
Two Literary Giants

WORKSHEET A

Jane Austen (1775-1817)

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire in the south of England, where her father was a priest. She was the second daughter and seventh child in a family of eight children. She started writing at a very early age and published a story called *The Three Sisters* when she was just eighteen years old. She and her family moved to Bath when her father retired in 1801. When he died four years later, she, her mother and her sister moved back to Hampshire. While events in neighbouring France were determining the shape of Europe with post-revolutionary France expanding under the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, Jane Austen sat down in a sleepy Hampshire village to write romantic fiction. Nevertheless, events in Europe created a backdrop to most of her stories. She wrote her most famous works in the last ten years of her life; *Sense and Sensibility* was published in 1811, followed by *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813. Although her works were well known in her lifetime, she published them anonymously, so she was not a famous public figure. Two years after Napoleon met his Waterloo in 1815, she died. While most of her stories revolve around her well-mannered heroine finding and marrying a suitable man, Jane Austen herself never actually married.

Emily Brontë (1818-1848)

Emily Brontë was born in Thornton, Yorkshire, in the north of England in 1818. The family moved to Haworth in 1820, where her father worked as a priest. Emily was the fourth daughter and fifth child in a family of six. When her mother died in 1821, Emily's aunt, her mother's sister, came to look after the children. Emily's two eldest sisters both died of tuberculosis when Emily was a little girl. The remaining four children were very close and played together, creating imaginary worlds like *Angria* to escape to from the reality of their own real world.

As adults the three sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne all had jobs as teachers in private households while their brother, a talented artist and writer, began a gradual decline into alcoholism and opium addiction. In 1845 the three sisters published a collection of poetry under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. In 1847, ten years after Queen Victoria had come to the throne, Emily (still using the pseudonym Ellis Bell) published *Wuthering Heights*. It was a story of the passionate, but ultimately destructive, love between Catherine Earnshaw and mysterious gypsy Heathcliff. Her insight into the intensity of relationships was all the more surprising as she never married or even had a serious relationship. Before this work could be recognised as the masterpiece that it is, Emily contracted tuberculosis and died, two months after her brother and five months before her beloved sister Anne, leaving only Charlotte and their father as the two surviving members of the family.

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WORKSHEET B

1. These statements refer to Emily Brontë, Jane Austen or both of them. Put **E** (Emily Brontë), **J** (Jane Austen) or **B** (both of them) next to each statement according to the biographical information on Worksheet A.

1. She was the second youngest child in her family.
2. She was born in the north of England.
3. She never married.
4. She died at the age of 30.
5. Her works were well known in her lifetime.
6. She wrote *Pride and Prejudice*.
7. Her sisters are also well-known writers.
8. Her father died before she did.
9. In her lifetime she witnessed the French Revolution and the rise and fall of Napoleon Bonaparte.
10. When she died Queen Victoria had already ruled for 11 years.
11. One of her earliest stories was called *The Three Sisters*.
12. Her father was a priest.
13. She wrote under a pseudonym.
14. Her mother died when she was three.
15. She wrote *Wuthering Heights*.