Exploring *Always Emily* through writing and reflection

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used to ask targeted questions for discussion and reflection.

- In the prologue of *Always Emily*, readers witness the Brontë children huddling in the family pew during the funeral of their sister, Elizabeth. How does their behavior during this difficult time help create an understanding of the personalities of each of the three surviving siblings? Does this remain consistent throughout the rest of the course of the novel?

- Though they are sisters, Emily and Charlotte Brontë are quite distinctive. Describe Emily’s relationship with her sister, Charlotte. How are these two girls similar from each other? How are they different? Do you believe them to be close? Why or why not? Use textual evidence to support your position.

- What is it about the boarding school where Emily is sent to that makes her so unhappy? Why does Charlotte believe it is the best place for her sister? Do you agree? Consider Charlotte’s own experiences there—do you find her to be happy? Why or why not?

- Though the rest of her family fear for her safety, the Moors are the place where Emily seems happiest. What is it about this landscape that speaks to Emily? In what ways does it inspire her writing?

- Though readers aren’t given much time with Harry, what is it about him that attracts the two sisters? What can you infer about his character and approach to life? Why does he ultimately choose to take his mother away rather than staying on to develop a relationship with Emily?

- Consider the quotes from the Brontë sisters’ own writing that are used to introduce the chapters; how do their words help set the tone for the story? Did you have a particular favorite or one you enjoyed most?

- As their father is a clergyman, the Brontë family lives in the church’s parsonage. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in property owned by the church? How would you feel about living in close proximity to a graveyard?

- When Miss Wooler questions Charlotte about her father’s position regarding the business practices of mill owners, Charlotte states, “My father tells the truth even when it’s not to his benefit. He’s very brave.” Consider Charlotte’s position about her father—do you agree with her opinion? What does Reverend Brontë risk by choosing to speak out for the employees of the mills?

Continued →
In your opinion, why do Emily and Charlotte feel so determined to solve the mystery of Mr. Heaton and his sister? Do you think the danger they put themselves in is justified? Why or why not?

Why do you believe Branwell succumbs to Mr. Heaton's demands? What is it about the Masonic lodge that attracts Branwell? What can we infer about his character based on his actions? How would you describe him? Is he a likeable character? Why or why not?

After discovering her overhearing him tell another that he is not permitted into his father's study alone, Branwell states, “Go to bed, Emily. My business is none of your concern.” What is it about this statement that makes Emily grow suspicious of her brother and his actions?

Always Emily is told in third person; how would the story be different if either Emily or Charlotte were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?

Describe Emily and Charlotte. What makes them dynamic characters? Are they the type of people you'd want to befriend? Why or why not?

If you could select one character in the novel to learn more about, who would it be? What is it about this particular character you found interesting or intriguing?

How would you characterize the relationship between Emily and Charlotte? Do you feel that it changes over the course of the novel? If so, in what ways?

Consider the variety of settings for Always Emily; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.

Using the phrase, “This is a story about...” supply five words to describe Always Emily. Explain your choices.


CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Considering Always Emily through Literary Elements Analysis

*For the following activities, allow students to show their understanding of various literary elements in the novel.

Character “To Do” List

Remind students that like us, literary characters have tasks they need to complete. Selecting a character of their choice from Always Emily, students are to create a list of the most important tasks at hand for that character with explanations as to why those tasks are so necessary.


CONTINUED ➔
(Cont’d) Classroom Connections: Considering *Always Emily* through Literary Elements Analysis

**Advice Column**
Ask students to describe one of the problems faced by a character in *Always Emily* and write advice to him/her. Students may choose to be serious or humorous. Use the letter format common to newspaper advice columns, where the person with the problem writes for advice and the advisor writes back. Often the person seeking advice “disguises” his or her name with a descriptive name associated with the problem.


**Fortune Cookies**
Have students imagine they are dining with three characters from *Always Emily*. Have them create fortune cookie statements for each character, making sure they tell you which character received the fortune and why it is fitting.


**Gift Giving**
Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect to give to one of the main characters in *Always Emily*; while these gifts can be tangible or intangible, they should be things that he/she would really want or need. Be sure for each gift, an explanation for the gift and why it is appropriate is attached.


**If These Walls Could Talk**
Ask students to create a conversation between one of the main characters in *Always Emily* and some intangible thing (justice, love, goodness, greed, etc.) or his/her conscience. Have them script the conversation for dialogue making sure they would appropriate punctuation.


**Considering Character: Host a Mock Trial**
After reading *Always Emily* as a class, students will brainstorm “crimes” committed by the characters from the novel. Have groups of students will work together to act as the prosecution or defense for the selected characters, while also acting as the jury for other groups. Students will use several sources to research for their case, including the novel and Internet resources on judicial proceedings and roles of the members of a trial. All the while, students will be writing a persuasive piece to complement their trial work. Additional teaching resources for literary mock trials can be found at www.readwritethink.org.

Considering Character—Create an “I AM” Poem or a Biopoem

The purpose of this strategy is to help students demonstrate knowledge of a character in *Always Emily* by following written prompts to complete a poem about the individual. Students can be given the prompts to follow on a worksheet or alternatively, students may create an original slideshow using PowerPoint or Movie Maker.

“I AM” POEM

**First Stanza:**
I am (name the character)  
I wonder (something the character is actually curious about)  
I hear (an imaginary sound the character might hear)  
I see (an imaginary sight the character might see)  
I want (something the character truly desires)

**Second Stanza:**
I pretend (something the character actually pretends to do)  
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)  
I touch (an imaginary touch)  
I worry (something that really bothers the character)  
I cry (something that makes the character very sad)  
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

**Third Stanza:**
I understand (something the character knows is true)  
I say (something that the character believes in)  
I dream (something the character might actually dream about)  
I try (something the character really make an effort about)  
I hope (something the character actually hopes for)  
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

BIPOEM:

Line 1: First name  
Line 2: Three traits that describe the character  
Line 3: Relative of ____________________________  
Line 4: Lover of __________________ (three things)  
Line 5: Who feels __________________ (three things)  
Line 6: Who needs ___________ (three things)  
Line 7: Who fears ___________ (three things)  
Line 8: Who gives ___________ (three things)  
Line 9: Who would like to see ______ (three things)  
Line 10: Resident of _____________________________  
Line 11: Last name

**Essential Quotes Analysis**

The language that an author uses in his work is essential to getting across the intended meaning. Select four quotes from *Always Emily* that seem to signify key ideas that the author hopes that readers take from the text. These might be quotes spoken by characters or might be from the narration, and page numbers should be included with the quotes. Have students develop a chart with the following four columns:

- Quote  
- Page Number  
- Relevance to the Novel  
- Intended Meaning for Readers

The intended meaning should have relevance not only to the characters in the text, but to the lives of anyone who reads the book.


**Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.1., R.L. 8.1., R.L. 9-10.1.**

CONTINUED
Emily and Charlotte Brontë are about as opposite as two sisters can be. Charlotte is practical and cautious; Emily is headstrong and imaginative. But they do have one thing in common: a love of writing. This shared passion will lead them to be two of the first published female novelists and authors of several enduring works of classic literature. But they’re not there yet. First, they have to figure out if there is a connection between a string of local burglaries, rumors that a neighbor’s death may not have been accidental, and the appearance on the moors of a mysterious and handsome stranger. The girls have a lot of knots to untangle—before someone else gets killed.

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