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Cyrano de Bergerac

by Edmond Rostand



A teacher guide for studying the play and attending Southwest Shakespeare Company's performance

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Dear Educator:

Welcome to Southwest Shakespeare Company's 13th season! We are thrilled to continue to provide quality matinee productions to Arizona's students, and we are excited that you have chosen to bring your students to our performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

In this age of high-stakes testing, many schools and educators feel forced to limit their focus in the classroom to test-taking skills, thus eliminating enrichment activities such as attending theatrical performances. But as you know, these experiences often make the learning objectives relevant to students and must be valued as much (if not more!) as high AIMS scores and meeting AYP. You are providing your students with lasting memories and helping to create a new generation of theatre-goers. This experience will stay with your students long after the last bubble sheet has been marked and the latest mandate has been met. We applaud your efforts to keep the learning process memorable and meaningful for your students.

We hope you find the enclosed information, activities, and resources helpful and entertaining. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not found in this study guide, please feel free to contact me by phone at 480.510.3808 or via e-mail lewandowski.angee@chandler.k12.az.us.

Happy teaching!

Angee Lewandowski
Southwest Shakespeare Company
Education Committee Chair

Meeting AZ State Standards

By viewing Southwest Shakespeare Company's production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, students can meet several of Arizona State Arts Standards. In addition, the activities included in this teacher's guide, when implemented in the classroom along with other teacher-assigned reading and writing activities, will allow students to meet various Arizona State Standards in Writing, Reading, and Listening and Speaking.

WRITING STANDARDS – STRAND 3: WRITING APPLICATIONS

Concept 1: Expressive

Expressive writing includes personal narratives, stories, poetry, songs, and dramatic pieces. Writing may be based on real or imagined events (*It's Not a Nose, It's a Hose!*, page 11; *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder*, page 14).

Concept 2: Expository

Expository writing includes non-fiction writing that describes, explains, informs, or summarizes ideas and content (*A Guide to Cyrano's World*, pages 9-10).

Concept 5: Literary Response

Literary response is the writer's reaction to a literary selection. The response includes the writer's interpretation, analysis, opinion, and/or feelings about the piece of literature and selected elements within it (*Lost in Translation?* pages 12-13; *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder*, page 14).

READING STANDARDS – STRAND 2: COMPREHENDING LITERARY TEXT

Concept 1: Elements of Literature

Identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the structure and elements of literature (*It's Not a Nose, It's a Hose!*, page 11; *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder*, page 14).

Concept 2: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature

Recognize and apply knowledge of the historical and cultural aspects of American, British, and world literature (*A Guide to Cyrano's World*, pages 9-10).

LISTENING AND SPEAKING STANDARDS

Standard 3: Students effectively listen and speak in situations that serve different purposes and involve a variety of audiences (*Role Playing*, page 7; *A Guide to Cyrano's World*, pages 9-10; *Lost in Translation?*, pages 12-13).

ARTS STANDARDS – THEATRE

Strand 3: Evaluate

Students describe physical and vocal attributes appropriate to the characters in the play in class and professional performances (attending and discussing Southwest Shakespeare Company's performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac*; *Audience Discussion Questions*, page 5).

Students justify the perception of a performance and critique its production elements (attending and discussing Southwest Shakespeare Company's performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac*; *Audience Discussion Questions*, page 5).

Audience Discussion Questions

It is very important for students to understand the difference between going to the movies and going to see a live play performance. Ask them to consider the following questions to help them become aware of theatre etiquette as well as get them thinking about all of the elements that come together to bring a play to life for an audience.

Before seeing the play:

- What is the role of the audience in a live performance? What is its role in a movie? Why can't you eat popcorn or drink soda at a live theatre performance? Why can't you talk? What can happen during a live play performance that cannot happen in a movie theater?
- Actors in a live performance are very aware of their audience and are interested in the audience's reactions to the play. Why is an audience just as an important part of the play as the actors, director, and stage crew?
- Discuss the elements that go into producing a live play performance: the lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the "behind the scenes" elements of the theatre are working backstage as the play is being performed for the audience. Be aware of this as you watch the show. Observe the lighting and sound cues. How do these add or distract from the over all affect the play?



