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Study Guide

for

**Cyrano de
Bergerac**

by **Edmond Rostand**



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New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Edmond Rostand



Call it a sort of lie,
If you like, but a lie is a sort of myth,
And a myth is a sort of truth.

—*Cyrano de Bergerac*, act 1

When Edmond Rostand was born in 1868, France was undergoing major changes. The country was establishing a republican government after centuries of monarchy. Along with industrial and commercial development came social tensions, which were reflected in the literature of the time. Realistic novelists like Gustave Flaubert and Émile Zola replaced romantic writers like Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas as public favorites.

France's self-confidence would be shaken by its loss in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. Although many people of the time did not realize it, they would soon be ready for a myth that could be a kind of truth. Edmond Rostand would be the man to give it to them.

Rostand spent his childhood in the southern port city of Marseilles. He was born to an artistic family: his father was a poet and professor and his uncle was a composer. Rostand was a brilliant student and, under pressure from his father, studied law in Paris. His real love was literature, however, and he began to write plays and poems.

The production of one of his plays, *The Princess Far Away*, starred the most famous actress of the day, Sarah Bernhardt, who was a good friend of Rostand's. In general Rostand's early works feature poetic sentiments, noble ideas, and good parts for the lead performers. Few of his plays are read or performed much today.

In April 1896, Rostand began working on the play that has since been regarded as his masterpiece—*Cyrano de Bergerac*. When it came out in 1897, *Cyrano de Bergerac* was very different from the popular mainstream plays of the time, which were very realistic and often addressed social problems such as poverty, illness, and crime. In spite of *Cyrano's* success, however, it did not create imitators. Realistic drama continued to dominate the stage.

In 1900 following the success of *Cyrano*, Rostand produced his second-best work. *The Eaglet* is the story of the young son of Napoleon, who never ruled France but spent his short life as a prisoner in Austria. The role of the young prince was played by actress Sarah Bernhardt. Critics have pointed out that Rostand may have felt a bond with the young prince. Both were prisoners of their past, shadowed by a great figure to whom they could never be favorably compared. For the young prince, it was the memory of his great father Napoleon. For Rostand, the gigantic figure always looking over his shoulder was his masterpiece, *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

After *The Eaglet*, Rostand wrote several more plays, along with patriotic poems. His health deteriorated, and he moved to southern France seeking a more healthful climate. He received the Legion of Honor, an award for cultural achievement, and was elected to the French Academy, but he lived a quiet life, seeing only a few friends and family. His final plays were not popular. He threw himself into supporting the French effort in World War I, and his visit to the trenches to see for himself the hideous slaughter of modern warfare shocked him greatly. He died six weeks after the war ended, at the age of fifty.

Introducing the Play

*I honestly believe, gentlemen, that under
That blessed moon of his there never walked,
Stalked rather, strutted, so extravagant, bizarre,
Far-fetched, excessive, hyperbolic, droll,
Mad a gentleman-ruffian as this Bergerac.*

—*Cyrano de Bergerac*, act 1

As the cast and producers of Edmond Rostand's new play were rehearsing in the fall of 1897, the mood was grim. While Rostand was a popular dramatist with Parisian audiences, the rumors the public had heard about his new play disturbed many theater fans. It had been scripted in a highly artificial form that was popular with French playwrights one hundred years earlier. No one expected it to hold the attention of sophisticated, modern Parisians.

In the last years of the nineteenth century, industrialization was taking place in most of Europe, including France, and with it came a more scientific way of looking at things, and realism was becoming popular. **Realism** in literature, including drama, emphasizes objective documentation of everyday life, usually working-class life, and rejects idealization or glamor. This movement, particularly in France, developed into **naturalism**—which shares the same goals as realism but also stresses the governing of human life by natural laws. Naturalists argued that the theater should explain the scientific laws of human behavior. Amidst this social and psychological objectivity, Rostand's new play about romantic heroes, beautiful maidens, sword fights, and the power of poetry and art seemed hopelessly out of date.

The directors of the theater that had accepted the new play regretted their decision. They decided to slash the budget for sets and costumes, so Rostand had to pay for the actors' lavish costumes himself. During the dress rehearsal, Rostand was so disappointed with the sets that he had to be restrained from attacking the set designer. The star of the play was Constant Coquelin, one of France's leading actors. Even he, when asked for his prediction about the new play's success, could only answer, shaking his

head, "Dark." Rostand himself apologized to Coquelin. "I beg your forgiveness, my friend," he pleaded. "Pardon me for having involved you in a disastrous adventure."

Therefore, when the curtain rose on *Cyrano de Bergerac* for the first time on December 28, 1897, expectations were low. The audience, however, was about to be pleasantly surprised. From the hero's first majestic entrance to his last farewell, he transfixed his viewers. Theatergoers cheered Cyrano's triumphs, sighed at his suffering, laughed at his witty wordplay, and cried as his fate became known. A full hour after the curtain fell, the audience was still applauding thunderously.

It is not easy to explain why Rostand's play confounded everyone by becoming one of the century's greatest smash hits. Perhaps the answer lies in *Cyrano de Bergerac's* stark contrast to the grimly realistic plays of its day, which often focused on modern society's darkest problems. The figure of the swashbuckling Cyrano dueling his way across the stage and stunning his compatriots with his verbal cleverness took Paris by storm. In fact, many critics, both of Rostand's time and later, attributed the play's tremendous success to its **romanticism**, or emphasis on idealism and heroism.

Although *Cyrano de Bergerac* may have allowed its audience to retreat temporarily from the grim realities of life, it is not just an escapist work. Readers and viewers of this play are able to recognize aspects of the universal human condition in the larger-than-life figure who dominates the play. Sometimes all bluster, sometimes sad and vulnerable, Cyrano bears the markings of a real human being. Although he possesses great gifts, he also carries a heavy burden that is as plain as the prominent nose on his face. His seeming self-confidence is blighted by his belief that his large nose makes him unlovable. This sense of inferiority fills his life and shapes his personality.

Another reason for the play's enduring popularity may lie in the cleverness of its writing. Through *Cyrano*, Rostand displays an incredible ability to compose witty poems, write ravishing

love letters, and speak off the cuff on any subject imaginable. Cyrano's virtues, though rather cliché, are still admirable. He is honorable, self-sacrificing, just, brave, idealistic, and loyal. He keeps his promises, even when they cause him great pain.

Finally, Cyrano is known and loved most of all for his *panache*, that is, his flair, individual sense of style, verve, or pizzazz. In the end, this quality is all he has left. Throughout the years since the play's opening, it is Cyrano's *panache* that has kept audiences and readers coming back.

THE TIME AND PLACE

Cyrano de Bergerac is set in France during the years 1640 to 1655. In the mid-1600s, France was fraught with political tension and in conflict with foreign enemies. The majority of *Cyrano* takes place in 1640, when Louis XIII sat on the throne, and Armand-Jean du Plessis Richelieu

dominated the political landscape. Richelieu was a Roman Catholic cardinal and the chief minister and advisor to King Louis XIII. (De Guiche, the play's villain, uses his connections with Richelieu to gain power.)

