

# **Wuthering Heights**

**English**  
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**Centre**

## Acknowledgements

Written by David Kinder and Juliet Harrison

Edited by Barbara Bleiman and Lucy Webster

Cover design: Rebecca Scambler

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# Introduction

*Wuthering Heights* continues to be an extremely popular text for study at advanced level. The combination of a compelling plot, highly charged emotions, complexity of narrative voice and structure, and the combined use of features of Gothic and Romantic literature make it an excellent text to study.

Rather than offering a chapter-by-chapter approach, the material assists students in thinking about the novel in the context of a wider understanding of narrative. It encourages a close focus on key aspects of form, structure and language, balanced by an awareness of the contexts of writing and reception and critical interpretations over time. Contextual and critical material is used to help students to articulate and develop their own interpretation of the text. Many of the activities model the use of evidence in supporting an argument or reading of the novel.

Activities include: a detailed linguistic analysis of a key passage, suitable for combined literary and linguistic study as well as the study of English Literature; a reality TV role-play exploring oppositions in the novel and opportunities for creative writing as a way of developing critical understanding of the text. Quotation and context cards can be used to help students use evidence, test their knowledge and revise the text for exams.

The materials support individual study, as well as group and whole class work, and include a range of strategies including creating visual maps and diagrams, jigsawing, presentations and a whole class simulation. There is also support for writing in exams.

## Notes on the text

Page references are given to the editions published by Penguin Classics in 1965 (reissued 1985, no longer in print) and 1995 (reissued 2003). The first page reference given is to the 1985, 2nd edition, the second is to the 2003, 2nd edition. Text extracts are taken from the 2003, 2nd edition.

At any point in activities or summaries where there might be confusion, Catherine Earnshaw is referred to as Catherine [1]. Her daughter, Catherine Linton, is identified as Catherine [2].

The free CD ROM supplied with this publication includes a printable PDF of *Studying Wuthering Heights*. Full page, colour reproductions of the images on pages 5 and 6 of this text are provided as an appendix (see pages 97 to 102 of the PDF).

# Before Reading

## 1. Speculating about *Wuthering Heights*

1. Individually, write down anything you know about *Wuthering Heights*.
2. Compare as a class, pooling your ideas on the whiteboard or on sugar paper. What connections can you see between your views? Summarise your shared perception of the novel in no more than five words.
3. In pairs, look at the images below and on page 6 and talk about possible links between them in terms of:
  - setting
  - mood
  - character
  - themes.
4. The images you've been studying could all be said to have something in common with the novel *Wuthering Heights*. Based on your ideas about the images, what do you think the novel might be about? Do the images suggest new ideas or confirm those you already had?



'The Nightmare', 1781 (oil on canvas) by Fuseli, Henry (Fussli, Johann Heinrich), (1741-1825)



'Wuthering Heights' by August Holland (c. 1960-69)



National Gallery for Salvator Rosa, (1615-1673):  
'Landscape with Mercury and the Dishonest Woodman'



Gabriel Metsu, 'Man Writing a Letter', c.1664-1666  
Courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland  
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Shibden Hall, Halifax, West Yorkshire

## 2. Floating Quotations

As you read *Wuthering Heights* you will find that patterns of iterative (or repeated) imagery start to emerge. These patterns may lead you towards particular interpretations of the novel. This 'Before Reading' activity gives you the chance to explore some of the repeated images and to speculate about their possible significance.

For this activity you will need a set of 'Quotation Cards' (see the instructions and cards on pages 90-96).

1. In pairs, read the quotations and talk about any links or connections you notice.
2. Try grouping the quotations in the ways listed below, making a note of your findings each time:
  - repeated words or phrases
  - images that have similar connotations
  - strong contrasts
  - any other way that seems to you to be interesting or revealing.
3. Share your findings in class discussion, drawing out any new ideas you now have about the novel you are about to read.

### Follow it up – after reading

4. After reading you will have the chance to look again at the quotations and what the repeated or iterative imagery suggests about the novel (page 90).

# Exploring Narrative Voice

## 1. Introducing Lockwood – the ‘Frame Narrator’

The narrator is a creation of the author used to:

- organise
- select
- present information.

