

# Charlotte Brontë | Biography

Charlotte Brontë was born April 21, 1816, in Yorkshire, England. In 1820 her father, a clergyman, moved the family to the town of Haworth on the Yorkshire moors. When Charlotte was only five years old, her mother died, and her father sent Charlotte and her sister Emily to join their older sisters Maria and Elizabeth at a boarding school. Conditions at the school were so bad that the girls were brought home in 1825. Soon after returning home, Maria and Elizabeth died of tuberculosis.

As they grew up, Charlotte, her younger sisters Emily and Anne, and their brother Branwell entertained each other writing stories about the imaginary lands they invented called Angria and Gondal. Charlotte taught at a school and briefly served two families as a governess, but the work did not appeal to her. Charlotte and her sisters decided to open their own school. To prepare for this venture, Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels in 1842, where Charlotte studied French, German, and music. There she fell in love with her teacher, but he was married and rejected her attention. Brokenhearted, Charlotte returned home two years later.

The plan for a school failed when the three could recruit no students; instead they concentrated on writing. In 1847 Charlotte published *Jane Eyre* to great success. Emily's novel *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's novel *Agnes Grey* were also published that year. The years 1848–49 were sad ones for Charlotte. In the span of two years, Branwell, Emily, and Anne all died of tuberculosis. Charlotte continued to write while caring for her elderly father. She published the novels *Shirley* in 1849 and *Villette* in 1852. Her work received popular acclaim and recognition in the literary circles of London and in North America.

After rejecting several marriage proposals, in 1854 Charlotte married the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, who had replaced her father as the parish priest at Haworth. Just nine months later, on March 31, 1855, she died, perhaps from dehydration caused by pneumonia. Two years later novelist and admirer Elizabeth Gaskell published *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which lionized the writer Gaskell had idolized and befriended but also sanitized Brontë's experiences to expunge any suggestion of behavior that was not morally upright. Thus, Gaskell omitted any mention of Brontë's love for the married teacher at the Belgian boarding school.