Richelieu's goals were to strengthen the French monarchy and make France the most powerful nation in Europe. He led France into the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), a complicated religious, economic, and military struggle.

As a result of the war, France became Europe's leading power. Protestant monarchs came to rule in most of northern Europe, and the old dream of a united Catholic Europe was destroyed forever. One key battle of this long war was the French siege of the town of Arras, in which the real Cyrano took part. The siege is also the setting for one of the scenes in the play, in which the fictional Cyrano takes part.

Did You Know?

Translating a work into another language is always a challenging task. This translation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is by the famous English novelist Anthony Burgess (1917–1993). He is best known for his futuristic fantasy novel *A Clockwork Orange*, which was turned into a controversial film by director Stanley Kubrick in 1971. In the novel, some of the characters use a language created by Burgess.

Burgess led quite an extraordinary life. Self-taught in music, he wrote numerous orchestral works. He also taught and worked in Southeast Asia in the late 1950s. When he was diagnosed with an incurable brain tumor,

he returned to England and began writing furiously in order to ensure that his wife would be financially comfortable after his death. Although the diagnosis was later proved incorrect, Burgess continued to write novels, stories, music and literary criticism, articles, film and television scripts, biographies, symphonies, translations, and even a Broadway musical based on *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In all, he wrote a book a year for fifty years.

As you read this translation of a hundred-year-old work, originally written in a highly artificial form of poetry, notice how easily the language flows.

Before You Read

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 1

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Judging by images shown on TV and in movies and advertisements, there are few things our society prizes more highly than physical beauty. In your opinion, why do we value physical beauty so highly? What relationship does it have to inner beauty?

Think-Pair-Share

Discuss this question with a partner. List reasons why you believe physical beauty is so highly valued by our society.

Setting a Purpose

Read about someone who is not beautiful, but who is a romantic hero nonetheless.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

“Swashbuckler” is a term used to describe a story with colorful sword-fighting characters. In film, as well as in literature, there is a whole genre of swashbucklers, including the movie versions of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Macbeth*, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, and *Shakespeare in Love*. The word itself was first used in 1560 to describe a swordsman who struck an opponent’s shield, or buckler, with his sword.

All for One, One for All: Swashbucklers Unite

Cyrano de Bergerac is a drama in keeping with an earlier tradition of gallant swashbucklers. Scottish novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott invented the swashbuckling historical novel by producing *Ivanhoe*, but the caped swordsman did not become a full-fledged hero until Alexandre Dumas’s *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Born in 1802, Dumas is the creator of the elegant, dashing duelist, D’Artagnan. Embodying all the virtues of courage, chivalry, and reckless delight, Dumas’s character is based on an historical figure from Gascony who was also called D’Artagnan, but whose real name was Charles de Batz de Castelmore (1611–1673). D’Artagnan appears in three of Dumas’s novels. He supposedly makes a cameo appearance in act 1 of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. As you read, see if you can spot him and take note of what he says to Cyrano.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

affable [əf’ə bəl] *adj.* warm and friendly

bellicose [bəl’ə kōs’] *adj.* hostile; aggressive

cynosure [sɪ’nə shōor’] *n.* something that attracts admiration

droll [drōl] *adj.* humorous; clownish

dubious [dūō’ bē əs] *adj.* doubtful

enmity [en’mə tē] *n.* hatred

lambast [lɑm bɑst’] *v.* to criticize harshly

obsequious [əb sē’ k wē əs] *adj.* fawning; servile

Active Reading

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 1

In act 1, Rostand presents a number of events that help define Cyrano's character and highlight his system of values. As you read the first part of the play, use the chart on this page to make notes on what different events tell us about Cyrano.

Event	What It Tells Us
He stands on his chair and forces Montfleury from the stage.	He is brave, aggressive, and follows through on his threat to remove the actor.
He challenges members of the audience to fight him.	
He criticizes Montfleury's acting style.	
He throws the bag of money on stage.	
He bullies the citizen who stares at his nose.	
He "teaches" the viscount how to properly insult his nose.	
He composes a ballad while defeating the viscount.	
He takes very little food from the foodseller.	
He becomes moody and subdued when the crowd has left.	
He refuses to take Le Bret's advice about Roxane.	
He instantly decides to defend Lignière from the 100 attackers.	

Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 1

Personal Response

What is your first impression of Cyrano? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What does Captain Le Bret say happens to anyone who makes fun of Cyrano's nose? What do you learn about Cyrano from this information?

2. How does Valvert insult Cyrano just before their duel begins? How does Cyrano gain revenge for this insult?

3. What is Le Bret's advice to Cyrano regarding his love for his cousin? What is Cyrano's reaction to the advice? Why do you suppose he reacts the way he does?

Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 1

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How does Rostand prepare the audience for Cyrano's first entrance on stage? Do you feel this is an effective technique? Why or why not?

5. In response to the question about where his life will lead, Cyrano tells Le Bret, "I've decided to excel in everything." Do you think such an attitude is realistic in everyday life? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

A Tale of Two Soldiers

Cyrano and Christian are two of the main characters in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting them, citing lines from this section of the play to support your analysis. (You might want to refer to the events you listed in the **Active Reading** on page 13.) What can you infer from each character's words and actions in this scene? In what ways are Cyrano and Christian different? How are they similar?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In your literature group, discuss how the first part of *Cyrano de Bergerac* addresses the role of physical beauty. Pay particular attention to what Christian says about his love for Roxane, to how Roxane reacts to Christian, and to what Cyrano says about his physical appearance and prospects for winning the love of Roxane. Identify lines in the play that address physical appearance and inner worth.

Listening and Speaking

Cyrano's act-one speech about his nose is one of the most famous and amusing monologues in the play. Cyrano uses his verbal wizardry to defeat his enemy as surely as he later uses his sword. Reread the speech. Then, for each category that Cyrano notes, such as "frank aggressive," "friendly," and "pure descriptive," write another comparison of Cyrano's nose. For example, for "frank aggressive," you might write, "If my nose were as gigantic as your own, / It'd be mistaken for a dinosaur bone!" Try to match Cyrano's cleverness and style; have your insult rhyme if you can. Share your replacement insults with the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 2

FOCUS ACTIVITY

A famous baseball player once said, “It’s not bragging—if you can do it!” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Discuss

With a few other students, discuss whether someone who talks a lot about his or her accomplishments or future plans is being boastful or merely confident. Does your perspective change if the person really has accomplished what he or she has claimed?

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover more about the accomplishments of one very talented—and maybe boastful—character.