After seeing the play:

- Did your views about the play or any of the characters change after seeing this live production? If so, how? Try to be very specific about moments in the action that affected you.
- Did the production look like what you imagined as you read the play? How was it similar? How was it different?
- Which actor best portrayed his/her character? Why?
- How was the production different from the written play? What decisions did the director make about staging? Were these effective decisions? Why or why not?
- What did you think of the production values (sets, costumes, lighting)? Did they help you to better understand the plot of the play?
- If you would like to share your opinions or ask questions of the director, crew, or actors of the play, send your letters to:
Southwest Shakespeare Company
Education Committee
P.O. Box 30595
Mesa, AZ, 85275-0595

Cyrano - An Introduction

One of the many legends surrounding the premiere performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Theatre de la Porte-Saint-Martin in Paris on December 28, 1897 involves the playwright, Edmond Rostand, himself. As rumor has it, right before the curtain went up, the author threw himself at the feet of Benoit-Constant Coquelin, the great French actor for whom Rostand had specifically written the part of Cyrano, and cried, "Forgive me! Oh, forgive me, my friend, for having dragged you into this disastrous adventure!" Another bit of lore states that the audience so loved the play that they applauded late into the night (supposedly for forty-two curtain calls) – so late into the night that the stage manager finally gave up, left the curtain open, and went home.

Even if these are exaggerated stories, it is true that the play was a smashing success. *Cyrano* was a dramatic departure from the realist plays of the late nineteenth-century – favoring instead a romantic style set during the seventeenth-century, a time fondly remembered as a golden age of France. It was a time known for its heroic musketeers and women who were not only beautiful but intelligent and witty as well. *Cyrano* did not feature grim, unsentimental characters, but instead a swashbuckling, clever, albeit insecure hero, who sacrifices everything for the woman he loves, even going so far as to woo her for another man. *Cyrano* allowed its audience to once again experience and believe in the ideals of valor, courage, and sacrifice that seemed to be missing in the society to which it was first performed.

Cyrano was published in France in 1898 and translated into English that same year. The play was also adapted into a comic opera by Victor Herbert. In 1950, it was brought to the silver screen in the United States with Jose Ferrer playing the role of Cyrano (for which he was nominated and won an Oscar for Best Actor). In 1990, a French version was made starring Gerard Depardieu, who was also nominated for a Best Actor Academy Award (he lost to Jeremy Irons's portrayal of socialite Claus von Bulow, in the film *Reversal of Fortune*). In 1987, the movie *Roxanne*, a modern interpretation of the play, was written by and starred comedian Steve Martin. Martin's character, "C.D. Bales" a very large-nosed fire chief of a small, idyllic town, woos the woman he loves for the good-looking but tongue-tied "Chris"; however, in this version, the hero eventually gets the girl ... and gets to live.

Cyrano de Bergerac and its adaptations have remained popular throughout the years because of its eponymous character. Cyrano is larger-than-life, heroic, self-sacrificing, witty, and chivalrous, who lives his life not only with grand gestures but also grand actions; he exemplifies the play's themes of love, loyalty, sacrifice, and independence. Edmond Rostand's mix of humor, heroic action, and unrequited love has held audience captive for well over 100 years, and its ageless themes continue to resonate with audiences of all ages.



Role Playing

With a partner or a small group, develop a role-play based upon one of the scenarios below. All of the scenarios are related to issues in *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

The purpose of this activity is to get you thinking about these issues before reading the play so you can relate to what the characters are going through.

After you role-play, stay in the role so that your classmates and teachers can ask you questions. Construct a scene based upon the following situations:

1. A girl likes a boy in her class, but she is not sure how he feels about her. The girl decides to talk about it with her one of her best friends, another boy in her class. However, she doesn't know that her friend likes her. What happens?
2. A boy who is very popular, well-liked, and admired has confidence about everything he does -- except admitting his feelings to a girl he likes. He lacks confidence in this area because he is embarrassed by something to do with his appearance: bad skin, big ears, weak upper body strength, whatever. One day he confides to his best friend that he is in love with the most beautiful and intelligent girl at school, but he feels that he can never reveal his feelings because of his appearance problem. His best friend reacts to this news. What happens?
3. A girl is in love with a very good-looking boy who has written her the most amazing love letters. She was initially attracted to him because of his looks, but she has truly grown to love him because of his wonderfully romantic letters. However, she discovers that another boy, who is one of her best friends, is the person who has actually been writing the letters to her. What happens?



Scavenger Hunt

Part One: Discover how your classmates' opinions and experiences relate to *Cyrano de Bergerac*! Walk around the room and find a student to which each statement applies and ask him/her to initial the square (students may initial each paper only once).

The first person to complete all 20 squares wins! Share your findings with the class and discuss the situations to which you can relate and why.