The narrator may also:

- comment and judge
- directly address the reader
- be a participant in the story
- be a detached observer
- be ‘transparent’, appearing to speak with the voice of the author.

Lockwood is not the only narrator in *Wuthering Heights*. His narrative contains all the other stories and narratives told in *Wuthering Heights*. Critics term this kind of narrator the ‘frame narrator’.

Included on page 9 are three extracts taken from early in the novel. All three extracts are narrated by Lockwood.

1. Read the extracts, annotating them with anything you can tell about the narrator and the way he is telling the story.
2. Based on these extracts, what sort of narrator would you say Lockwood is? Use the descriptions below to help you define the type of narrator Emily Brontë has created in Lockwood.

A narrator can:

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| belong to the same reality as the characters (‘diegetic’)                 | or | stand outside the story (‘extradiegetic’)                             |
| participate in the story  | or | tell the story without any involvement                                |
| be perceptive   | or | misread events  |
| play a role in the story (reader is aware of the narrator as a character) | or | be ‘invisible’ (reader is unaware of any narrator or narrative voice) |
| be reliable (reader believes what the narrator relates)                   | or | be unreliable (deliberately deceitful) or inadequate (unperceptive)   |

**Extract 1**

1801 – I have just returned from a visit from my landlord – the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a beautiful country! In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropist's Heaven – and Mr Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name. (*p45/p3*)

**Extract 2**

I obeyed; and hemmed, and called the villain Juno, who deigned, at this second interview, to move the extreme tip of her tail, in token of owning my acquaintance.

'A beautiful animal!' I commenced again. 'Do you intend parting with the little ones, madam?'

'They are not mine,' said the amiable hostess more repellingly than Heathcliff himself could have replied.

'Ah, your favourites are among these!' I continued, turning to an obscure cushion full of something like cats.

'A strange choice of favourites,' she observed scornfully.

Unluckily, it was a heap of dead rabbits – I hemmed once more, and drew closer to the hearth, repeating my comment on the wildness of the evening.

(*pp52-53/pp10-11*)

**Extract 3**

'It is strange,' I began, in the interval of swallowing one cup of tea and receiving another, 'it is strange how custom can mould our tastes and ideas; many could not imagine the existence of happiness in a life of such complete exile from the world as you spend, Mr Heathcliff; yet, I'll venture to say, that, surrounded by your family, and with your amiable lady as the presiding genius over your home and heart –'

'My amiable lady!' he interrupted, with an almost diabolical sneer on his face.

'Where is she – my amiable lady?'

'Mrs Heathcliff, your wife, I mean.'

'Well, yes – Oh! you would intimate that her spirit has taken the post of ministering angel, and guards the fortunes of Wuthering Heights, even when her body is gone. Is that it?'

Perceiving myself in a blunder, I attempted to correct it. I might have seen that there was too great a disparity between the ages of the parties to make it likely that they were man and wife. (*pp54-55/p13*)

## 2. Experimenting with Voice

The two extracts below are taken from early in *Wuthering Heights*.

1. In groups of four, read the two extracts and talk about the following questions.
  - Of the two extracts which narrative voice appears more subjective?
  - Which narrative voice seems more reliable and accurate?
  - Which narrative voice do you find most engaging, or powerful, or affecting?

### Extract 1 – Lockwood

1801 – I have just returned from a visit from my landlord – the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a beautiful country! In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropist's Heaven – and Mr Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name. (p45/p3)

### Extract 2 – Nelly

We crowded round, and, over Miss Cathy's head, I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk – indeed, its face looked older than Catherine's – yet, when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors: she did fly up – asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed, and fend for? (pp77-78/pp36-37)

2. In your group, divide into pairs, with each pair taking one of the extracts. In your pair, experiment with re-writing the extract in the third person, attempting to be as objective as possible.
3. Back in your group of four, take it in turns to read out your re-written extracts.
4. How has moving from a first to a third person narration changed the style and impact of each extract? You could use the questions suggested here to get you started.
  - Has the punctuation changed?
  - Has the language itself changed and in what way?
  - In what way has the tone changed?
  - Do you respond differently to the extract, depending which narrative voice is used?
  - Did the move from first to third person have a bigger effect on one or other of the extracts?
5. In your group, sum up what have you learned about the narrative voices in *Wuthering Heights* from doing this activity, ready to feed back to the rest of the class.