BACKGROUND

French Food

Sprinkled throughout the play are various references to food such as rhubarb tarts, fruit flans, cream buns, casseroles, sauces, and pork *pâté* (*pâtés* are chopped meat cooked with spices). Cooking is considered an art in France. Well known for its creamy sauces and puff pastries, French cuisine has been world-famous since the 1700s. A typical French meal may consist of several courses. Appetizers may include a French specialty called goose liver *pâté*, *crêpes* (thinly rolled pancakes), *escargots* (snails) in a garlic and butter sauce, or onion or potato soup. The main course is usually made up of steaks, pork chops, or roast chicken. This is followed by a green salad, then cheese or fresh fruit, and sometimes dessert. Dessert can be a fancy pastry, a fruit tart, or a *crêpe* filled with whipped cream.

Did You Know?

Irony is a contrast between appearance and reality. Edmond Rostand makes use of several types of irony in this play. One kind, called **structural irony**, is present throughout the work. It is created by the contrast between Cyrano’s inner qualities—his wit and intelligence, his kindness, and his love of beauty, justice, and honesty—and his ugly appearance. This contrast creates most of the dramatic events of the play. Notice also that the ironic contrast between inner and outer qualities carries over to other characters as well, such as Christian, Ragueneau, and the viscount. Another type of irony is called **dramatic irony**. It occurs when the audience, or reader, knows something that a character does not. The audience watches as the character makes decisions based on incorrect information. An example of dramatic irony occurs in this part of the play. The audience knows from the first act that Roxane was attracted to Christian at the play. Cyrano, however, does not know this and makes an assumption about why Roxane wants to meet with him.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

acrostic [ə krɒs'tɪk] *n.* series of lines in which the first letters of each line form a word

doggerel [dɒg'gər əl] *n.* trivial or inferior poetry

doublet [dʌb'lɪt] *n.* short jacket

moiety [mɔɪ'ə tē] *n.* portion; piece

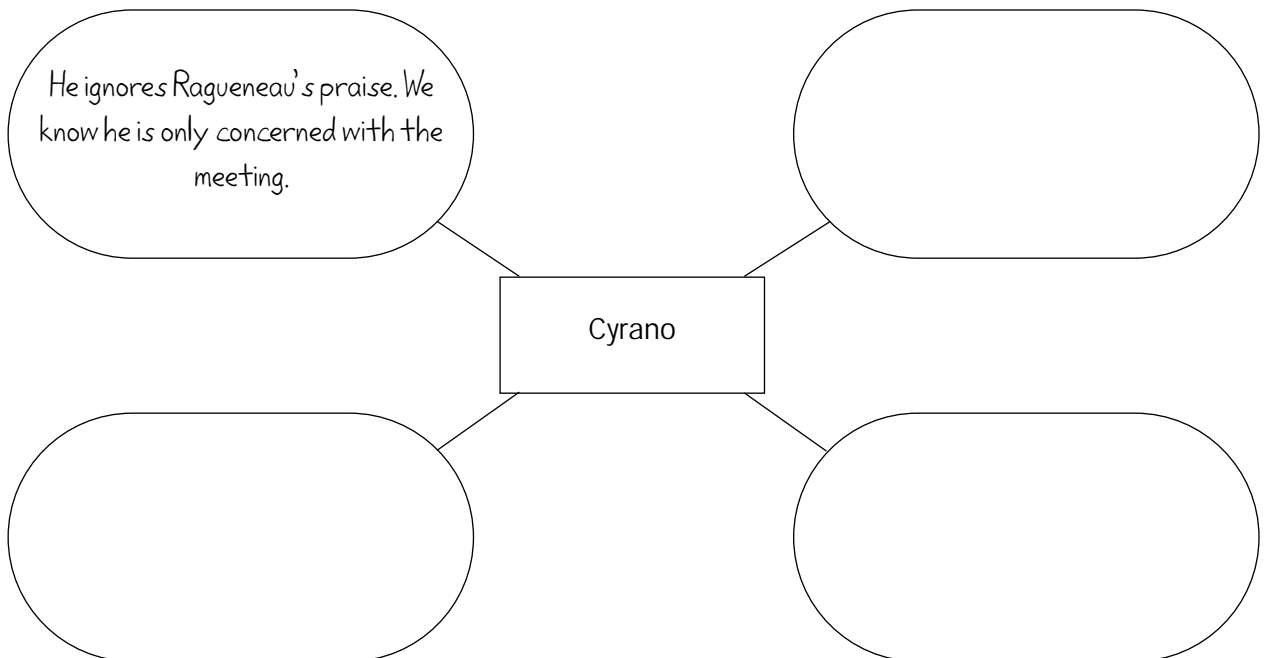
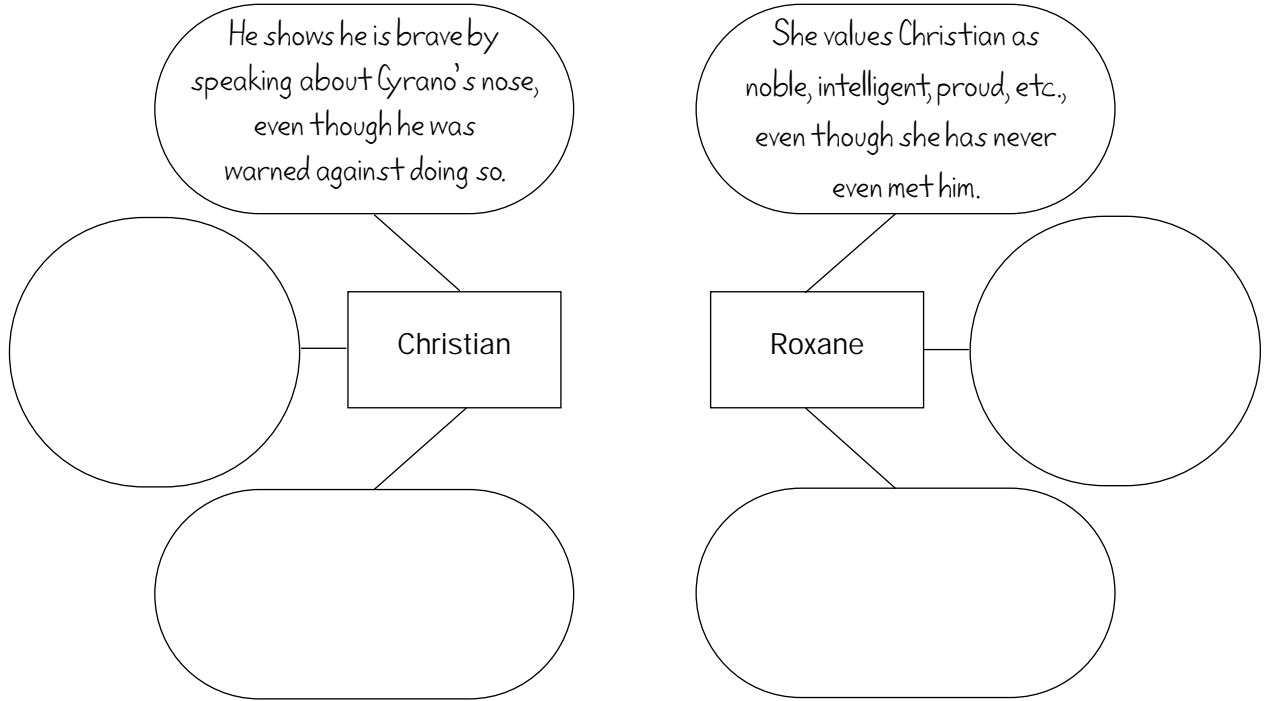
retinue [ret'an əō'] *n.* group of followers

whelp [hwɛlp] *n.* young animal

Active Reading

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 2

At the center of the play are three characters: Cyrano, Roxane, and Christian. We learn about these characters through their actions and words, as well as by what others say about them. As you read this section of the play, use the webs on this page to write down words, phrases, and actions that give you insight into each character.



Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 2

Personal Response

What did you find funny in this section of the play? Describe the incident(s).

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. At what exact moment in the pastry shop does Cyrano learn that Roxane is talking about someone else? What does this say about Cyrano?

2. In your opinion, why does Christian insult Cyrano's nose? What is Cyrano's reaction when he finds out that Christian is the one making the rude comments about his nose? What does Cyrano's reaction tell you about him?

3. What arrangement does Cyrano make with Christian regarding Roxane? Why do you suppose Cyrano suggests this arrangement?

Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 2

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Cyrano agrees to help another man who is in love with the same woman as himself. Are Cyrano's actions believable? Does he behave as you feel most people would in a similar situation? Explain.

5. In the **Focus Activity** on page 16, you discussed confidence and boastfulness. Do you think Cyrano is boastful? Why or why not? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.

Literature and Writing

Images from Nature

Cyrano's speech to Le Bret, in which he explains why he does not want a protector, contains numerous natural images that enrich his speech and clarify his explanation. Write a short essay in which you evaluate Rostand's use of imagery in this speech. Analyze how images such as the leeching vine, fog of fear, and oak tree add richness to the speech and magnify his reasons for wanting to remain free.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

At the end of this section of the play, Christian admits that he does not speak well, especially with women. The underlying theme of his discussion with Cyrano is that language is a powerful tool and can be used to accomplish goals such as, in this case, winning the love of Roxane. Language has been used throughout history to achieve political, economic, and personal goals. In your group, make a list of specific ways in which spoken and written language can be used. Give examples from history, current events, or your own life. Then discuss how language may be analyzed to determine whether it is being used for positive or negative purposes.

Learning for Life

In this part of the play, Ragueneau amuses the hungry poets by writing his own poem on how to bake an almond tart. Reread this poem. Then think of a procedure you are familiar with. Examples may include telling a good joke, repairing a flat bicycle tire, programming a VCR, or surfing the Internet. Write a poem in the style of Ragueneau on your chosen activity. Then, read your poem to the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 3

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What personal traits are important to you in a friend or companion?

List It

Work with a partner to make a list of five characteristics you find most important in another person.

Setting a Purpose

Read to see which personal traits the characters in *Cyrano de Bergerac* find most attractive in others.

BACKGROUND

The Real Cyrano

Edmond Rostand's hero is based on a real-life person. The real Cyrano, born in 1619, was not from Gascony, but from Paris. A castle owned by his father was called Bergerac, and this name, ending in -ac like many names in Gascony, led Rostand to make his character a native of this region. The historical Cyrano did, in fact, come under the influence of his beautiful and intelligent cousin, Madeleine Robineau, who was married to the Count de Neuville. It is not known whether Cyrano was in love with his cousin, but she did help him become a member of Parisian high society.

Like his fictional counterpart, Cyrano was well known for his skill in dueling and his inordinately long nose. He also fought at the siege of Arras in 1640. There, he coached his comrades on how to speak and write effectively, especially on matters of love. On his return to Paris, he began a career as a largely satirical author and well-known freethinker. He wrote a tale about an imaginary trip to the moon and dabbled in science. An accident took his life when he was only thirty-six.

Did You Know?

Cyrano de Bergerac, along with most of the other cadets, is from the province of Gascony in southwestern France. Gascony lies more than 300 miles from Paris, the French capital. The region includes both the Pyrenees Mountains that separate France from Spain, and the Basque Country. In Cyrano's time (and in Rostand's), the people of Gascony had a reputation for being hot-headed and fun-loving. Gascons recognized this about themselves, as you hear in their songs.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