<p>___ would sacrifice anything for love</p> <p><i>Cyrano</i></p>	<p>___ thinks that a good sense of humor is the most important thing in the opposite sex</p>	<p>___ enjoys supporting the arts by attending plays, dance recitals, poetry readings, concerts, etc.</p>	<p>___ has stood up for or helped to defend a friend</p>
<p>___ has regretted a mistake he/she has made</p>	<p>___ has lost someone important to him/her</p>	<p>___ has been attracted to someone, but then has later found out that person isn't right for him/her</p>	<p>___ has loved someone who was in love with someone else</p>
<p>___ has helped a friend who has wanted to let someone know that he/she is interested in him/her</p>	<p>___ likes to talk, joke around, and get attention by being witty</p>	<p>___ has kept a secret from a friend</p>	<p>___ has tried to break up a couple who is dating</p>
<p>___ is a good listener when friends' have problems they need to talk about</p>	<p>___ has been too embarrassed to approach or even talk to someone he/she is attracted to</p>	<p>___ has accidentally made enemies by something he/she has said</p>	<p>___ has had someone help them with writing a note/e-mail/letter to someone he/she likes</p>

Part Two: After reading and/or seeing *Cyrano de Bergerac*, **list the names of characters next to the appropriate statement** (the first one has been done for you). Be ready to defend your choices to the class with specific details from the play!

A Guide to Cyrano's World

What was the real Cyrano like? Who was fighting in the war portrayed in *Cyrano de Bergerac*? Who were the Gascon cadets? What was life like in seventeenth-century France? These questions can be helpful to understanding the historical context of the play.

For this activity, students are going to take on the role of dramaturge, or historian. The dramaturge provides the director, actors, muscset and costume designers, and musicians a historical and biographical perspective for the time in which the play takes place. The dramaturge helps make the play more real to the artists so they can do the same for their audience.

Activity:

1. Explain to students the role of a dramaturge and that they will take on this role in order to conduct research that will help them better understand and appreciate *Cyrano de Bergerac*.
2. Divide the class into five groups. Each group will research a different historical or biographical aspect of the play:
 - a. Group 1: investigate the historical events of the time of the play (1640-1655).
 - b. Group 2: investigate how theatres of that time period looked and operated.
 - c. Group 3: investigate the real Cyrano, Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac.
 - d. Group 4: investigate the life and work of Edmond Rostand.
 - e. Group 5: investigate the time period in which Rostand wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac* (late 1800s).
3. Each group will assign roles to its members: researcher(s), scribe(s), and illustrator(s). See the following page 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 their research. Or, you can schedule a class period in the school's media center or computer lab for research time. If possible, assign a portion of each class period for the students to meet in their groups to work on the project.
5. After conducting their research, each group should make a ten-minute presentation of their findings. Each presentation should include:
 - a. A poster board, PowerPoint presentation, or Publisher document (such as a brochure) that explains the aspects of the group's research.
 - b. 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 of music by Brahms or Tchaikovsky).
 - c. A report that summarizes their research.
6. After each group presents their research, have the other students write a summary of what they learned from each presentation.

A Guide to Cyrano's World

As a dramaturge, you will conduct research on a different historical or biographical aspect of the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. For your research, each member of your group must take on one of the following roles. If you have more than three people in your group, you may double up on roles as needed.

Group #: _____

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

Researcher(s): _____

Your role is to conduct research about the topic assigned to your group. Hopefully, 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 for this project, most (if not all) of the group members should take on the role of Researcher in some capacity.

Illustrator(s): _____

Your role is to draw or choose images to create a poster board, PowerPoint presentation, or Publisher document (such as a brochure) that reflect your group's research. For example, you could illustrate a seventeenth-century theatre, the real Cyrano and his nose, or what a Gascon cadet looked like. You can also draw maps or create a graphic organizer 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 report. You may ask each group member to provide a summary of their contributions to the group and then use these summaries to complete your report.



Adapted from Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities for the Enriched Classic Edition of *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand

It's Not a Nose, It's a Hose!

In *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Edmond Rostand created a character that is not only memorable for his large nose but also for his rapier wit, his skill with words, and his skill with the sword. Cyrano stands out as a memorable character because of how he manipulates language. His dialogue is a veritable banquet of poetic phrases and literary devices.

A perfect example is his inspired response to the Vicomte de Valvert's extremely lame insult about Cyrano's nose that occurs in Act I, Scene 4. This scene is one of the most famous from the play, as Cyrano decimates the Vicomte with his barrage of more creative insults. His clever comments are full of literary devices, especially that of metaphor and personification.

