

## 2016 Wuthering Heights | Sample Essay

**“Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff share a variety of character traits that contribute to the dramatic and tragic aspects of the story.”**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your answer with reference to the novel, Wuthering Heights.**

Upon initial reading of ‘Wuthering Heights’ by Emily Bronte, it could be interpreted that Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff are irrevocably different people. However, upon further examination, I am inclined to believe that they share very similar personalities. These similarities are especially evident in the similar paths their lives take, although they follow slightly different timelines. Both characters spend their childhoods together, running wild on the moors and not caring for anyone but themselves. When they inevitably grow up, both find themselves in unhappy life situations. However, we soon realise that both Heathcliff and Catherine have personalities which will make a harmonious relationship unlikely. They are simply too alike. Both are stubborn, cruel-hearted and selfish to the needs to others. In this essay, I will be discussing the character traits that Catherine and Heathcliff share and how they contribute to the overall dramatic and tragic aspects of the story.

Passion and rebelliousness are evident in both characters from the beginning of the novel. Heathcliff is first introduced in Nelly’s narration as a seven-year-old foundling, adopted by the kind spirited Mr. Earnshaw, who welcomes him into his home at Wuthering Heights. Bronte illustrates a starving and homeless child who, upon being introduced to the family, *“bred bad feelings in the house.”* Initially, he is hated by both Catherine and her older brother Hindley, due to the gifts lost in the process of saving him. However, Heathcliff and Catherine quickly become firm friends and spend their days outside, walking the moors together, *“But it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at.”* As children, Catherine and

Heathcliff seem to represent the spirit of freedom as they rebel against the tyrannical authority represented by Hindley and the wider society. But their youthful independence soon leads them into trouble. They make an ill-advised attempt to spy on the Lintons' in Thrushcross Grange and are spotted by the servants, who give chase. Heathcliff manages to escape unscathed, but Catherine is not so fortunate. She, having been injured by the Linton's dog, is kept at Thrushcross Grange for five weeks. The arrival of the Lintons' into Catherine's life precipitates a chain of events which sees her becoming ever more distanced from her former companion. She is courted by Edgar Linton and he eventually asks for her hand in marriage. Heathcliff, overhearing her discussion with Nelly, departs Wuthering Heights in a fit of rage after Catherine declares, "*It would degrade me to marry Mr. Heathcliff.*" It is this overwhelming passion that continues throughout the book. In her heart, Catherine knows that she does not love Edgar in the same way she loves Heathcliff, yet she vainly thinks that by marrying Edgar she will be able to make both men happy. Their love is proper and civilised, a socially acceptable love, but it can't stand in the way of Heathcliff and Catherine's more profound connection. Upon Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights, we see the rebellious streak from their childhood as they begin to rendezvous more regularly, despite Catherine being married. When Catherine dies after the birth of her child, Nelly delivers the news to Heathcliff, but observes that he already seems to know. Their connection was so deeply rooted that Heathcliff could feel her presence, in both life and death. Distraught, he howls into the night like a wild animal. Heathcliff later continues in his vindictive plotting against both the Earnshaw and the Linton families, and the legacy of his and Cathy's relationship is one of pain and suffering. Heathcliff is tormented by the tragic memory of an unfulfilled relationship and begs the ghost of Catherine to haunt him eternally, "*I cannot live without my soul.*"

Cruelty, a trait possessed by both Catherine and Heathcliff. They do say that "what goes around comes around" and I find this to be true in the case of both characters. While Heathcliff's cruelty towards others may have stemmed from his brutal childhood, Catherine does not have the same excuse. They are cruel towards each other and everyone around them. This is first demonstrated when Catherine returns from Thrushcross Grange. She is enchanted by the elegance and grace of the Lintons' and their house, and she has the sense to realise that if she is to retain her place as a young lady in society, she must distance herself from Heathcliff, at least publicly. Catherine decides to marry Edgar, knowing how much this will torment Heathcliff. In the wake of Heathcliff's departure from Wuthering Heights, Catherine takes her anger out on her new

husband. When Heathcliff eventually returns, Catherine is as selfish as ever, insisting to Edgar that, *"I know you didn't like him...Yet, for my sake, you must be friends now"*. She behaves abominably when Heathcliff comes back into her life and sees no reason why they should not pick up their friendship exactly where they left off, disregarding her husband's feelings on the matter. She is also astonished when Heathcliff accuses her of treating him *"infernally"* and swears that he will have his revenge. Always the privileged child, she has no regard for others around her. At no stage in the narrative does Catherine accept any responsibility for the grief and suffering her actions have caused. Instead, she thinks only of her own sorrow, petulantly telling Heathcliff on her deathbed that if she has done any wrong, she is dying for it. If Catherine had spoken to Heathcliff before she decided to marry Edgar and explained her thoughts and reasoning more clearly, the theatrics of their unconventional love may have been avoided. Not one to be outdone, Heathcliff marries Isabella (Edgar's sister) in spite and eventually forces the marriage of young Cathy Linton and his son Linton. By doing this, he secures both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange as his own, the ultimate revenge. He abuses his son Linton, both physically and emotionally, and continues this behaviour towards young Cathy after he forces her hand in marriage. Although Catherine had been deceased many years at this stage, his cruelty persists. Their intertwining lives resemble a game of chess, each move carefully planned, with the intention of causing the utmost pain and suffering, *"He shall never know I love him."*

Impulsiveness, arguably the most dangerous trait that Heathcliff and Catherine share. Perhaps, if they had stopped and thought about their actions, many of the tragedies that occurred throughout the novel could have been avoided. Heathcliff could have questioned Catherine as to her motives behind marrying Edgar Linton and contested them. Instead, he decided to abscond from Wuthering Heights and stayed away for several years. Similarly, if Catherine had taken some time to think about Edgar's proposition instead of immediately agreeing, she may have decided that she only loved him platonically and wished to be with Heathcliff instead. When Heathcliff eventually returns, he immediately seeks out Catherine. Hurt by her unfair reasoning for dismissing him as a potential suitor, he strived to better himself. While he returns *"a tall, athletic, well-formed man"* who's *"countenance was much older in expression,"* the old Heathcliff remains. Far too quickly, their relationship returns to the toxic state in which it was left. He, fully aware that Catherine is married, endeavored to cause chaos in the Linton household. I believe that if he had stayed away, Catherine would have continued to live her life as a well-respected lady in society and may not have died so young. However, she is as much to

blame. She flippantly dismisses Edgar's concerns about Heathcliff, instead of trusting that her husband only has her best interest at heart. When Isabella's declaration of love reached Heathcliff's ears, they were married within weeks. He recognised an opportunity to cause more damage to the Linton's and he took it. Once again, this back and forth between Heathcliff and Catherine was mutually destructive and only caused their collective downfall, "*Treachery and violence are spear...they wound those who resort to them worse than their enemies.*"

In conclusion, Catherine and Heathcliff share a range of traits that ultimately contribute to the dramatic and tragic aspects of the novel. They have no desire to develop their love in order to create a happy, functioning relationship. Instead, they destroy each other with their cruelty and impulsiveness. Their relationship is a destructive one which brings misery not only to themselves, but to two generations of the Earnshaws and Lintons. Their need for one another is a primal, irresistible impulse, but it is not a healthy one. It is more like an addiction, intoxicating. Catherine admits that her love for Heathcliff is, "*a source of little visible delight, but necessary.*" Yet, she still insists that she could "*as soon forget you as my existence!*" Their similarities cause them to grow further and further away from one another, like magnetic poles repelling. Perhaps if they had really cared for one another, they would have realised that they were better off apart.