avowal [ə vɒʊ' əl] *n.* assertion; pledge

augment [ɔːg mɛnt'] *v.* to add to; to increase

bequeath [bi kwɛθ'] *v.* to pass on; to give to

desolate [dɛs'ə lit] *adj.* deserted; abandoned

dissonantly [dɪs'ə nənt lɛ] *adv.* out of tune; screechingly

eloquence [el'ə kwəns] *n.* expressive, effective language

heresy [hɛr'ə sɛ] *n.* opinion contrary to generally accepted beliefs

leers [lɛrs] *n.* sly or lustful looks

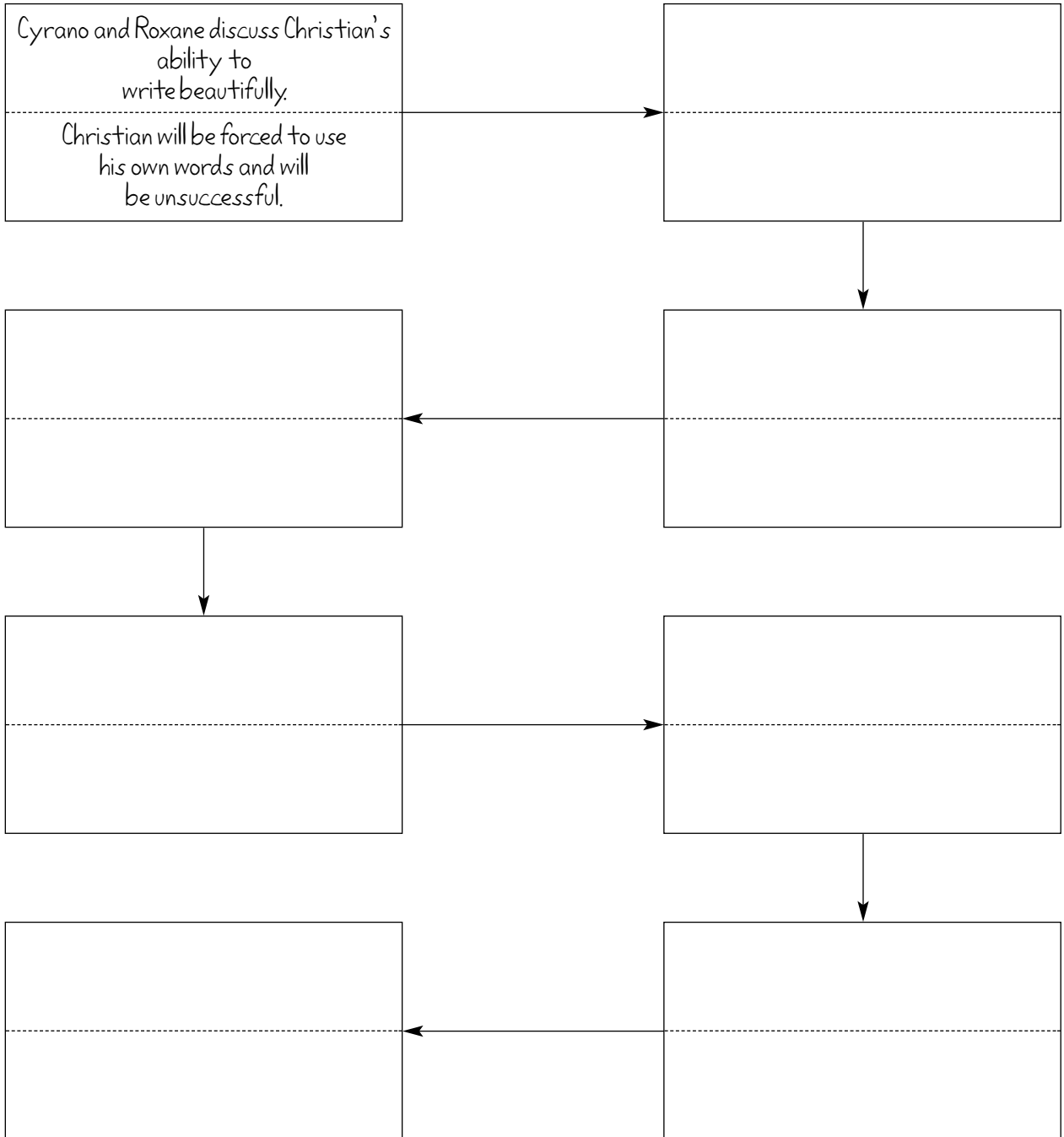
quintessence [kwɪn tɛs'əns] *n.* purest example of something

slanders [slændərs] *n.* lies

Active Reading

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 3

In the third act of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the plot becomes more complicated, and events that occur at this point will have an important impact on the events to come later. As you read this act, use the flow chart below to keep track of events as they occur. There is also space in each box for you to predict how the events you list might affect later developments.



Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 3

Personal Response

If you were Cyrano, would you have been able to help Christian win Roxane's love? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why is Roxane so concerned when she learns that de Guiche is about to order the soldiers to depart for war? What trick does she play as a result of her concern?

2. How would you describe Cyrano's emotions as he speaks for Christian to Roxane? Why might he have mixed feelings about what he is doing?

3. How does Cyrano keep de Guiche from interrupting the wedding? What do you learn about Cyrano from the method he chooses?

Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 3

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Having read the conversation between Roxane and de Guiche, how would you describe Roxane's attitude toward him? How does Rostand communicate Roxane's true feelings to the audience without making them clear to de Guiche?

5. *Cyrano de Bergerac* is a drama, intended for performance by actors. When you read the play, you have to imagine the actors' gestures, appearances, and voices. If you were casting the three main roles of the play, which actors would you select? Explain why you feel the actors you choose would be appropriate for the roles. Cite performances you have seen the actors give in movies, TV shows, or stage roles in justifying your selections.

Literature and Writing

Paraphrasing a Master of Words

Just when all seems lost for Christian because of his inability to speak the lovely phrases that Roxane requires, Cyrano comes to his rescue. Choose three sections of Cyrano's speech to Roxane. Then paraphrase each one. If necessary, look up the meaning of difficult words. Read your paraphrases to the class.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

What does this scene imply about why people are attracted to each other? On what qualities do the various characters base their relationships to others? Examine the text to find evidence that addresses these issues. You might want to look at such elements as what Christian says to Roxane when he is speaking on his own, how Roxane reacts to Christian's lack of eloquence, and what Cyrano focuses on as he rescues Christian's attempt to woo Roxane. In your group work together to predict the future of these three characters.

Performing

This part of the play contains three entertaining episodes that can be acted in class. One is the conversation between Roxane and de Guiche, where he attempts to seduce her. Another is the famous balcony scene, in which Cyrano helps Christian find the words to declare his love for Roxane. The third is when Cyrano stalls de Guiche as the wedding is conducted. Choose one of these scenes to act. Practice your lines, and perform your scene for the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 4

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Are your mother and sisters the most beautiful women in your community? Are your father and brothers the most handsome men? How about your boyfriend or girlfriend, cousins, aunts, and uncles?

Journal

Write in your journal about why you care for all these people anyway, even though their physical beauty may not win contests. What does this fact suggest to you about why we love people?

Setting a Purpose

Read to see how one character in the play makes an important discovery.

BACKGROUND

The Plot Thickens

The sequence of events in a story, novel, or play is called the **plot**. Because drama is one of the oldest forms of literature, many of our ideas about plot are based on the ideas and practices of ancient Greek and Roman dramatists. The first part of the plot is called the **exposition**. It introduces the characters and presents the conflicts they will have to address during the play, in addition to describing the setting, time, and situation. Some of these elements are shown to the audience, others are described by the characters or in stage directions. The conflicts are developed during the next part of the play, the **rising action**, in which tension grows and events become more complicated. The rising action leads to the **climax**, or point of highest emotional pitch. After the climax, the **falling action**, which is the logical result of the climax, leads to the play's **resolution**, or final outcome.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), who wrote extensively on art and drama, believed that in the best plots, events must happen *because of* the previous ones, not just *after* them. The English novelist E. M. Forster (1879–1970) echoed Aristotle, stating that in a story events happen after each other in a time sequence. In a plot, the events are bound together by cause and effect. He explained the difference this way: “The king died and then the queen died” is a story. “The king died and then the queen died of grief” is a plot.”

Did You Know?

