

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Wuthering Heights (Unabridged) by Emily Brontë

## Book Information

Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights (Unabridged)

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Interest Level: UG

A tale of love that is stronger than death, it is also a fierce vision of passion between Catherine and Heathcliff.

**Topics:** Classics, Classics (All); Emotions, Love; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Popular Groupings, Upper Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Series, Modern Library Classics; Series, Scholastic Classics

## Main Characters

Catherine Earnshaw Heathcliff's true love and only friend, who marries someone else in order to help him

Edgar Linton Catherine's neighbor, the man she marries and with whom she is happy until Heathcliff returns

Ellen (Nelly) Dean the housekeeper and nanny for many of the people in the story

Hareton Earnshaw young Hindley's son, who finds himself ignored by his father and under the bad influence of Heathcliff

Heathcliff an orphan brought to Wuthering Heights, who ultimately plots revenge on everyone who has wronged him

Isabella Linton Edgar's sister, who ends up marrying Heathcliff and having his son

Joseph an old disagreeable man, who helps around the farm at Wuthering Heights

Linton Heathcliff Isabella and Heathcliff's son, a sickly boy who is afraid of his father and marries Cathy Linton

Mr. Lockwood Heathcliff's tenant, to whom Heathcliff's tale is told

old Hindley Earnshaw the father of Catherine and young Hindley and the man who brings Heathcliff home with him

young Catherine (Cathy) Linton the daughter of Catherine and Edgar, a vivacious person who deeply loves her father, marries Linton, and falls in love with Hareton

young Hindley Earnshaw Catherine's brother, who is jealous of Heathcliff and treats him as a servant

## Vocabulary

**Elysium** the place of the blessed after they die

**kirk** a church

**misanthropist** a person who hates people

**physiognomy** judging a person by their facial features

## Synopsis

Mr. Lockwood is a tenant at Thrushcross Grange, and Heathcliff is his landlord. He visits Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights one afternoon and is forced to stay because of a snowstorm. After spending a terrible night there, Mr. Lockwood is curious about the history of the people who live at Wuthering Heights. He discovers that Mrs. Ellen Dean is knowledgeable about them, and she tells him the story.

Old Mr. Hindley Earnshaw has a son, Hindley, and a daughter, Catherine. On one of his trips to Liverpool, he brings home an orphan, Heathcliff. Catherine and Heathcliff become almost inseparable friends, but young Hindley grows to despise him. Catherine is a rough girl, but after she spends five weeks at Thrushcross Grange with the Lintons because of an injury, she returns very ladylike. Heathcliff feels left out of Catherine's life, and young Hindley and his wife try to keep them apart as much as possible. Young Hindley treats Heathcliff terribly, especially after old Mr. Earnshaw dies.

Young Hindley becomes even more unbearable after his wife dies from consumption. Before she dies, she has a son named Hareton. Young Hindley ignores his son, and Mrs. Dean becomes his

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"parent." In the meantime, Catherine has become a good friend of Edgar and Isabella Linton. She accepts Edgar's marriage proposal with the intent of helping Heathcliff. Heathcliff feels betrayed and leaves the area for several years.

Catherine and Edgar live a happy life at Thrushcross Grange, with Ellen as their housekeeper, until Heathcliff comes back. He ends up residing at Wuthering Heights because he has money, and he gambles with young Hindley. He has vowed to have revenge on Hindley, and he exerts a very bad influence on Hindley's son, Hareton. Heathcliff visits Catherine often, much to Edgar's disapproval. Isabella falls in love with Heathcliff during these visits, and although he despises her, Heathcliff marries her. She soon realizes her mistake and escapes from Wuthering Heights as soon as possible.

Catherine becomes very ill and dies after giving birth to a daughter, young Catherine. Heathcliff mourns deeply at the loss and becomes an even worse tyrant at home. When young Hindley dies, Heathcliff becomes the owner of Wuthering Heights because he was young Hindley's creditor. When he learns that Isabella has died and their son has moved in with Edgar and Cathy Linton, he demands that his son come to Wuthering Heights.