### 3. Two Narrative Voices – Nelly and Lockwood

1. Individually, annotate the two sets of extracts below with any differences you notice in terms of their style and language.
2. Discuss your notes in a group of four. As a group decide on a difference in each of the following categories:
  - vocabulary (for example, is it high or low frequency? colloquial or Standard English?)
  - sentence structure and length (simple, complex, compound?)
  - punctuation (varied, or restricted to commas and full stops?)
  - tone (for example confident or hesitant?)
  - the effect of these linguistic choices on the narrative voice.
3. As a group, discuss how the language the characters use helps to create a particular impression of them or influences the reader's view of what they are like.

#### Nelly

##### Extract 1

'Why, sir, she is my late master's daughter; Catherine Linton was her maiden name. I nursed her, poor thing! I did wish Mr Heathcliff would remove here, and then we might have been together again' ....

'Very old, sir, and Hareton is the last of them, as our Miss Cathy is of us – I mean, of the Lintons. Have you been to Wuthering Heights? I beg pardon for asking; but I should like to hear how she is?' (p75/pp34-35)

##### Extract 2

'Rough as a saw-edge, and hard as whinstone! The less you meddle with him the better.'

... 'It's a cuckoo's, sir – I know all about it; except where he was born, and who were his parents, and how he got his money, at first – And Hareton has been cast out like an unfledged dunnock – The unfortunate lad is the only one, in all this parish, that does not guess how he has been cheated!' (p76/p35)

#### Lockwood

##### Extract 1

Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door, above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins, and shameless little boys, I detected the date '1500', and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw'. I would have made a few comments, and requested a short history of the place, from the surly owner, but his attitude at the door appeared to demand my speedy entrance, or complete departure, and I had no desire to aggravate his impatience, previous to inspecting the penetralium. (p46/p4)

##### Extract 2

I, who had determined to hold myself independent of all social intercourse, and thanked my stars that, at length, I had lighted on a spot where it was next to impracticable, I, weak wretch, after maintaining till dusk a struggle with low spirits, and solitude, was finally compelled to strike my colours, and, under pretence of gaining information concerning the necessities of my establishment, I desired Mrs Dean, when she brought in supper, to sit down while I ate it, hoping sincerely she would prove a regular gossip, and either rouse me to animation, or lull me to sleep by her talk. (p74/p33)

## 4. Dual Narration

This activity on the narrative voices in *Wuthering Heights* builds on 'Two Narrative Voices' and is best tackled either after or towards the end of your reading.

1. Read the descriptions of the two main narrators on page 13 of this text. Individually, decide which descriptions most aptly fit Lockwood, which Nelly, and any that fit both. Find examples from the novel to illustrate the descriptions you choose for each narrator.
2. With a partner, compare your descriptions of Nelly and Lockwood and share the textual evidence you found to support your decisions.
3. In pairs, attempt to find opposites in the descriptions. What does one narrator do that the other does not?
4. Are there any descriptions which you want to challenge, adapt or qualify in some way? If so, re-write the description so that you are happy with it and explain to your partner the reason you have changed it. For example, you may have identified 'often suppresses information and deceives' as best describing Nelly. However, you may want to challenge the description, arguing that 'sometimes she suppresses information but without the intention to deceive.'

### The function of the dual narration

5. Now you've explored in some detail the main narrative voices in *Wuthering Heights* and the different roles taken by Lockwood and Nelly, try this 'what if?' task:
  - What if Brontë had used a single first person narrator?
  - What if Brontë had used a single third person narrator?
  - What if the novel had been 'written' entirely by Lockwood?
  - What if the novel had been 'recounted' entirely by Nelly?
6. Share your thoughts about the reasons Emily Brontë may have used the dual narration in *Wuthering Heights*, using the ideas below to get you started:
  - to highlight the partial and subjective nature of the narrative voice
  - to show the reader that they must find the truth of the story.

