) to be equally talented and brilliant as her far more famous older sisters.

[00:19:52] These three novels – Jane Eyre especially - were a sensation - they [took the London-based readership and literary critics by storm](#)¹³¹.

[00:20:02] [Critics](#) made connections between the three novels of the Bells. They referred to the "painful and exceptional subjects", and the "[eccentricities](#)¹³² of woman's fantasy" and overall the "[coarseness](#)¹³³" of emotions displayed.

¹²⁶ speaking of which, by the way

¹²⁷ rough, not smooth or soft

¹²⁸ not smooth or soft

¹²⁹ any kind of violence in a family environment

¹³⁰ sexual relations between a married person and someone other than his or her lawful husband or wife

¹³¹ quickly became very successful or popular among people in London who read, judged or reviewed them

¹³² strange or not normal characteristics

¹³³ the state of being rough, not smooth or soft

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[00:20:18] However, notably, as one commented "we are [spellbound](#)¹³⁴, we cannot choose but read...".

[00:20:24] Famously, the highly respected and established [novelist](#) William Thackeray missed his day's appointments because he simply could not stop reading Jane Eyre and [was in tears](#)¹³⁵ when reading the love scenes.

[00:20:38] And in case you haven't read them, let me simply say that they are great, extraordinary and highly unusual books, written by three sisters who had suffered greatly.

[00:20:49] Unfortunately, two of the sisters, Emily and Anne, were both dead within two years of their publication, aged 30 and 29 respectively.

[00:21:00] After the death of her sisters, the true identity of the Bells was revealed, and the surviving sister, Charlotte, became a [literary sensation](#)¹³⁶, visiting London a number of times and becoming a favourite guest amongst London literary people.

[00:21:16] She did manage to find some happiness in marriage, but sadly she too died young, aged only 38 and several months pregnant.

¹³⁴ extremely interested in it, fascinated

¹³⁵ was crying

¹³⁶ a reaction of interest and excitement among readers of literature

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[00:21:27] By 1855, poor Patrick Brontë, the father, who had already lost his wife, then his eldest two daughters [in quick succession](#), then three of his remaining children within a nine month period, finally had to [bury](#)¹³⁷ his last remaining daughter.

[00:21:43] It's quite something to think about.

[00:21:46] Although none of the sisters lived a long life, the long term legacy of these three women's works has been extraordinary.

[00:21:55] Charlotte and Emily wrote books which [defined](#)¹³⁸ the idea of the romantic novel and created some of the best known characters and scenes in fiction.

[00:22:04] They [redefined](#)¹³⁹ what was thought possible for women to write about, and [paved the way](#)¹⁴⁰ for a new generation of [novelists](#).

[00:22:13] It's particularly powerful to think about when you know that two of the sisters had died within 2 years of the books being published, both before their 31st birthday, and the final sister didn't live much longer.

[00:22:26] One can only guess how many more works of genius might have been written if all five of the Brontë sisters had lived to old age.

¹³⁷ put her dead body into the ground

¹³⁸ included or described the basic qualities of

¹³⁹ included or described the basic qualities of it again or differently

¹⁴⁰ prepared the way

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[00:22:37] OK then, that is it for today's episode on The Brontë sisters.

[00:22:41] I hope it's been an interesting one, that you've learnt something new, and perhaps this episode might have inspired you to pick up a copy of Jane Eyre or Wuthering Heights, either in English or in translation, and jump into these wonderful books.

[00:22:55] And with this episode comes the end of our three-part mini-series on great Victorian [novelists](#).

[00:23:02] In case you haven't yet listened to parts one and two, we covered Jane Austen and Charles Dickens.

[00:23:08] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode, and of this mini-series in general.

[00:23:14] Can you think of a more [talented](#)¹⁴¹ literary family than the Brontës?

[00:23:18] Of the three subjects we covered, Austen, Dickens, and the Brontës, do you have a favourite?

[00:23:24] Have you ever tried reading any of them in the original, English version? Or have you seen any of the film [adaptations](#)¹⁴²?

[00:23:31] If not, what is stopping you?

¹⁴¹ having the natural abilities or skills

¹⁴² films that have been based on her written works

[00:23:33] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:23:37] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:23:46] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:23:51] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Urban	relating to a town or city
Make up	are, consist
Themes	subjects, topics
Novelists	people who wrote novels
Upbringing	the way they were raised or grew up
Instrumental	very important
Set the scene	describe the situation and the conditions
Rural	in the countryside
Parsonage	a church house provided for a priest
Clergyman	priest
As a side note	in addition to, but less important than what was just being discussed, by the way
Moors	big open areas of land that cannot be farmed and usually are left in a

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natural state

Moor

big open area of land that cannot be farmed and usually is left in a natural state

