

JEWELS OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

Coordinator: Sophie Balcoff

Jane Eyre and *Vanity Fair* appeared within a year of each other, when Victoria was queen, and the British Empire was close to its height. Each book follows the struggles and eventual triumph of an orphaned governess, rebellious and self reliant; *Vanity Fair* is bitterly satirical while *Jane Eyre* is intense, Gothic, and highly romantic. Both capture in gorgeous prose the spirit of their age. The study group focuses on how each novel reflects social history and reveals unmatched literary art. We observe how distinctively Thackeray and Bronte explore their themes.

Readings and other Required Materials:

William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, Penguin Classics, 2003
ISBN-13: 978-0-141-43983-9, \$10.00

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, Penguin Classics, 2006
ISBN-13: 978-0-141-44114-6, \$9.00

Sophie Balcoff is a retired high school ESL and history teacher. She has coordinated six study groups, four of them about literature. She also teaches immigrants, tutors college students and sings in a chorus.

******* Syllabus *******

Part 1: *Vanity Fair*

Week 1 Chapters 1 -13

Thackeray's life; how his life and his characters are intertwined with the British East India Company and the Jamaican sugar trade.

Week 2 Chapters 14 - 24

What are we supposed to think about Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley?

Week 3 Chapters 25 - 34

The Napoleonic Wars culminating in the Battle of Waterloo.

Week 4 Chapters 35 - 46

Satire of high society, hypocrisy and marriage

Week 5 Chapters 47 - 58

Excerpts from a film based on the novel.

Week 6 Chapters 59 - end

What does "Vanity Fair" mean?

Part II: *Jane Eyre*

Week 7 Chapter I - IX

Introduction to *Jane Eyre*; biography of Bronte and connections between her life and the novel.

Week 8 Chapters X - XVI

Historical background: Romanticism and its influence on Bronte.

Week 9 Chapters XVII - XXI

Contrasting characters Jane and Becky, the Byronic Mr. Rochester with anti-heroic characters Rawdon Crawley, George Osborne and Dobbin

Week 10 Chapters XXII - XXVII

Scenes from the most recent "Jane Eyre" movie.

Week 11 Chapters XXVIII - XXXIII

Bronte's literary art reflected in selected scenes from the book.

Week 12 Chapters XXXIV - end

The novel as reflection of life in the British colonies.