

TSSMTM
Creating VCE Success

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
"Wuthering Heights"

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AUTHOR NOTES

About the author

Emily Bronte was born 30 July 1818 in Yorkshire, England, the setting of Wuthering Heights. She was the fourth daughter of Maria Branwell (1783-1821) who died of cancer when Emily was just three years old and Irish clergyman Patrick Bronte (1777-1861). After her youngest sister Anne (1820 -1849) was born the Bronte's moved to the village of Haworth where Patrick had been appointed rector. Emily had four older siblings; Maria (1814-1825), Elizabeth (1815-1825), Charlotte (1816 -1855) and Patrick "Branwell" (1817-1848). Emily's Aunt Elizabeth Branwell (1776-1842) moved in to the Parsonage after Maria's death to help raise the six young children.

In 1824, Emily with her four sisters entered the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge near Kirby, Lonsdale. When Maria and Elizabeth died a year later of tuberculosis, she and Charlotte returned home to Haworth. Their father spent most of his time alone and the children entertained themselves by reading William Shakespeare, Virgil, John Milton and the Bible, doing needlepoint and telling each other stories. Charlotte and Branwell started writing of their imaginary world 'Angaria' and Emily and Anne wrote of its rival 'Gondal'. They created histories and characters for their kingdoms and wrote stories and poetry.

In 1835 Emily enrolled at Miss Wooller's school at Roe Head, Mirfield where Charlotte was teaching but returned home due to homesickness and illness. Emily worked as a governess at Law Hill Hall Halifax, West Yorkshire only to travel to Brussels Belgium in 1842 with Charlotte and Anne. There she studied French, German and Literature with the aim of starting their own school. When their Aunt Branwell died Emily returned to Haworth for the funeral and stayed there with her father. She continued writing and editing her poems. By 1845 her sisters had joined her and they were all together at Haworth. They published the poems of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell in 1846. The following year Wuthering Heights was published and received mixed reviews, although it was hailed an innovative tragic romance.

Emily and her sisters had a difficult life dealing with her brother Branwell's alcoholism and addiction to opium. He died in 1848 and while at his funeral Emily caught a cold and died soon after on December 19th 1848.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Wuthering Heights was written at a time of great social and economic upheaval in England. By the time Bronte was writing in 1847 the Industrial Revolution was well under way and a new group of industrial capitalists were challenging the accepted notions of the farmer and the landed gentry as the accepted classes. This new group of capitalists brought about the development of a middle class who were the new wealthy in society. Women at this time were still confined by a largely patriarchal society where their lives and rights were controlled by men. It was not until later in the nineteenth century that women began writing about women's rights. There was a call for the right to vote in the early 20th Century.

Women were reliant on men for their welfare and social position and had very few rights of ownership or choice in marriages. Cathy's choice of Edgar Linton as a marriage partner above the degraded Heathcliff was an obvious choice for a woman of her time in order to gain security.

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