**Key Relationships in *Jane Eyre***

**Jane's relationship with Mrs Reed**

Mrs. Reed is Jane's aunt. She despises her and allows her own children to bully Jane. Later we see how all three Reed children grow up to be miserable and unpopular. When Jane's wealthy uncle, John Eyre, writes (from Madeira) with the aim of adopting Jane, Mrs. Reed writes back to inform him that Jane is dead. Dying, Mrs. Reed asks for, and receives, Jane's forgiveness.

**Subject/implications/moral and philosophical context**

* Describe the nature of this relationship. Why does Mrs. Reed so dislike Jane? (Mrs. Reed explains this in Chapter 21). Comment on Jane's forgiveness of Mrs. Reed, as she dies.
* Mrs. Reed tries to harm Jane by depriving her of her inheritance. Explain how she succeeds at first, but ultimately fails in this attempt.
* How does Mrs. Reed, without intending it, help Jane to become strong and independent?

**Style/structure/narrative craft**

* Mrs. Reed disappears from the novel when Jane goes to Lowood School, but reappears briefly, when she is dying. Why is her reappearance important to the structure of the story?

**Effects of language/emotive, ironic, figurative effect/patterns and details**

* Comment on Bronte's use of dialogue to show this relationship.
* What is the effect of the final sentence of Chapter 21?

**Jane's relationship with Helen Burns**

Helen is a girl some three years older than Jane, and becomes her first, and best, friend at Lowood School. Helen is patient under suffering, and teaches Jane to be less excitable. She sees the best in others, even teachers who dislike her. She is almost too good for this world. As she dies of typhus she is sure that she is going to be with God. Jane leaves the reader, also, in no doubt of this.

**Subject/implications/moral and philosophical context**

* Explain how Jane finds her first real friend in Helen, who is very different from her.
* What does Jane learn from her friendship with Helen?
* How does Helen feel about dying? Why does she face death with such confidence?

**Style/structure/narrative craft**

* How does Charlotte Bronte arouse the reader's admiration for Helen?

**Effects of language/emotive, ironic, figurative effect/patterns and details**

* How are Helen's character and beliefs shown in her speech?
* What is the meaning of the last paragraph of Chapter 9? Why should Helen's grave receive a proper memorial only fifteen years after her death?

**Jane's relationship with St. John Rivers**

St. John (pronounced Sínjun) Rivers is a clergyman who gives Jane shelter when she flees from Thornfield. Later Jane finds that he is her cousin. He is a good and sincere man who plans to go abroad as a missionary. He proposes to Jane, but she declines his offer. In 1847 the idea of marrying a handsome and courageous man and supporting him in his vocation would have been attractive to many readers. St. John and his sisters (Diana and Mary) become Jane's best friends, and he helps her recover her fortune. Jane takes only a quarter of the inheritance and gives the rest to St. John, Diana and Mary. The Rivers family can be contrasted with the Reeds, and St. John, hard on himself but kind to others, with the hypocritical Mr. Brocklehurst.

**Subject/implications/moral and philosophical context**

* Explain the nature of Jane's relationship with St. John. Why would he be attractive to many women? Why does Jane decide to reject his offer of marriage?
* In what ways does Jane's relationship with St. John resemble that with Helen Burns?

**Style/structure/narrative craft**

* How does Jane present St. John to the reader? Why does she end the novel with an account of his achievements? In what ways does he deserve this honour?

**Effects of language/emotive, ironic, figurative effect/patterns and details**

* In the final part of the novel, Jane refers to other books to describe St. John. These include The Pilgrim's Progress and St. Paul's letters from the New Testament of the Bible. What is the effect of these references?

**Jane's relationship with Mr. Rochester**

This relationship dominates the novel, as it becomes the most important thing in Jane's life. At first Jane finds Rochester rather rude and insensitive, but it is her ability to stand up to him that earns his love. He hopes to secure her in a bigamous marriage. Although the modern reader is sympathetic to Rochester who was tricked, as a young man, into marrying a lunatic, the 19th century reader would have no doubt that Jane does the right thing in leaving him - to be his mistress is not an option. The fire that widows him also disables him. He has to learn to depend on Jane. And as an heiress, she does not even depend on his fortune any more.

**Subject/implications/moral and philosophical context**

* Try to trace the different stages of Jane's relationship with Rochester. This is a big subject, so be selective. Why does he prefer her to the conventional beauty of Blanche Ingram?

**Style/structure/narrative craft**

* How does Jane influence the reader's response to Mr. Rochester?
* Comment on the mystery surrounding Rochester's wife. How is this presented in the story?
* Comment on Jane's remarks to the reader about her relationship with Rochester.

**Effects of language/emotive, ironic, figurative effect/patterns and details**

* Explore the way in which Bronte presents the themes of sight and blindness, sanity and madness.
* How does Bronte use dialogue to show the various stages of Jane's relationship with Rochester?
* Comment on the ideas of the natural and the supernatural in the presentation of this relationship.