This act of the play showcases Cyrano's bravery in battle. Not long after the play's premiere, Cyrano's stage exploits actually inspired real-life soldiers. In 1914, at the start of World War I, a group of French soldiers heading into battle called themselves the Cyrano Division. As their insignia, or symbol, they chose the Chanticleer, a rooster made famous by another one of Rostand's plays.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

abject [əb'jekt] *adj.* wretched; pathetic

banshee [bæn'shē] *n.* Irish spirit who signaled a coming death

epigrams [ep'ə gramz] *n.* meaningful sayings

gudgeon [gudʒ'ən] *n.* small bait fish

haute cuisine [öt kwi zēn'] *n.* elaborate cooking

insolence [in'sə ləns] *n.* rudeness; disrespect

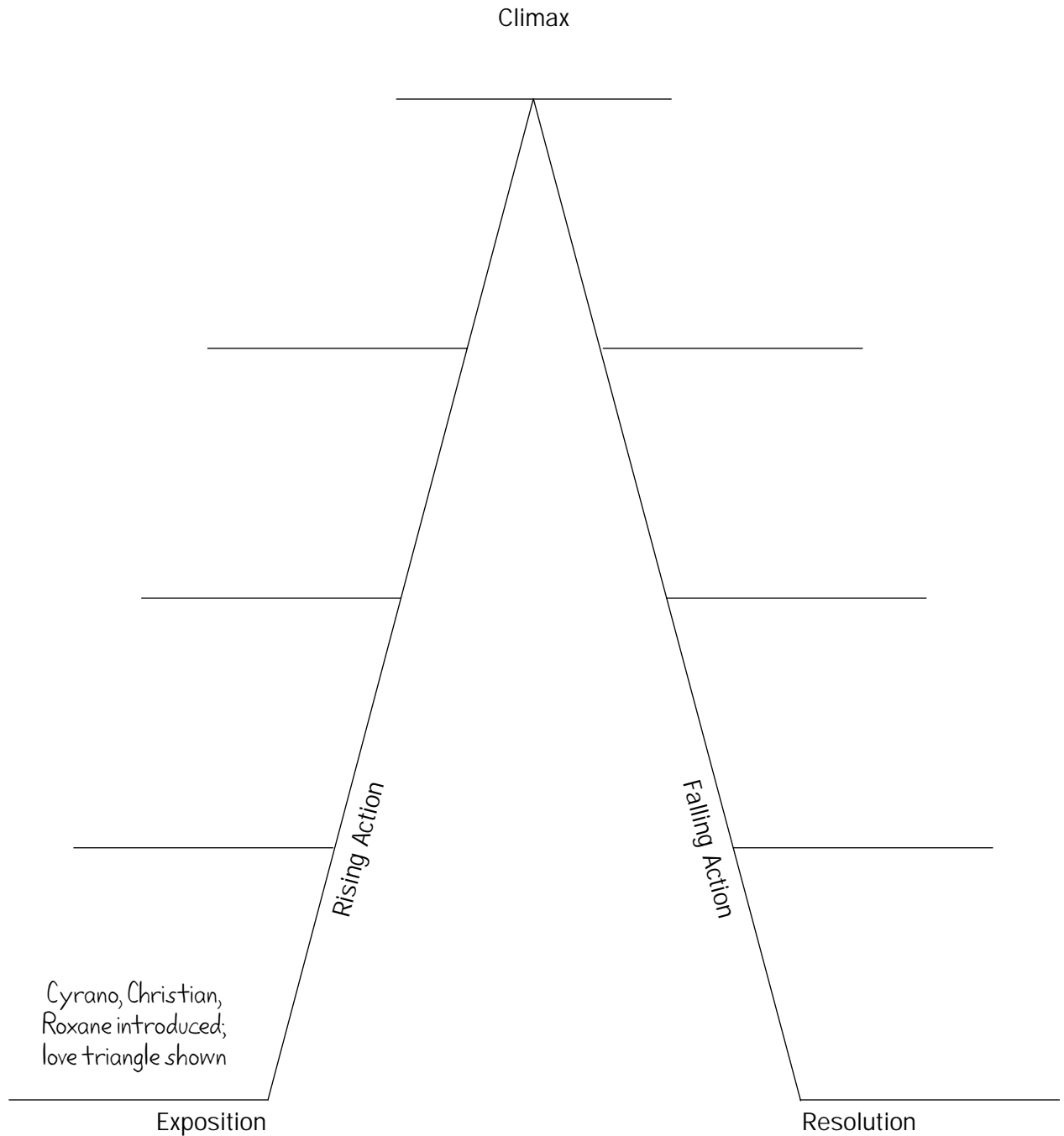
specious [spē'shəs] *adj.* false, but seeming true

vacuous [vək'ū əs] *adj.* empty

Active Reading

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 4

In the **Background** on page 24, you read about the plot elements in a work of literature. By the time you finish act 4 of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, you will have encountered all of the major plot elements except for the falling action and resolution, which occur in the play's final act. Use the chart on this page to fill in the different plot elements, beginning with the exposition in act 1 and including the climax. There is space on the chart to add events that occur in the final act.



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Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 4

Personal Response

What were your feelings at the end of the act as Cyrano leads the cadets into battle? Do you think Cyrano will survive the battle?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is the military significance of de Guiche's white scarf? What happens to it? What does Cyrano think about the white scarf, and what does he do for it?

2. What realization does Roxane finally come to about Christian? How does this realization affect Christian?

3. What does Christian urge Cyrano to do? In your opinion, what are his reasons?

Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 4

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. What do you think would be Roxane's reaction if she were to learn the truth about Christian and Cyrano and her relationship with them?

5. Describe Roxane's character so far. Do you feel that she is worthy of Cyrano's love? of Christian's? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

In his 1971 translation of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, commissioned by Michael Langham (the artistic director of the Tyrone Guthrie Theater), Anthony Burgess was asked to substitute Roxane's physical appearance at the army camp with the arrival of a letter from her instead. Langham claimed that the arrival of Roxane at the battlefield, wafting perfume and bearing a gourmet dinner, trivialized the life-and-death situation of the soldiers. Furthermore, Langham felt that her arrival "relieved the tension of a scene which . . . should remain taut to the end." What is your opinion? In a few paragraphs, describe the tension indicated by Langham and analyze the effect of Roxane's presence in the scene. How would the scene be different if only a letter had arrived? If you were the artistic director, how would you handle the scene? In your answer, keep in mind today's modern audience and their response.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Cyrano makes a very difficult sacrifice at the end of this act. He decides not to reveal the truth to Roxane, and he puts the letter in Christian's dying hands. By doing so, he gives up all hope of ever winning Roxane's love for himself. In your group, discuss why Cyrano makes this sacrifice. Look for clues in the text of the play as to his motivation. Then discuss Rostand's reasons for having his character behave in such a manner.

Journalism Connection

Imagine that you are a war correspondent assigned to the siege of Arras during the Thirty Years' War. Your editor has asked you to come up with human interest stories that would let viewers or readers know what it is like for the common soldier at the front. Using the information in this scene, create either a script and list of camera shots for a video report on the Gascony cadets on the eve of battle or a written story about the cadets as they prepare for the critical assault. Begin by listing elements in the scene that might make a good story. Come up with a "hook" or "angle" to create human interest. Then create your report and share it with the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What are the five most important things you hope to have accomplished by the time you are fifty years old?

Chart It

Think about categories like family, career, and personal accomplishments. Create a chart that lists what you hope to achieve and how long you think it will take to accomplish each goal.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover how one character looks back on his own rich life.

BACKGROUND

Foreshadowing is a literary technique that involves the use of clues to prepare readers for what will happen later in a narrative. These clues are often events or statements that seem insignificant at the time but are later seen to have pointed forward to an important event in the plot. Authors use foreshadowing to build suspense and increase the reader or viewer's involvement.