Activity:

1. Read Cyrano's speech in Act I, Scene 4, in which he provides a litany of clever insults about his own nose. Next, show the comparable scene from the movie *Roxanne*, starring Steve Martin, in which the character C.D. (the Cyrano role), provides a modern list of insults for his extremely large nose. 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 (example: "Magisterial nose, no wind/Could give thee a cold, except the mistral").
2. Introduce/review two literary devices: metaphor ("'Tis the Red Sea when it bleeds," *Cyrano*) and personification ("Table for two?" *Roxanne*). Define each term for the class, using examples from both the play and the movie. Note how both Cyrano and C.D., both poets at heart, use these devices constantly in their dialogue, but most acutely in the monologues introduced at the beginning of this activity.
3. Now it is the students' turn to be poets. Each student should come up with a clever description of Cyrano's nose, using either a metaphor or personification. Once each student has his/her description, they should illustrate it on construction paper (either by drawing or using pictures from magazines to create a collage). Students should also write their descriptions on the front of the poster. Then students should write on the back of the poster whether the description is metaphor or personification.

Alternative: Have students create both a metaphor and a personification description. Draw a line down the middle of the poster, and illustrate both descriptions.

4. Place the posters on the walls of your classroom to create a gallery walk. Number each poster. Have students number a sheet of paper with however many posters are in the gallery walk. As the students look at each poster, they should write on their paper (by the appropriate number) a "M" if they think the description is a metaphor or a "P" if they think the description is a personification.
5. After all students have completed the gallery walk, ask each artist to explain to the class why his or her description is either a metaphor or personification. Students can check their lists to see if they agree or disagree.

Lost in Translation?

Cyrano de Bergerac was originally written in French, and since its debut, various scholars and poets have translated it into many languages. Although each version tells the same story of love, loss, and regret, the rhyme, rhythm, meter, and overall wording is very different. Translators have much to consider: they have to strike a balance between meaning, keeping the same intended rhyme scheme, and keeping the reader (or audience) interested. The texts vary so greatly because each translator will give weight to one of these more than the other.

Activity:

1. Break the students into four groups. Give each group a different version of the first stanza of *Cyrano's* speech to the Vicomte de Valvert and the crowd at the Hotel de Bourgogne in Act One (see the following page for these translations).
2. Have students read their translation as a group and answer the following questions:
 - a. Does the language feel elevated to you? Accessible? Modern?
 - b. What is your first impression of *Cyrano*? Is he pompous? Intelligent? Witty? Sarcastic?
 - c. What does his language or choice of words tell you about his character?
 - d. How does the rhythm work to emphasize these character traits?
3. Ask each group to give a dramatic reading of their stanza. Students can decide how they will present it (read as a group, each person read one line, two people read one line, etc.), but each group member must read at least one line of the stanza. Give the groups a few minutes to practice their performance. After each group has performed, ask the class these questions:
 - a. Did the groups perform a similar or different characterization of *Cyrano* each time?
 - b. What were some of the similarities of their characterizations? Some of the differences?
4. Hand out a copy of all four translations to the students. Have them read each translation to themselves. Give them a few minutes to compare each text and then discuss these questions:
 - a. Look at the rhyme, rhythm, and meter of each of the translations. What similarities and differences are there?
 - b. Does one translation seem more poetic than the others?
 - c. Does one translation create a better mental image in your head?
 - d. Does one translation seem easier for you to understand?
 - e. Which translation do you prefer? Why?
 - f. Were you surprised at how different each translation was?

Lost in Translation?

Cyrano
(shutting his eyes for a second):
Wait while I choose my rhymes ... I have them now!
(He suits the action to each word):
I gaily doff my beaver low,
And, freeing hand and heel,
My heavy mantle off I throw,
And I draw my polished steel;
Graceful as Phoebus, round I wheel,
Alert as Scaramouch,
A word in your ear, Sir Spark, I steal—
At the envoi's end, I touch!
(They engage):

Thomas, Gladys and Mary F. Guillemand, trans. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. By Edmond Rostand.

Cyrano
(Closing his eyes for a moment)
Wait, I'm thinking of how to begin ... There, I have it.
(His actions match his words throughout the ballade.)
I take off my hat and discard it,
I slowly abandon my cloak,
I draw my sword out of its scabbard,
Preparing to put it to use.
For the moment, I stand here before you,
Elegant, calm, and serene,
But I warn you, my impudent scoundrel,
When I end the refrain, I draw blood.
(They begin fencing.)

Blair, Lowell, trans. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. By Edmond Rostand. New American Library, a division of Penguin Putnam, Inc.: New York, 1972.

