***Jane Eyre***

***Chapter 5***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Short Summary:***

Jane wakes early on January 15 and is offered breakfast, but cannot eat for excitement. She is sent alone in a coach the 50 miles to Lowood School. At Lowood, she is shown to a room. Two women, one named Miss Miller, question Jane about her skills and educational background, then escort her to a room of girls who are studying. They put their books away and have a meager dinner, say prayers, then go to bed, two to a bed. The next day, Jane cannot eat the burnt porridge and overhears one of the teachers say how bad it tastes. They go to classes from breakfast. They receive a break and chat among themselves, mostly about the horrible breakfast and Mr. Brocklehurst. Miss Miller seems to disapprove but does not stop them. Miss Temple enters and the children have academic classes. Miss Temple says she is purchasing lunch since breakfast was so bad.

During fresh air and exercise, Jane talks with a girl who is reading and learns the school is a charity school. Jane questions the girl briefly about the teachers, and then the students are called for dinner, which is rancid meat and potatoes. During evening lessons, the girl Jane talked to is punished by being forced to stand in the middle of the school room. Jane is impressed by how calmly the girl endures her punishment and wonders how she can act in such a way. After lessons are finished at 5pm, the girls have another scant meal of bread and coffee, then an hour of free time before it is time to study. As on the night before, bedtime is preceded by prayers and a meal of water and oat cake.

***Short Analysis:***

This section details Jane’s experiences at Lowood, from her first day at the school to her final one some nine years later. Jane’s early years at Lowood prove to be a period of considerable tribulation, as she endures harsh conditions, cruel teachers, and the tyranny of Mr. Brocklehurst. Moreover, the harsh conditions she experiences as a student at Lowood show us that, despite Jane’s intelligence, talent, and self-assurance, she is merely a burden in the eyes of society, because she is poor.

***Summary in detail:***

January 19, the date of Jane's departure from Gateshead has arrived. She rises at five o'clock in the morning, so that she'll be ready for the six o'clock coach. None of the family rises to bid Jane farewell, and she happily journeys far away from the Reeds. The porter's wife is surprised that Mrs. Reed is allowing such a young child to travel alone. Jane's imaginative nature is once again apparent, and she worries that kidnappers will snatch her away at the inn where the coach stops for dinner.

The day of Jane's arrival at Lowood is rainy, windy, and dark. Jane is led through the unfamiliar, labyrinthine halls of Lowood, until she reaches a large room in which eighty other girls sit doing their homework. Soon it is bedtime, and Jane wearily makes her way to bed. The next day, Jane follows the full routine of the school, studying from pre-dawn until five o'clock in the evening. The chapter is filled with Jane's observations of the school. Jane discovers the kind Miss Temple and the unreasonable Miss Scatcherd, who unfairly punishes Helen Burns. While solitary and isolated through most of the day, Jane does converse with Helen, who tells Jane that Lowood is a charity institution for orphan children. She also learns that Miss Temple must answer to Mr. Brocklehurst in all she does.

A coach comes, and Jane clings to Bessie's neck until she is put on the vehicle, with the servant telling the coach's guard to take care of the girl. Jane then travels by herself for a full day on a coach to Lowood, where she meets Miss Temple and another teacher. Jane describes her first evening and day at Lowood. The sprawling building houses about 80 students. Daily activities, from meals to prayers to classes, are highly regimented. The dormitories are cold; the girls are dressed in old-fashioned, cheap uniforms; and the meals are insubstantial and of poor quality.

Jane observes classes, and Miss Temple replaces the poor breakfast with lunch she pays for herself. This lunch is eaten in the garden. In the garden Jane meets an older girl, [Helen Burns](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Jane-Eyre/character-analysis/#Helen_Burns), who answers Jane's many questions about the school and the teachers. Helen agrees with Jane that the school superintendent, Miss Temple, is the best teacher at Lowood. Later that day a teacher, Miss Scatcherd, makes Helen Burns stand in the middle of the schoolroom as punishment for some infraction in class. Jane is impressed and puzzled by the way Helen accepts her punishment—not with "distress and shame," as Jane would have done, but with serene composure.

***Analysis in Detail:***

Jane is making progress in her journey of self-knowledge, and has now progressed from Gateshead (note the significance of the name, as the starting point of Jane's quest) to Lowood. Its name alerts the reader that the school will be a "low" place for Jane, and, thus, it appears on her first day. Modeled after the Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge where Charlotte Brontë and her sisters Maria, Elizabeth, and Emily were sent, Lowood is not appealing. The school day begins before dawn, the students are offered eat meager rations of burnt and unappetizing food, and the grounds surrounding the school are blighted and decayed. The chapter shows the harsh realities of charity-school life in Victorian times.