This play is rich in the use of foreshadowing. An example is in the beginning of act 1. While waiting at the pastry shop for Roxane to arrive, Cyrano composes a love letter to her. He decides, however, not to sign his name to it, writing only, "Your friend, who loves you." This seemingly unimportant decision turns out to be very significant by the end of the scene. Because he has not signed his name, he is able to give the letter to Christian to send as his own to Roxane. Looking back on the play, can you think of any other examples of foreshadowing?

Did You Know?

During the time Edmond Rostand was writing *Cyrano de Bergerac*, France became enmeshed in one of the greatest controversies in its history—the Dreyfus affair. In 1894, three years before the premiere of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a captain in the French army named Alfred Dreyfus was accused of selling military secrets to Germany. He was quickly convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. Because Dreyfus was Jewish, many French newspapers and politicians used the conviction to blame Jews for many of France's problems. Others suspected that a grave injustice had been committed. Over the next few years, evidence surfaced that Dreyfus had been convicted based on forged documents. His supporters, led by novelist Émile Zola, demanded that the case be reopened. The controversy raged until 1906, when Dreyfus was finally cleared of all charges and awarded the Legion of Honor medal. He was greatly admired for the way he endured his suffering and maintained his innocence and integrity. Many critics have seen in the character of Cyrano some of the qualities of Alfred Dreyfus—honesty, integrity, and determination. Edmond Rostand, Cyrano's creator, was one of Dreyfus's strongest defenders.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

buffoon [bʌ fʊˈn̩] *n.* clown; jokester

defiled [dɪ fɪˈlɪd] *adj.* polluted; dirtied

entomologist [enˈtɒ məˈlɒʒ ɪ st] *n.* scientist who studies insects

obstinate [ɒbˈstɪnɪt] *adj.* stubborn; inflexible

omniscient [ɒm nɪʃhənt] *adj.* all-knowing

stoic [stɔɪk] *adj.* calm; unexcitable

vermin [vɜrˈmɪn] *n.* small unpleasant animals like rats or fleas

Active Reading

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 5

In the final act of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, many of the play's conflicts are resolved. As you read act 5, use the graphic on this page to note the conflicts' outcomes.

Conflict

Outcome

Cyrano vs. de Guiche

Cyrano vs. anyone in society
who opposes him

Cyrano vs. Christian, in the contest
for Roxane's heart

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Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 5

Personal Response

What impressions from the final scene are the strongest and most lasting?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What do you learn about Cyrano from the conversation of the nuns, de Guiche, and Le Bret before he comes on stage? Why is this information necessary?

2. What information does de Guiche give to Le Bret about Cyrano? Why do you suppose Cyrano's old enemy has told Le Bret about the danger?

3. How does Roxane finally learn that it was Cyrano who wrote the letters and has loved her all along? Do you think she is surprised? Explain your answer.

Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac Act 5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How does Rostand use natural imagery to create the mood in the last scene? Evaluate the success of this technique.

5. In the **Focus Activity** on page 28, you listed what you hope to accomplish by the time you are older. What are Cyrano's accomplishments? For what will he be most known? In your opinion, what kinds of accomplishments in life are the most meaningful?

Literature and Writing

A Good Ending

Do you think that the play has a good ending? Why or why not? Write an essay in which you evaluate the conclusion of this play. Discuss elements that make a good ending. Support your ideas with evidence from the text. You may want to focus on what you learn about Cyrano's life after the battle at Arras, what he says in the convent garden about the sacrifices he has made, and his final speech as he lies dying.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

One of the characteristics Cyrano likes best about himself is his individuality. He believes in going his own way with flair and complete independence. American society also prizes individual freedom. In your group, give examples that show the value American society places on individual freedom. Then discuss how such an orientation leads to both positive and negative consequences.

Listening and Speaking

A eulogy is a speech given in praise of someone and often presented at that person's funeral. A eulogy usually includes an evaluation of the person's life and achievements, as well as reminiscences that capture the deceased's personal qualities. Some eulogies even use humor to convey the dead person's zest or appreciation for life. Use information you have learned about Cyrano throughout the play to write a eulogy that could be given at his funeral. Read your eulogy to your class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Responding

Cyrano de Bergerac

Personal Response

What lessons did you learn about life from reading *Cyrano de Bergerac*?

Writing About the Play

Imagine that you are a theater director who has just been given a copy of a new play, *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand. The potential producer of the play wants you to evaluate it so that she can decide whether or not to produce the play. She is particularly concerned about the lead role; will audiences respond warmly to the character of Cyrano? Using examples from the play, write a recommendation to the producer. Discuss whether or not the play is both funny and emotionally affecting, whether or not it has good roles for several actors and actresses, whether or not staging will be difficult and the sets expensive, and whether or not it is likely to be a success today.



Save your work for your portfolio.

The Masterpieces

Alba della Fazia Amoia

Before You Read

Focus Question

If you could create your own hero, what would he or she be like?

Background

In her book on playwright Edmond Rostand, Alba della Fazia Amoia examines the composition and production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. An expert in French and Italian literature, Amoia delivers a critical and historical view of the play and of the real Cyrano who lived in the seventeenth century and was the inspiration for Rostand's immensely popular tragic comedy.

Responding to the Reading

1. Do you agree with the author that, "even if Cyrano had been endowed with a beautiful nose, Roxane would still not love her cousin"? Explain your answer.

2. When Rostand speaks of the "soul of Cyrano," what do you suppose he means?

3. How does the real Cyrano compare to the fictional Cyrano?

4. How does Amoia define Cyrano's *panache*? How did you define it when you read Rostand's play? Do you agree with Amoia? Explain.

Literature Groups

Rostand's Cyrano lives in the seventeenth century amidst cardinals, noblewomen, and soldiers. Develop a contemporary eleventh-grade Cyrano who attends your high school. Describe his clothing, hobbies, interests, and his attitude toward life today. Create modern side characters as well. Write a five-minute act with a dialogue and create a setting similar to Cyrano's first appearance in Rostand's play. Present your act in front of the class.

Cyrano de Bergerac and Cyrano in English

Max Beerbohm

Before You Read

Focus Question

How do you explain your like or dislike for a particular movie or play?

Background

In the summer of 1898, Max Beerbohm went to see the original Paris production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In his review, Beerbohm, a dramatic critic for one of London's newspapers, applauds the production. He also correctly predicts that sooner or later someone will translate the play from French to English. His comments on one of the first translations follow his review.

Responding to the Reading

1. At the time Beerbohm reviews Rostand's play, authors and playwrights have begun to take an increasingly realistic approach to their work, focusing on the importance of objectivity over idealism. The success of a romantic character like Cyrano, therefore, comes as a surprise to many dramatic critics of the day. Beerbohm, however, appears to enjoy the play. What arguments does he use to defend the play's romantic vision?

