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CLASSICS

**Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities
for the Enriched Classic edition of
Cyrano de Bergerac by Edmond Rostand
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Activities created by Robert Marantz

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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“That’s a Nose that is a Nose!” **(A Lesson on Literary Devices)**

In Cyrano De Bergerac, Edmond Rostand created a character memorable not just for his large nose but for his inimitable skill with both the pen and the sword. Cyrano stands out in the annals of theatre because of how he manipulates language. His dialogue is a cornucopia of poetic phrases and literary devices. One needs look no further than his inspired retort to the Vicomte’s unimaginative insult about his nose that occurs during the first act (pp. 33-34). Upon being informed that his nose is “large,” Cyrano launches into one of the most famous monologues in drama. In it, he details the many creative ways one might have insulted his nose. (“Countrified: That’s a nose that is a nose!”) His clever comments are awash in literary devices.

This lesson will highlight two of those literary devices: the metaphor and personification. Students will have the opportunity to analyze both devices as they are employed in both Cyrano De Bergerac and its modern film update, Fred Schepisi’s *Roxanne*. Students will also produce their own metaphors and personifications.

This lesson will take one class period.

NCTE Standards Covered:

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Read Cyrano's speech in Act 1, scene 4, in which he provides a litany of clever insults about his own nose (pp. 33-34). Next, show the comparable scene in Fred Schepisi's *Roxanne*, where Steve Martin plays C.D., the Cyrano role, and provides a more modern list of insults for his equally large nose.

2. Talk about how in each scene, Cyrano and C.D. produce clever barbs about their own noses. Concentrate on the language used, specifically how it is poetic. ("Magisterial nose, no wind/Could give thee a cold, except the mistral.")

3. Introduce two literary devices: the metaphor ("Tis the Red Sea when it bleeds" *Cyrano De Bergerac*, p. 34), and personification ("Table for two?" *Roxanne*). Define each term for the class, using examples from both the play and the movie. Here are some examples of metaphors and personifications from other parts of the play:

Metaphors:

"Hate is at once a collar and a halo" page 78

"And I am but a shadow, you a radiance." page 103

Personifications:

"Shame will not let you see my naked blade?" page 27

"A trap by nature set" page 43

"Truly, this passion/Jealous and terrible, which sweeps me on/Is love indeed" page 106

4. Note how both Cyrano and C.D., both poets at heart, use these devices constantly in their dialogue, but most acutely in the monologues featured in the opening to this activity.

5. Now it's the students' chance to be poets. Each student will come up with a clever description of Cyrano's nose, using either a metaphor or personification. Once each student has his or her description, they will illustrate it on construction paper (either by drawing or using photos from magazines to create a collage).

6. Each poster should have the student's description of the nose in addition to the illustration, and a label on the back of the paper identifying the description as either a metaphor or personification.

7. Next, post all of the posters on the walls to create a gallery walk in your classroom. Next to each poster place a sheet of paper with the question, "Metaphor or Personification?" and space for students to put check marks below one of the two terms.

8. Have your students peruse their classmates' work. As the students view each poster, they must identify whether the illustration is a metaphor or a personification and indicate their choice on the sheet of paper.

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9. After all students have viewed all posters, ask each artist to explain to the class why his or her illustration is either a metaphor or personification.

What You Need:

A copy of the enriched classics edition of Cyrano De Bergerac (ISBN: 0743487753) for each student, a videotape or DVD of *Roxanne* (1987), construction paper, colored pens and/or markers, scissors, glue, and old magazines

How Did It Go?

There are two opportunities to check for understanding in this activity: Did your students correctly produce statements about Cyrano's nose that employed metaphors or personifications? Did they correctly identify the metaphors and personifications created by their classmates?

“Eye of the Beholder”

(A Lesson in Theme)

One of the major themes in Edmond Rostand’s Cyrano De Bergerac concerns the conflict between inner beauty and outer beauty. Roxanne must choose between a man who is physically attractive but simple (Christian) and a man who is intellectually attractive but physically repulsive (Cyrano). What does the heart most want—beauty or brains?