Besides acquainting us with the rigors of Lowood, the chapter also introduces us to two women who will have significant impact on Jane's development: Miss Temple and Helen Burns. Miss Temple's name signifies Jane's worshipful feeling for Lowood's superintendent, as does her appearance: she is tall, fair, and shapely, with a "benignant light" in her eyes and a "stately" posture. Notice how Miss Temple's appearance contrasts with the stony, dark, rigid exterior of her employer, Mr. Brocklehurst. Supplying the compassion he lacks, Miss Temple orders a decent lunch for her students to compensate for their burnt breakfast.

Another hero in Jane's story, Helen Burns, is introduced in this chapter. What does Helen Burns' name signify? She is burning with a passion for heaven, and her fate is to die of a fever. Burns is based on Charlotte Brontë's oldest sister, Maria, who died when she was twelve years old after contracting consumption at the Clergy Daughters School. Brontë's second-oldest sister, Elizabeth, also died from this disease, caught at the unsanitary and damp school. Both Charlotte and Emily were withdrawn from the school before the following winter for the sake of their health. Like Helen Burns, Maria was known for the precocity of her thinking; Mr. Brontë said that "he could converse with her [Maria] on any of the leading topics of the day with as much freedom and pleasures as with any grown-up person."

When Jane first notices Helen, her friend is reading Samuel Johnson's didactic tome, Rasselas, an essay arguing that happiness is often unobtainable. Although she enjoys reading, Jane isn't interested in Helen's book because it doesn't contain any fairies or genii. Like Jane, Helen is a poor, lonely child, but her method of dealing with her problems contrasts with Jane's, as is apparent in the interaction with Miss Scatcherd. After being unfairly disciplined by Miss Scatcherd, Helen neither cries nor looks humiliated; instead, she accepts her situation with composure and grace. Wondering how Helen can accept this treatment so quietly and firmly, Jane notices that Helen seems to be "thinking of something beyond her punishment," and her sight seems to have "gone down into her heart," emphasizing Helen's focus on spiritual rather than material matters. Jane is fascinated with Helen's self-possession, which signals a depth of character that is new to her. At this point in the story, Jane doesn't know how to judge Helen: Is she good or bad? Jane's goals in this first section of the book to learn to recognize character and to find a role model.

Jane describes Lowood—the setting for the next phase of her life—without expressing her reactions to the poor conditions and bad food, but the details conjure the reader's sympathy for the students, who are clearly ill-treated. There is no suggestion she feels she might have made a mistake by coming to Lowood. This might be an indication of how bad things were for her at Gateshead. Jane is drawn to Miss Temple, the headmistress, who embodies qualities Jane admires—intelligence, independence, grace, and beauty. Her presence at the school might make Lowood's shortcomings seem less important, and her gesture with the lunch shows her kindness toward the students. Jane is also impressed with [Helen Burns](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Jane-Eyre/character-analysis/#Helen_Burns), who will become a close friend and an important influence on her life.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Four days later, on a January morning, [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) leaves Gateshead. The carriage trip winds through a dreary landscape and lets Jane off at an uninviting, haunted-looking compound—the Lowood school.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The barren winter landscape resembles the lifeless and stern environment that Jane will find at Lowood school.

***Summary Part 2:***

The Lowood school is a charity school for orphan girls, ranging in age, and all wearing drab rough uniforms. On her first day, [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) witnesses the strictly regimented routine. Teachers order the girls around in formation. Students share beds in long dormitories, and must eat sparse and sometimes inedible [meals](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/symbols/food).

***Analysis Part 2:***

Brontë uses Lowood to satirize the conditions in girls' charity schools (two of her sisters died in such a school). Because it's a charity school, Mrs. Reed didn't pay anything to send Jane to school there.

***Summary Part 3:***

The school's superintendent, [Ms. Maria Temple](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), intervenes to provide some better [food](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/symbols/food). Ms. Temple also teaches several subjects. [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) respects her for her kindness and knowledge.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Ms. Temple is a mother figure for Jane. She provides love and sustenance (physical and spiritual) that Mrs. Reed never did.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) spots a solitary girl reading. The girl is [Helen Burns](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), an orphan herself. Jane is not used to talking to strangers, but she feels an immediate connection to Helen. Jane asks her a lot of questions about the school, the teachers, and [Mr. Brocklehurst](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), which Helen answers carefully and with respect.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Helen is independent and intellectual like Jane. But she is much more restrained and refuses to say anything negative about the people running the school—though she could.

***Summary Part 5:***

In the afternoon, a bitter teacher history teacher named [Miss Scatcherd](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) kicks [Helen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) out of class and makes her stand in the middle of the school room for all to see. [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) cannot understand how Helen can bear the humiliation so quietly.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Helen's experience here parallels the Reeds' mistreatment of Jane, but Helen does not fight the injustice, as Jane passionately did. She endures it.