

## **Questions for Professor Sarah Russo**

### **1. What was the specific assignment?**

The essay assignment was a close reading of a passage of the student's choice in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. The essay begins with annotating and color-coding the passage for language usage, thematic tensions, and structural shifts. Then the student designs an argument around the most important and surprising things revealed by close reading. We also worked on crafting thesis statements that are interesting, original, and arguable—preferably controversial.

My section of English 101 is subtitled “Literary Conversations” because we look at how different pieces of poetry, drama, and fiction talk to each other. After *Jane Eyre*, we read Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which tells the whole story of Bertha Mason, a mysterious and undeveloped character in *Jane Eyre*. As a follow-up to the essay, I assigned a creative writing piece in which students wrote Jane's reaction to some incident in *Wide Sargasso Sea*—as if Jane had also read Bertha's story.

### **2. How does this assignment fit with the goals of your course?**

The close reading essay is part of a semester-long development of close reading skills in poetry, prose, and drama. The creative writing piece is a chance for students to try on a perspective other than that of analyst and critic, but still to converse with the assigned text. This creative writing assignment requires students to think critically about a character across two texts and to generate a third text of their own, thus extending their grasp of intertextuality even further.

### **3. Why does this student's essay stand out for you as strong writing?**

Alice's essay uses close reading to its fullest potential. Her thesis is completely original and quite controversial. Critics continue to debate the politics of Brontë's choice of endings, but I have never read such a full and detailed argument for Jane's pleasure in Rochester's dependence.

As for the creative piece, I found that first of all Alice has a knack for building up to a dramatic and unexpected ending, which is in perfect consonance with Brontë's neo-romantic form. Even better, I found that her alternative ending to *Jane Eyre* is one way of dramatizing the thesis idea of her essay.

## **Questions for Alice Chandler**

### **1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?**

We were given a rubric for this paper that had concepts we had to complete. I think that is why I was so successful in it because there were specific things I needed to include.

### **2. What was the most challenging aspect of this essay assignment?**

Sarah really pushes us to find deeper meanings in the material that we read. I knew I would do well on the paper if I really challenged myself to find something different from what the author was saying up front.

### **3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?**

I was more successful in writing this paper than any other written piece in the class, besides creative pieces. I had never looked so deep into what I was reading until I looked

at this specific passage from Jane Eyre and tried to draw my own conclusion from it.

**4. What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?**

Finding something different behind what the author is saying is important to do. It gives you a whole different perspective on the meanings of the book and what the author is trying to say but maybe couldn't due to certain circumstances. I don't know if what I wrote was what Bronte actually meant, but I know it's a very different outlook on the novel in general.