CYRANO
[closing his eyes a second]
Wait. I am settling upon the rhymes. There. I have them.
[In declaiming, he suits the action to the word.]
Of my broad felt made lighter,
I cast my mantle broad,
And stand, poet and fighter,
To do and to record.
I bow, I draw my sword ...
En garde! With steel and wit
I play you at first abord ...
At the last line, I hit!

Hall, Gertrude, trans. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. By Edmond Rostand. Barnes and Noble Classics: New York, 2003.

CYRANO
(Closes his eyes for an instant.)
Stop ... Let me choose my rimes ... Now!
Here we go –
(He suits the action to the word, throughout the following:)
Lightly I toss my hat away,
Languidly over my arm let fall
The cloak that covers my bright array –
Then out swords, and to work withal!
A Launcelot, in his Lady's hall ...
A Spartacus, at the Hippodrome! ...
I dally awhile with you, dear jackal,
Then, as I end the refrain, thrust home!
(The swords cross – the fight is on.)

Hooker, Bryan, trans. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. By Edmond Rostand. Bantam Dell: A Division of Random House: New York, 2004.

Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

One of the major themes of *Cyrano de Bergerac* concerns the conflict between inner beauty and outer beauty. What does the heart want most – beauty or brains?

Activity:

1. Have students respond to this writing prompt: "Could you love someone you don't find physically attractive? Why or why not?" Give students a few minutes to write down their thoughts.
2. Next, show students several photos of current actors, actresses, models, sports figures, etc. Ask the students: "Why are these people considered attractive?" After they have answered, ask them, "Does this mean these people are easier to love?" Allow the class to respond.
3. Then show the class images of Quasimodo (from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), Beast (from *Beauty and the Beast*), Charlize Theron's character from *Monster*, Cameron Diaz's character from *Being John Malkovich*, Cyrano de Bergerac (either Jose Ferrer's or Gerard Depardiu's picture), or any other pictures of characters who are less than perfect. Ask students, "What is "wrong" with these people? Could you love them?" Allow students to respond.
4. As a transition to the text of the play, ask students, "Who is 'attractive' in *Cyrano de Bergerac*?" You will get a variety of answers, from the obvious Roxane (beautiful) and Christian (handsome), to Cyrano (intelligent, humorous, etc.). Then ask students, "What attracts us to other people besides their looks?" Have students discuss this with a partner or a small group.
5. Make a T-chart on the board and label one column "Inner Beauty" and the other column "Outer Beauty." Ask the class to divide the major characters in the play into one of the two categories. Write the names of the characters under the appropriate heading, having students explain their reasoning (you could also have students do this on their own or with a partner before sharing with the class). Roxane should end up on both lists.
6. Ask the students, "How does Cyrano see himself?" Possible answers could include that he is full of bravado, he wields a sword with panache, he is witty, his wit is as sharp as his sword, but he lacks self-confidence. He is afraid of what Roxane thinks of him. Then ask students, "How does Cyrano's perception of himself affect his life?" Allow students to respond.
7. Ask students to review what they wrote at the beginning of the lesson. Do they still agree with what they wrote? Give students time to add to or edit their writing.
8. Now have students consider how differently the play might have turned out if Cyrano had been confident in his inner beauty. Have students rewrite one of two scenes: Act II, Scene 6 (where Roxane tells Cyrano that she loves Christian), or Act III, Scene 1 (where Roxane reads the letters to Cyrano and suggests that Christian is smarter than Cyrano). How could these scenes be changed so that Cyrano shows more confidence in himself, which would then lead to a happy ending for the play?
9. When the students rewrite one of the scenes, they don't need to rewrite every word; they can add or change some elements in each scene so that the outcome is different.
10. For the next class, students could share their new scenes with small groups and explain how their version of *Cyrano de Bergerac* would end.

Educator Comments

Please help us to improve. We invite you to share your thoughts about this production. Please **return this form** to any Southwest Shakespeare Company volunteer as you leave, **OR mail** it to us at P.O. Box 30595, Mesa, AZ 85275, **OR fax** it to 480.924.4310. Thank you for completing and returning this form, for coming to our performance, and for introducing your students to the wonders of live theatre!

Please feel free to use the back of this form to include any additional comments.

Name of Play: _____ Performance Date: _____

Did the confirmation packet provide you with the information you needed? Why/why not? _____

Did you find the Teacher Guide helpful? What did you particularly like/dislike? _____

Did you enjoy the performance? Why/why not? _____

Could you understand it? _____

Could you hear it? _____

What did you think of it visually? _____

Would you recommend Southwest Shakespeare to other educators? Why/why not? _____

Your name and school (optional) _____

E-mail address (optional) _____