Linton, Heathcliff's son, is a sickly boy who has nothing in common with his father. Heathcliff decides that his son and young Cathy should marry, so that he can eventually inherit Edgar's property. Cathy does care for Linton, and they do marry, although Heathcliff forces them to do so. Cathy's father, Edgar, dies shortly thereafter before he can change his will. Linton inherits the Grange, and when he dies soon after he marries Cathy, Heathcliff takes possession of it.

Cathy leads a depressing life at Wuthering Heights until she and Hareton become good friends. She helps him learn to read, and they fall in love. Heathcliff ends up dying after not eating for days. He is buried next to Catherine according to his wishes. Cathy and Hareton plan to marry and move to Thrushcross Grange.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

What did Heathcliff mean when he told Nelly about Hareton, "I'd have loved the lad had he been someone else"?

*Hareton is a younger version of Heathcliff's own strength and degradations. Heathcliff knows that Hareton reveres him as his only friend, yet he continues to keep the boy uneducated and wild in compliance with his plans for revenge. Were Hareton not Hindley's son, Heathcliff's sympathetic feelings for him would not be at odds with his use of him.*

### Literary Analysis

Briefly describe Heathcliff's complex character.

*He is most of all a man without pity, even for himself. His natural intelligence was only partly informed by education. From youth to manhood, he has an endless capacity to bear suffering. His love of Catherine is vast, sincere, and complete. Although irreligious, he remains (oddly enough) an enormously "spiritual" man, for whom ghosts traverse the physical world.*

### Inferential Comprehension

What brought about Heathcliff's death?

*The text allows one to draw conclusions that fit one's own aesthetic or religious inclinations. Heathcliff stops eating as he feels Catherine's ghostly presence is increasingly with him. This rationalistic cause of death, however, is mitigated by his claim to Nelly that he does not intend to starve himself. From his own perspective, Heathcliff seems to be undergoing a kind of spiritual consummation with his eternal love for Catherine. With his revenge utterly complete, perhaps the passion that drove it is all that continues to anchor Heathcliff to this earth.*

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## Constructing Meaning

What did Nelly mean by the expression, "...for the space of half a year, the gunpowder lay as harmless as sand, because no fire came to explode it"?

*The early months of Catherine's marriage to Edgar were happy and calm, because Heathcliff--and his fiery passions--were absent. We can assume that, had Heathcliff never returned, the marriage would have continued to be "a day at the beach." However, the combination of his passion and pitilessness destroyed all the calm at Thrushcross Grange.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** This novel takes place in a remote area of England in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Its focus is so tight upon the characters involved, the setting becomes almost ahistorical. You may wish to fill in the particulars of life in provincial England at that time, either by lecture or assigned research. How might estates like Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange have been organized and populated at that time? What amenities would they have lacked or afforded?

**Understanding the Author's Craft** In *Wuthering Heights*, we learn everything we know about the history of the characters because Mr. Lockwood asks Mrs. Ellen Dean to tell him the story. What would happen if Mr. Lockwood were left out of the story? Ask students to speculate on the advantages the author sought by placing the story in the framework of an extended flashback. How does knowing the "triumphant" Heathcliff first affect perceptions of him at other points of his story?

**Comparing and Contrasting** The ancient debate as to whether nature or nurture most controls human destiny might be well enjoined in the context of *Wuthering Heights*. On the one hand, Heathcliff succeeds in grooming Hareton into a younger replica of himself by very conscious steps he takes in raising the boy. On the other,

Heathcliff and Catherine appear to have been born as soul mates. Which "force" would students conclude is the most influential in this novel?

**Responding to Literature** Heathcliff is a remarkable character, and your students' reactions to him are likely to be strong and complex. How sympathetic to him do most students feel? Do they find him credible as a human being or somewhat super-human? Is he "evil"? Is he a "tragic hero"? Perhaps a helpful way to focus the topic would be to compare him to other powerful characters in literature. What does he have in common with Hamlet? Pip in *Great Expectations*? Mister Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*? Or Rochester in *Jane Eyre*?