In this lesson we will explore the nature of inner and outer beauty. We will examine what the media tell us is attractive, what we think is attractive, how these perceptions can lead to a lack of self-confidence, and how these ideas are relevant today and also permeate Cyrano De Bergerac.

This lesson will take one and a half class periods, plus one night or two to complete a homework assignment.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

What to Do:

1. Open the lesson with a writing prompt: “Could you love someone you don’t find physically attractive?” Give the students ten minutes to jot their thoughts down.
2. Next, present the class with a series of images. Start with photos of current super models, actors, and actresses. Ask the students: Why are these people considered attractive? Follow up on their answers with this question: Does this mean these people are easier to love?
3. Then show the class images of Quasimodo (from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), Beast (from *Beauty and the Beast*), and Cyrano de Bergerac (either Jose Ferrer’s or Gerard Depardieu’s). Ask: What is “wrong” with these men? Could you love them?

From these first three steps you should be generating a great deal of discussion and possibly debate about what is “attractive” and what is not.

4. Now you can transition to the text. Ask: Who is “attractive” in *Cyrano*? You will get a range of answers, from the obvious Roxanne (beautiful) and Christian (handsome), to Cyrano (smart). Ask: What attracts us to other people besides looks?
5. Write “Inner Beauty vs. Outer Beauty” on the board and then ask the class to divide the characters in *Cyrano De Bergerac* into one of the two categories. Write the names of the characters under the appropriate heading. (Christian is handsome, Roxanne is beautiful—both are examples of outer beauty. Roxanne is also intelligent, Cyrano is artistic—two examples of inner beauty.) Roxanne should end up on both lists.
6. Ask: How does Cyrano perceive himself? (He is full of bravado. He wields a sword with panache, and has a rapier wit to match, but ironically lacks self-confidence. Cyrano is afraid of what Roxanne thinks of him.) Ask: How does Cyrano’s perception of himself affect his life?
7. Now ask the students to look back at what they wrote at the start of the lesson. Do they still agree with what they wrote, or do they want to amend their thoughts? Give them a few minutes to add or edit their writing.
8. Ask: How might the play have been different had Cyrano been more confident in his inner beauty? Have the students re-imagine these two scenes: Act II, Scene 6 (where Roxanne tells Cyrano that she loves Christian), and Act III, Scene 1 (where Roxanne reads the letters to Cyrano and suggests that Christian is smarter than Cyrano). How could one rewrite those scenes so that Cyrano displays more confidence in himself, and this leads to the play having a happy ending? (For example, Cyrano could reveal to Roxanne in Act II that it is him and not Christian who writes to her so poetically.)

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9. For homework, have the students rewrite the two scenes in such a way that the play has a happy ending. (The students need not rewrite all dialogue—they can add or change some elements in each scene so that the outcome is different.)

10. At the next class, have the students read their re-writes to the class and explain how their re-imagined Cyrano De Bergerac would end.

What You Need:

A copy of the enriched classics edition of Cyrano De Bergerac (ISBN: 0743487753) for each student, several magazines with images of popular actors, actresses, and models, and images of Quasimodo, Beast, and Cyrano (all of which can be found on the Internet).

How Did It Go?

This activity affords an excellent opportunity to explore what it means to be beautiful. Your students should have re-examined their preconceptions about beauty and amended their initial thoughts about what is attractive. The exercise in evaluating Cyrano's lack of self-confidence is also a timely activity for students, as many teens grapple with self-esteem and image issues. Students should have suggested alternate courses of action for Cyrano in which he wooed Roxanne more actively and stood up for himself. Particularly perceptive students may have provided scenarios that portrayed self-confident acts without teetering into arrogance.