Expanse

a large open area of land

Cultivated

farmed

Bogs

soft, wet ground, swampy area

Bushes

low plants with many branches that arise from or near the ground

Heather

a low plant, usually with small pink, purple, or white flowers

Isolated

far away from other places

Weaving

the act of making clothes using threads, knitting

Supplemented

added to

Modest

not large in amount

Vicar

minister

Enterprise

ability or creativity

Secure

succeed in obtaining or having

Securing

succeeding in obtaining or having

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Upwardly	towards a higher social class
Mobile	moving
Prestigious	much respected and admired
Astounding	very impressive
Engaged	involved in (politics)
Stimulating	encouraging or causing interest and enthusiasm
Rewind	go back
Dive into	become involved in it with excitement
Tempestuous	characterised by strong feelings, emotional
Traumatic	causing emotional shock and pain
Colourful	full of interest, exciting
Feature	have a strong presence, are presented
Prominently	in a way that can easily be seen
Distraught	extremely worried
By all accounts	according to all of the different descriptions

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Widowed	having lost his wife through death
Boarding school	a school in which students lived and studied
In effect	in reality, in fact
Boarding schools	schools in which students lived and studied
Fees	amount of money paid for the service
Clergy	religious officials
A living hell	an extremely unpleasant situation
Burnt	destroyed by heat, overcooked
Beaten	physically hurt, hit
Punished	caused to suffer when they did something wrong
Contracted	caught or developed
Tuberculosis	a serious infection or disease
In quick succession	following one right after the other
Chilling	frightening, causing fear
Striking	very noticeable or obvious

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Sue	take legal action against
Portrayal	presentation
Deal with	be about
Came up with	invented, thought up
Novelist	a person who wrote novels
To a certain degree	to a certain level or point
Splendidly	extremely well
Bizarre	very strange or uncommon
Go on	continue
Craft	art
Set	arrange, present
Self-contained	complete, having all that is needed in themselves
Get up to	be involved in
Influential	having a lot of influence or effect
Unsurprisingly	in a way that was not surprising

The Brontë Sisters

Emphasise	show that it is very important
Fertile	producing new ideas, creative
Formal	public, official
Formative	having a big effect on her development
Inspirational	making her feel full of hope, encouraging
Discipline	control or order
Ensured	made certain that
Facility	ability, skill
Sentimental	relating to the emotions
Headmistress	a woman who was in charge
Taken her seriously	considered her worthy of attention
Hinted at	talked about in an indirect way
Favourably	in a way that showed his approval
Unreturned	not responded to, not given back
Unrequited	not responded to, not given back

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Recurrent	appearing again and again
Pursued	followed or went after
Journals	newspapers or magazines
Tutor	private teacher
Tutoring	teaching privately
Affair	sexual relation
Struck up	started, began
Sacked	dismissed from employment, fired
Morphine	a drug made from opium
Lead him to an early grave	lead him to an early death
Governesses	women whose job was to teach privately and babysit
Governess	a woman whose job was to teach privately and babysit
Blend	mixture, combination
Childminder	babysitter, someone who looks after young children
Talents	natural abilities or skills

The Brontë Sisters

Suitable	fitting, appropriate
Funding	providing for
Marriage prospects	possibilities or chances for a good marriage
Be in charge of	be responsible for
Tutors	private teachers
Superior	higher
Camaraderie	trust and friendship
Features	has a strong presence, is presented
To recap	to sum up or repeat the main points
Prospects	good chances
Pen-names	name chosen to use instead of their real ones
Considerable	a lot of
Speculation	guessing, theories
Critics	people who judged the characteristic of the artistic works
Par excellence	best example of its kind, better than others

The Brontë Sisters

Betrayal	the act of not being loyal
Imprisonment	the state of being kept in prison
Trials	formal examinations or hearings of a criminal case in a court of law
Conclusion	the ending or final part
Revenge	the action of hurting someone in return for a wrong suffered at their hands
Stress	give particular importance to
Spectrum	wide range or scope
Fundamental	basic, very important
Restrained	controlled, limited
Incidentally	speaking of which, by the way
Coarse	rough, not smooth or soft
Rough	not smooth or soft
Domestic abuse	any kind of violence in a family environment
Adultery	sexual relations between a married person and someone other than his or her lawful husband or wife

The Brontë Sisters

Took the	quickly became very successful or popular among people in London
london-based	who read, judged or reviewed them
readership and	
literary critics by	
storm	
Eccentricities	strange or not normal characteristics
Coarseness	the state of being rough, not smooth or soft
Spellbound	extremely interested in it, fascinated
Was in tears	was crying
Literary sensation	a reaction of interest and excitement among readers of literature
Bury	put her dead body into the ground
Defined	included or described the basic qualities of
Redefined	included or described the basic qualities of it again or differently
Paved the way	prepared the way
Talented	having the natural abilities or skills
Adaptations	films that have been based on her written works

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com