2. Why is Beerbohm so opposed to the translation of *Cyrano* from French to English?

3. **Making Connections** Beerbohm says of *Cyrano*, "It may not be the masterpiece I think it, but at any rate it is one's money's-worth." Anthony Burgess, after translating the play, wrote: "[It] may not be the greatest play ever written, . . . [but it] was worth translating, is worth acting and, I trust you will find, worth reading." Why do you suppose the critics like *Cyrano de Bergerac* so much even though they agree that perhaps it's not the greatest play ever written?

Your Turn

What do you think of Edmond Rostand's play? Was it worth reading? In a paragraph or two, write your own review of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. This is your chance to reveal your true opinion of the play. However, you must back up your opinion with solid evidence (and other critics' opinions if you wish) and logical conclusions. Your argument should contain at least three key points.

Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self

Alice Walker

Before You Read

Focus Question

How do you see yourself? What are your favorite things about yourself? Your least favorite?

Background

Throughout his life, Cyrano has to deal with his large nose, which he sees as a physical disfigurement. In spite of this, he is able to develop self-respect and even affection for his nose. Oftentimes, we let what we perceive as weaknesses keep us from actively participating in life. Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, writes how a childhood injury affected her attitude toward life and how, eventually, she was able to regain her sense of self-worth.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why do you suppose Walker's family members say she didn't change at all after the accident?

2. How do her daughter's words help to heal Walker's pain?

3. **Making Connections** At the end of the essay, how do Walker's feelings about her eye compare to Cyrano's feelings about his nose?

Self-Portrait

Create a collage self-portrait using pictures and words cut from old magazines. Think about the things that make you who you are, then try to convey those qualities through your collage.

On Falling in Love

Robert Louis Stevenson

Before You Read

Focus Question

How would you describe being in love? Where did you get your information?

Background

Love is one of the great themes not only of *Cyrano*, but of life and the human condition. Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, offers some observations on the grand event of falling in love and its “strange” effects on the average individual.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Stevenson, can people plan or prepare to fall in love? Why or why not? Do you agree? Explain.

2. What does Stevenson mean when he says “the essence of love is kindness . . . kindness, so to speak, run mad”?

3. **Making Connections** Stevenson claims that a person in love wishes to be fully understood. “He wishes to be assured that he is not loved for this or that good quality, but for himself, . . . his pride revolts at being loved in a mistake.” How might this statement be viewed by Christian?

Postmodern Courtship

Does true love still exist today? In a small group, discuss the definition of true love. What elements do you consider to be important in a relationship? Discuss the things that make a relationship fun. What about the things that can make it painful? Finally, consider what forces may have influenced your definition of love, such as your friends, the media, personal experience, and so forth. Are these sources reliable? Why or why not?

Strangers in Love

Esther Gwinnell

Before You Read

Focus Question

Do you have any pen pals or people you communicate with regularly?

Background

Roxane, although she does not realize it, falls in love with Cyrano through his letters and the words he speaks to her through Christian. It is not unusual for people to develop relationships through written communication, often without ever having met each other. Psychiatrist Esther Gwinnell examines relationships that have flourished through the written word.

Responding to the Reading

1. In your opinion, is it possible to fall in love with someone whom you know only through correspondence? Explain your answer.

2. Gwinnell says that Annie and Tom’s “facelessness to each other actually contributed to the intimacy of the writing.” What does this statement mean? What are some of the pros and cons of communicating with someone whom you do not have to actually deal with in person?

3. **Making Connections** Roxane’s realization that she loves Christian/Cyrano’s soul more than Christian’s outward beauty occurs while Christian and Cyrano are away at war. Gwinnell says that “letters between The War and Home . . . seemed to form a lifeline between two people.” How might the sense of life-threatening danger brought on by the war have had an effect on Roxane’s ultimate conclusion?

Creative Writing

Imagine that you are acting as a sort of Cyrano to a friend who feels unable to write his or her own love letters. Write a letter or love poem designed to eloquently capture the attention of the object of your friend’s affection. Like Roxane, the recipient of this letter will not be impressed by mere trivialities.

TEST: *Cyrano de Bergerac*

Recall and Interpret (40 points total; 5 points each)

Write the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. Readers learn much about Cyrano before he appears on the stage because
- a. Roxane reads a letter from him.
 - b. he is described in stage directions.
 - c. Ragueneau wrote a poem about him.
 - d. playgoers talk about his exploits and odd appearance.
- _____ 2. While defeating the viscount in a sword duel, Cyrano also
- a. makes fun of the viscount's nose.
 - b. throws a bag of money to the actors.
 - c. composes a clever poem.
 - d. describes his love for Roxane to his friend Le Bret.
- _____ 3. An example of structural irony in the play is
- a. de Guiche's attraction to Roxane.
 - b. Cyrano's panache, or white plume.
 - c. Cyrano's inner and outer self.
 - d. when Cyrano goes to the pastry shop not knowing Roxane loves Christian.
- _____ 4. Christian's attempts to woo Roxane without Cyrano's help turn out to be
- a. successful.
 - b. disastrous.
 - c. foreshadowing.
 - d. ironic.
- _____ 5. In revenge for the wedding of Christian and Roxane, de Guiche
- a. sends the cadets to the war.
 - b. pretends he has fallen from the moon.
 - c. insults Cyrano's nose.
 - d. tries to get his uncle Cardinal Richelieu to punish Roxane.
- _____ 6. When de Guiche loses his white scarf at the battlefield, Cyrano
- a. loans him his own white scarf.
 - b. cheers up the cadets by talking about Gascony.
 - c. helps the cadets get more food.
 - d. criticizes him for sacrificing his panache.
- _____ 7. After speaking with Roxane at the battlefield, Christian realizes that
- a. he is going to die in battle.
 - b. she really loves Cyrano.
 - c. he does not really love her at all.
 - d. she and Cyrano have been playing a trick on him.
- _____ 8. Roxane finally understands that it is Cyrano she loves when
- a. she sees dead leaves in the garden.
 - b. he is able to recite the letter she found on Christian at Arras.
 - c. he appears with a bandaged head.
 - d. Ragueneau tells her that he has been hurt by the falling log.

Evaluate and Connect (60 points total; 30 points each)

Answer two of the following essay questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The most important symbol in the play is Cyrano's white plume. Discuss Rostand's use of this symbol, noting where it appears and the different meanings it has. Cite evidence from the play in your answer.
2. Discuss the following statement as it applies to the play: "Physical beauty is a lesser good than spiritual beauty." Support your discussion by citing passages and other evidence from the text. Analyze the key characters and events linked to this theme.
3. Choose one of Cyrano's speeches that you feel best describes his character. Note where in the play the speech occurs, why Cyrano gives it, and to whom it is directed. Discuss what the speech reveals about Cyrano and why you feel it represents him accurately. Support your argument with references to both the meaning and the verbal style of the speech.