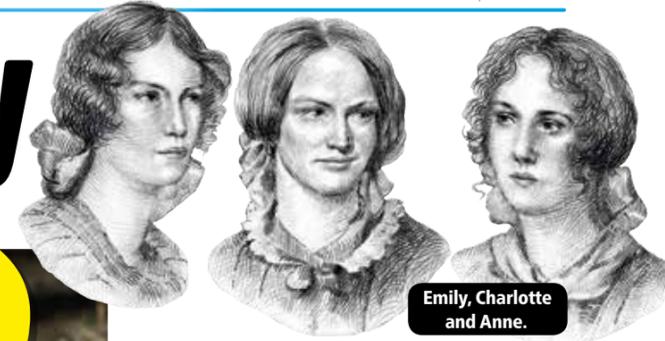




# The UK's most famous writing family



Emily, Charlotte and Anne.

The Brontë sisters' books are considered to be among the best ever published.

During the first half of the 19th century there lived three of the UK's most talented writers. They were all women, which was regarded as unusual for authors at the time, and what's more, they were sisters. Writing under male names so that they could get published, the Brontë sisters, Anne, Charlotte and Emily, would be shocked to learn that their books are now considered among the best ever published. On 17 January 1820, 200 years ago, the youngest Brontë sister – Anne – was born.

### Early life

Charlotte, Emily and Anne had two older sisters, who died during childhood, and a brother called Branwell. Their father, Patrick, worked as a clergyman (a church official). Their mother died shortly after Anne's birth. The sisters went to several different schools, including the Clergy Daughters' School in Cowan Bridge, Lancashire. The headmaster of this school would later inspire a character in Charlotte's novel *Jane Eyre*. In their spare time, the Brontës loved to write stories and books. In fact, they wrote more during their childhood than they ever did as published authors. One of Charlotte's earliest creations was more than 60,000 words long.

### Women's work

After leaving school, the three sisters had to find work. They had very few options because, at that time, many businesses would only hire men. As a result, the Brontës mostly worked as teachers or governesses (someone who looks after another family's child or children). Charlotte and Emily's work took them to Brussels, in Belgium, where they hoped to improve their French. However, they had to return home when their aunt Elizabeth, who had helped to raise them, died. They did travel again, but by 1845 they had all returned to the family home in Haworth, West Yorkshire. Nevertheless, life was about to change for the sisters.

### A plan to be published

To begin with, the sisters worked together on a collection of poetry. The idea came from Charlotte, who found a notebook of poems written by Emily and considered them to be good enough to be published. Emily was furious with Charlotte for reading her personal writing, but eventually she and Anne agreed to publish a book of poetry in 1846.

Charlotte Brontë



**A WORLD OF IMAGINATION**  
In 1831, Emily and Anne created a fictional island called Gondal, which they wrote about in stories and poems. Only the poems still exist – the stories are lost.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Before the release of Charlotte Brontë's book *Shirley*, the name Shirley had only been used for boys.

### When did the Brontës become famous?

Although only two copies of the poetry book were sold, the experience inspired the sisters to write more. They would spend their evenings writing, often working late into the night. The plan was for each of them to write their own novel. These three stories were published in 1847. Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights*, which was published in the same book as Anne's novel, *Agnes Grey*. Charlotte's story, *Jane Eyre*, came out by itself. The sisters' stories expressed modern opinions on social issues and relationships. All three stories were successful, but *Jane Eyre* was most read. Although the Brontë sisters' names are now very famous, they initially decided to write under male pseudonyms (made-up names). Charlotte became Currer Bell, Emily became Ellis Bell, and Anne became Acton Bell. The Brontës revealed that they weren't men when rumours emerged that the stories were written by one person.

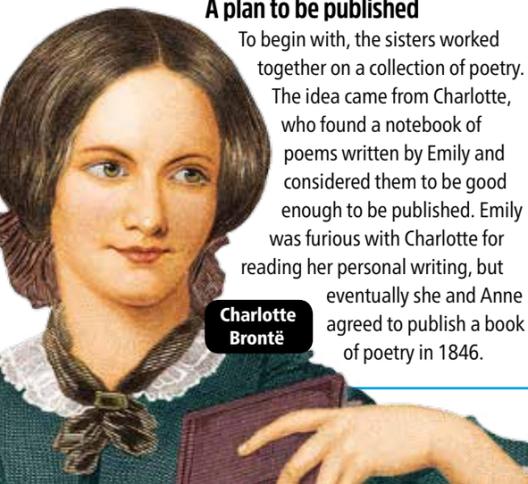
### A lasting legacy

Sadly the sisters didn't enjoy fame for long. Emily caught a cold at Branwell's funeral in 1848 and died a few months later, and Anne died the following year. Charlotte continued to write, although none of her other books were as successful as *Jane Eyre*. She died in 1855. Their relatively short lives makes their impact on literature even more impressive. They showed that women should have the same opportunities as men. Book critics and researchers believe the struggles in their own lives played a big part in helping the Brontë sisters create their stories. Their legacy lives on today; people still read their books and enjoy adaptations on stage and screen. In 2015, a BBC poll named *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* as among the top 10 greatest British novels of all time.



A BBC drama told the story of the sisters' lives.

The Brontës' work is still loved.



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