Adds a degree of sophistication, contrasted to the environment of Wuthering Heights in particular.	<b>1</b>
Has complex personality traits and is related in social and personal ways to the characters around him or her.	<b>2</b>
Is reserved and shy, and apparently unable to form a close relationship with the opposite sex, thereby giving him or her a detachment from events.	<b>3</b>
Is part of the story, advising and occasionally directing events through his or her actions.	<b>4</b>
Is generally outside the story, unable to comprehend events, objects or even dialects.	<b>5</b>
Is judgemental, both about the events as they unfold and also in hindsight.	<b>6</b>
Is fulfilling the role of the reader, asking questions in order to attempt to explain events.	<b>7</b>
Takes the role of confidante, being privy to an account of Catherine [1] and Edgar's bedroom conversation, Heathcliff's graveyard activities, and is the recipient of Isabella's letter.	<b>8</b>
Demonstrates inability to read signs accurately, leaving the reader unable to trust this narrator's judgements, even at the end of the novel.	<b>9</b>
Has a role which stresses the domestic, providing a foil to the supernatural and to the passionate side of the novel.	<b>10</b>
Makes obtuse comments which undercut the extreme passions in the novel.	<b>11</b>
Is an outsider, unable to understand the world in which the characters in the core story are immersed.	<b>12</b>
Often suppresses information and deceives.	<b>13</b>
Often compromises him or herself morally and is undecided which path to take.	<b>14</b>
Generally adheres to conventional commonsense, reacting to the values of the environment.	<b>15</b>
Demonstrates a prosaic, limited vision.	<b>16</b>

## 5. A Critical Take on Nelly's Voice

1. Individually, read through the extract from Stephen Jacobi's essay below, noting what you consider to be the main points he is making.
2. Compare your notes with the rest of the class, and attempt to reach an agreement about the three main points of this extract.
3. Look through the novel to find one or two more examples of the 'transition' noted by Stephen Jacobi. As a class, discuss possible reasons why Emily Brontë uses two such different voices for her narrator Nelly Dean.

<b>Stephen Jacobi, 'The Importance of Not Being Nelly: a Structuralist Approach'</b>
<p><i>'Rough as a saw-edge, and hard as whinstone! The less you meddle with him the better'</i> (Chapter 4)</p> <p>This is Nelly's 'characteristic' tone. The vocabulary is simple, and the sentences are short, almost breathless, often broken by colons and semicolons, and containing both questions and exclamations. There is also a great sense of the 'personal' – the respectful repetition of 'sir', the colloquial phrasing and the willingness to give an opinion.</p> <p>However, once Nelly begins her narration, the briefly established characteristic tone quickly becomes diluted, or combined with and punctuated by a series of other modes of narrative voice. A comparison of the different voices will clarify this. First, there is Nelly's mimetic mode (... the characteristic tone already noted) ...</p> <p>Compare this to another moment of 'her' narration (when she is giving information, rather than reporting her own speech), when Master Linton inadvertently insults Heathcliff:</p> <p><i>'... but Heathcliff's violent nature was not prepared to endure the impertinence from one whom he seemed to hate, even then, as a rival. He seized a tureen of hot apple sauce, the first thing that came under his gripe, and dashed it full against the speaker's face and neck; who instantly commenced a lament that brought Isabella and Catherine hurrying to the place.'</i> (Chapter 7)</p> <p>This passage occurs only two pages after the first example, but here the reader has an objectified, impersonal account of Heathcliff's character, not really in the accustomed manner of Nelly at all. The sentences are evenly balanced, with the punctuation being used to control the rhythm, rather than breaking it ...</p> <p>... Emily Brontë does actually admit a proliferation of 'languages' into her text ...</p> <p>I have already identified one of these types of language (or modes of discourse) as Nelly's 'mimetic mode', whilst the other, which is a more objective, evenly balanced voice, is the 'diegetic' mode.</p>

4. The two quotations from the novel below are in Lockwood's voice. As a group, can you find a connection between the quotations included here and the critical extract? Discuss why you think Emily Brontë has her frame narrator, Lockwood, comment on Nelly's 'style'.

<b>Lockwood on Nelly's narration</b>
<p><i>'You've done just right to tell the story leisurely. That is the method I like; and you must finish in the same style. I am interested in every character you have mentioned, more or less.'</i> (p102/p62)</p>
<p>I have now heard all my neighbour's history, at different sittings, as the housekeeper could spare time from more important occupations. I'll continue it in her own words, only a little condensed. She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator, and I don't think I could improve her style. (p192/p157)</p>