Wuthering Heights

Author: Emily Brontë (1818–1848)
Teaching Notes author: Jo Tregenza

Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

Synopsis

As children, Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff are inseparable but Catherine later rejects the dangerous Heathcliff to marry respectable Edgar Linton. When Linton puts an end to Catherine and Heathcliff’s friendship, Catherine becomes ill and then dies in childbirth. Heathcliff seeks revenge by wooing Edgar’s sister, Isabella, and cheating the Earnshaws out of their family homes. The story ends when the ghost of Catherine comes for Heathcliff and he dies, leaving the homes to their rightful owners.

Social and historical context

The story is set in Yorkshire, England, mainly during the late eighteenth century. Emily used the local moorland and valleys, and typical stone architecture, as the setting for Wuthering Heights. Illness and death were common occurrences during Emily’s lifetime. Emily Brontë’s older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, died of tuberculosis before they were fifteen, and in Wuthering Heights, Edgar and Linton also die of wasting diseases.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

• **Clarifying** Talk with the children about the North Yorkshire Moors in Emily Brontë’s time period. Discuss how wild it might be living up on the moors.
• **Imagining** Read up to the end of page 7 to the children. Ask them to try to visualise the room of the house where Mr Lockwood has arrived. What would it look and smell like? What sounds would there be?

During reading

• **Clarifying** Ask the children to read the rest of Chapter 1. As they read, ask them to note down the names of each of the characters they meet on a sheet of paper. Once they have read the chapter, help the children to begin to interpret the relationship between the characters. Can they draw lines between the characters’ names to show how they are linked?
• **Predicting** Can the children predict who the ghost might be?
• **Questioning** Ask the children to think of one question they might like to ask Hareton Earnshaw.
• Focus on the last line on page 12, when Mr Lockwood says he ‘was feeling as weak as a kitten’. Why do the children think the author has chosen the kitten reference? What other similes can children think of for feeling weak?
• **Predicting** Read to the end of Chapter 2 together, and ask children to predict what the rest of the story might be about. Some children might like to go into role as Nelly Dean – Mr Lockwood’s servant – and tell their own versions of the story ending.
Independent reading

Objective: Understand underlying themes causes and points of view.

- Ask the children to read up to the end of Chapter 5 independently and to continue adding information to show the relationships between the different characters.
- (Imagining) Encourage them to consider the story from Heathcliff’s point of view. Where might he have disappeared? How might he feel when he visits Cathy again?
- (Clarifying) Ask the children to review the characters they identified. Can they discuss how they are linked, backing up the information with evidence from the text?

Assessment: Check that children:
- can infer how the characters are linked
- can use evidence in the text to back up their opinions about the relationships between the characters.

Ask the children to finish reading to the end of the story independently.

Returning and responding to the text

- (Clarifying) Ask the children to draw conclusions about why Heathcliff married Isabella.
- (Summarising) Discuss the character traits of Heathcliff. What sort of man do the children think he is?
- (Summarising) Ask the children to consider the impact of having two narrators – how does this affect the story and the pace? Why do they think the author chose Nelly Dean as the main narrator?

Assessment:
- Can the children draw conclusions about the character of Heathcliff and give reasons for his actions?

Speaking, listening and drama activities

Objective: Consider examples of conflict and resolution, exploring the language used.

- Ask the children to choose one of the following roles to assume: Nelly, Linton, Cathy, Hareton or Heathcliff. Encourage the children to carry out a discussion in role to explore the actions of the individuals. How could they have acted differently?

Writing activities

Objective: Use different narrative techniques to engage and entertain the reader.

- Recap the story with the children. Ask the children whether they have read any other stories that feature ghosts – tragic or otherwise.
- Ask half of the group to draw a picture of a male character, while the other half draw a female character. Encourage the children to make up powerful names for the characters.
- Using the pictures and names, ask the children to match a male character with a female character.
- Now ask them to draw a picture of a setting. Shuffle the setting pictures and give a picture to each pair of children.
- Using the setting and the two characters, ask the children to compose orally a tragic ghost story. Once they have prepared the story, invite them to tell it to another pair.
Finally, allow the children to write their own version using one, or a combination of the two stories they have heard. Remind them of the structure of Wuthering Heights, where flashbacks of events witnessed by Nelly Dean are given.

Assessment:

- Can the children write an imaginative story, following the structure used by the author?

Whole class reads

Books on a similar theme:

- *Girl in the Attic* by Valerie Mendes
- *White Peak Farm* by Berlie Doherty

Cross-curricular links

Geography

- Talk with the children about where the story is set. Ask them to find descriptions of the moors and the climate of the area, e.g. ‘…the entire countryside was now one mass of white billowing snow’ (page 12). Encourage the children to research books and the Internet to find pictures of moorland, especially the North Yorkshire Moors, in different seasons. How is this environment similar or different from where they live?

History

- Ask the children to find out information about one disease that had a huge impact on life in the eighteenth century, e.g. smallpox, typhus, tuberculosis. Can they find out why the disease may no longer be a threat to society today? How did the disease affect life in the eighteenth century?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Spoken language</strong></th>
<th>Pupils should be taught to participate in discussions, presentations, performances and debates (SpokLang.9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading: Comprehension</strong></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions (Year 5/6 ReadComp.1iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence (Year 5/6 ReadComp.2iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by predicting what might happen from details stated and implied (Year 5/6 ReadComp.2iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by providing reasoned justifications for their views (Year 5/6 ReadComp.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing: Composition</strong></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to plan their writing by, in writing narratives, considering how authors have developed characters and settings in what they have read, listened to or seen performed (Y5/6 WriteComp.1iii)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCOTLAND** Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes – Second level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Listening and talking</strong></th>
<th>When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others’ contributions and use these to build on thinking (LIT 2-02a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own (ENG 2-17a) I can discuss the writer’s style and other features appropriate to genre (ENG 2-19a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Having explored the elements which writers use in different genres, I can use what I learn to create stories [...] with an interesting and appropriate structure, interesting characters and/or settings which come to life (ENG 2-31a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WALES** Programme of Study for English: Year 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Oracy</strong></th>
<th>Learners are able to explore issues and themes through role play (Y5_OracSpea.5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>Learners are able to infer meaning which is not explicitly stated, e.g. what happens next?, why did he/she do that? (Y5_ReadComp.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Learners are able to use techniques in planning writing, e.g. mindmapping, sequencing, placemat activities (Y5_WritMean.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NORTHERN IRELAND** Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Talking and listening</strong></th>
<th>Pupils can develop a role (L4_com_talk.1ii)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>Pupils can understand explicit meanings and recognise some implicit meanings (L4_com_read.4ii) Pupils can explain opinions about what they read (L4_com_read.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Pupils can choose from and use a range of forms, as appropriate (L4_com_writ.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>