“Cyrano’s World”

(A Lesson in Historical Research)

What was the real Cyrano like? Who were the Gascon cadets? Who was fighting in the war depicted in Cyrano De Bergerac? These questions, and many more like them, can be answered when one understands the historical context of the play. When a play like Cyrano is performed today, the company usually employs a dramaturge, or historian, to provide the actors, director, set and costume designers, and musicians a historical and biographical perspective on the time in which the play takes place. The dramaturge helps make the words and events on the page more real to the artists so that they in turn can do the same for their audience.

In this activity, students will become their own dramaturges. They will provide each other the historical and biographical perspective on the people depicted in the play, the man who wrote it, the time it was written, and the time in which it takes place. In doing so, they will also gain experience into the process of research.

This activity will take approximately one week.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

What to Do:

1. Start the lesson by reading aloud pages vii-ix in the Introduction of Cyrano De Bergerac. This serves a dual purpose: an introduction to the play, and an introduction to this activity. Explain to the students that they will be conducting research that will expand their understanding and appreciation of Cyrano De Bergerac.
2. Divide the class into five groups. Each group will research a different historical or biographical aspect of Cyrano De Bergerac. The first group will investigate the historical events of the time of the play. The second group will investigate how the theatres of that time period looked and operated. The third group will investigate the real Cyrano. The fourth group will investigate the life and work of Edmond Rostand. The fifth group will investigate the time period in which Rostand wrote Cyrano De Bergerac.
3. Each group will assign roles for its members: researcher(s), scribe(s), and illustrator(s). See Handout #1 for a description of each role.
4. If there are computers in the classroom, set up a schedule to allow each group an hour or two to conduct research on their topic. Alternatively, you can schedule a class period in the school's library or computer room to assist the students in their research.
5. If feasible, you can also allocate a portion of each class period for the students to meet in their groups to work on this project. Give the students about a week to gather their research and put together their work. At the end of the week, each group will make a ten-minute presentation on their findings. Each presentation must have the following elements:
 - Two poster boards depicting different aspects of the group's research (For example, the group researching the theatre of Cyrano's time might have a diagram of a typical 17th century French theatre, and another diagram illustrating the different people who attended the theatre.)
 - Two of the following: a piece of music, a work of art, or a film clip that is directly related to the person or time period researched (For example, since the play was written during the musical period of Romanticism, a group might play a piece by Brahms or Tchaikovsky to relate Rostand's writing to his contemporaries' art forms.)
 - A two page report summarizing their research
6. After all groups present their research, have the students write a summary of what they learned from the other four presentations.

What You Need:

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A copy of the enriched classics edition of Cyrano De Bergerac (ISBN: 0743487753) for each student, and access to the Internet and/or a library.

How Did It Go?

This activity requires a lot of self-regulation by your students. Did they stay on top of the research? Did each group delegate responsibilities equally among the members? These are important skills for the students to master that go beyond the proscribed English Language Arts Content Standards. Also, you can use the students' summaries in addition to each group's report to assess the degree of research and student comprehension for the class as a whole.

Cyrano De Bergerac Research Project

For your research, each member of your group must assume at least one of the following roles. If there are more members than roles, you may double up on roles as you deem necessary.

Directions: Write the name(s) of the group members assigned to each of the three roles.

Researcher(s): _____

Your role is to conduct research into the topic assigned. Ideally, you will be able to connect the time period or person you are researching to other people, works of art, and events of the same time period. Since this is the most important role in this project, most if not all of the group members should be engaged as a researcher in some capacity.

Illustrator(s): _____

Your role is to draw or select images to create two posters that reflect your group's research. This could mean illustrating a 17th Century theatre, the real Cyrano and his nose, or what a Gascon cadet looked like. You can also draw maps or organizational trees to show how one person, place, or event relates to the others from the same time period.

Scribe(s): _____

Your role is to sum up the findings of your group's research into a two-page report. You may ask each member to provide a summary of their contributions to the group, and then integrate those summaries into your report.