

Read the opening paragraphs of the book. Pick out the elements showing that the narrator stands apart from the group.

WS2

Extract 1

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery¹ an hour in the morning; but since dinner² (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped³ fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings⁴ of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group; saying, "She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation, that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly⁵ manner—something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were—she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children."

"What does Bessie say I have done?" I asked.

"Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners; besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent."

A breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room, I slipped in there. It contained a bookcase: I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in double retirement.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear⁶ November day. At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.

NOTE BOX

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1. *massif de fleurs* 2. here, the meal eaten in the middle of the day 3. *pincé*
4. reprimand 5. lively 6. monotonous



Anna Paquin as Jane in the 1996 film version.



1 Read the passage and find information about:

The narrator	Time and place	The other characters	Nature and the cold season
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2 Pick out two sentences showing that the narrator is perceived as someone who misbehaves.

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3 Observe the sentence, "Me, she had dispensed from joining the group," (ll.14-15) and say how the anteposition (the fact of placing *me* as a first word) helps us to understand that the narrator will be the main character.

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4 Explain why the description of the weather can be associated to the narrator's relationship to Mrs. Reed.

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GRAMMAR LAB

Preterite vs present perfect

- a Observe the verbs in the passage. Identify the main tense used.
- b Observe the sentence, "What does Bessie say I have done?" Comment on the choice of that tense in comparison to the rest of the narrative:
- c Now complete: In a narrative, the tense used to describe the main events is the while, the is used when the event described is linked to the present situation.

5 Check your understanding

● Circle the true statements.

- a. The narrator is frustrated not to be able to play outside.
- b. According to the narrator, Eliza, John and Georgiana are spoiled children.
- c. Mrs. Reed is very affectionate towards the narrator.
- d. The narrator feels lonely.
- e. The atmosphere is very cheerful.

FOCUS ON... Manners in the Victorian era

Manners were extremely important in the Victorian era especially in upper- and upper-middle-class families. Daily life was organised around a set of rules for men and women, but also children. They were taught to behave and speak in a certain way to respect propriety. Most of the time, servants hired in the house would raise the children and wealthy parents didn't spend much time with their children. However, poor children had a very different experience and worked to support their families.

