

4 Mr Brocklehurst

My first winter at Lowood was long and hard. It often snowed and it was very cold. Our clothes didn't keep us warm. We were given very little food and were constantly cold and hungry.

But the worst thing that happened to me that winter was Mr Brocklehurst's first visit to Lowood.

One afternoon soon after my arrival at Lowood, a tall black figure entered the schoolroom. I recognized Mr Brocklehurst immediately. Everybody stopped writing on their slates and stood up. Even the teachers stood up. I felt very afraid. Mr Brocklehurst had false information about me from Mrs Reed. I was sure he wanted to tell everyone I was a liar.

He talked to Miss Temple about the school. He complained about a lot of things. The girls had too much to eat, their clothes were washed too often, some of the girls' hair wasn't completely straight and even that some of the girls were growing too tall. Miss Temple listened to these absurd complaints and tried not to show her anger.

All this time I was hiding my face behind my slate because I didn't want Mr Brocklehurst to see me. But then to my horror I dropped it. It fell to the floor and broke into pieces. Everybody turned to look at me.

'Ah, the new girl!' said Mr Brocklehurst. 'I have something to tell you about her. Come here girl.'

The girls next to me pushed me forward. Two monitors lifted me onto a stool. The stool was in the middle of the room and everybody was looking at me.

Glossary

• slate:



• stool:



'Girls! Teachers!' said Mr Brocklehurst. 'Can you all see this girl? She is young and healthy. But I must warn you about her. She is evil and she is a liar! I learnt this from her benefactor, Mrs Reed. That good lady treated her well but this girl was deceitful and dishonest. Mrs Reed brought this girl here to learn to be good and honest. Teachers! You must watch her and punish her when she is naughty. Girls! You must not talk with her or speak to her. Perhaps we'll manage to save her soul. Now she will stay on the stool for another half hour.'

With these words Mr Brocklehurst left the room.

My punishment was so unjust. I felt furious and humiliated. My heart was burning and it was difficult for me to breathe. I couldn't look at anyone.

But then someone walked past me. It was Helen Burns. When she passed again she looked up at me and smiled. What a smile! I remember it now. Her smile gave me strength and I stood on my stool with my head up high.

HUMILIATION

Why is Jane's punishment unjust?

Have you ever felt humiliated?



Discuss with a partner.

The clock struck five. My half hour was over so I got off the stool and went to the corner of the now empty room. I started to cry. I was trying so hard to be good at Lowood and to make a new start. I was good at my schoolwork and the teachers liked me. But now everybody thought I was a liar. This made me cry even harder.

• **benefactor:** someone who gives money to help an organisation, society or person

• **furious:** very angry

• **humiliated:** when someone is treated without respect