

The Play's the Thing: The Drama of *Cyrano de Bergerac*

Grade Level: Seventh Grade

Presented by: Deborah Wilson, Platte River Academy, Highlands Ranch, CO

Length of Unit: Ten Lessons

I. ABSTRACT

Drama grows from the physical and mental experiences of real people. No better illustration of this fact can be found than in the study of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a play constructed on the life of a real person from 17th century France. Drama is visual, auditory, and spoken. The imagination used to bring a play reading to life requires “suspending disbelief.” The students will be given opportunities to practice dramatic “living” through charades, pantomime, and “market scenes.” Through their experience with the text and dramatic expansion, students will examine their own values in comparison to Cyrano and other characters. Students will explore cultural and historical diversity, and experience the universality of human experience. The sayings, literary terms, and text are all elements of the Core Knowledge curriculum for seventh grade. French vocabulary, literary terms, essay and journal writing skills will also be incorporated.

II. OVERVIEW

- A. Developing skills in reading and appreciating the dramatic form of classic literature will expand imagination, encourage originality and improve writing skills.
- B. The Core Knowledge content covered is the study of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, literary terms, dramatic elements, elements of fiction, sentence structure, speaking skills, writing nonfiction essays and vocabulary development.

III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- A. For teachers:
 - Way, Brian. *Development through Drama*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1967.
 - Rostand, Edmund. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. (in any translation)
 - Cyrano de Bergerac* web site: <http://cyrano.kensai.com/index4.htm>
- B. For students:
 - 1. Conflict, plot elements, theme
 - 2. Author development of character traits
 - 3. Students should be acquainted with etymology of words to study French derivatives.
 - 4. Essay structure for exams
 - 5. Journal with five entries assigned a week in advance

IV. RESOURCES

Cyrano de Bergerac text

Journals

Internet access

Films: *Cyrano de Bergerac* (the Jose Ferrer version is in English, Gerard Depardieu version is French with subtitles which is very effective for pronunciation); *Roxanne* (with Steve Martin)

Materials for puppetry; video equipment

V. LESSONS

Lesson One: What is Drama?

A. Objectives:

1. *Lesson Content:* Define drama, charades, pantomime. Explore similarities and differences between life and drama/theatre activities. Students will experience interacting in a “market place” as different characters as a preview to the opening scene to *Cyrano*.
2. *Concept Objective:* To understand the literary terminology necessary to engage in dramatic activities depicting different historical times; to explain how situations and characters in drama are similar or different from those in life.
3. *Skill Objective:* The student will learn the French terms, charades and pantomime and how they relate to the study of drama. The student will participate in originating speech for an imaginary character and will perform with the class. The student will extrapolate his/her knowledge of scenes into understanding the opening of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

B. Materials:

Brian Way's *Development through Drama*
Topic cards for actors
Playbooks, *Cyrano de Bergerac*
Overhead projector

C. Vocabulary:

Drama - an art form that allows us to be spectator/participators in a story. “Drama makes powerful comments on human nature and the human condition; it reveals human truth arising out of characters under pressure of situation; it is a persuasive and memorable mode of conveying truth” (Altenbernd 8). Drama is visual, auditory, and spoken.

Charades

Pantomime

D. Procedures:

1. Solicit definitions of drama. Record on overhead.
2. Provide definition from vocabulary.
3. Have students look up charades and pantomime in dictionary and come to a consensus.
4. Demonstrate definitions.
5. Practice movement (pantomime) and speaking without embarrassment--a whole class activity. Explain the concept of a market place where half the class is sellers and the other half buyers. Working in pairs, sellers and buyers talk and introduce different elements such as: a quarrel about a price or quality, suspicion of theft, a very rich person comes to buy, a vendor sells refreshments. It might be best to hand them scenarios if the conversation lags. Be prepared. (Other roles might correlate with Act I scene i.) Costuming helps at this age. Aprons, long skirts, and hats can help suggest a different historical context. This is drama!
6. Videotape without focusing too closely on individuals; discretion will allow more freedom. After a few minutes of successful conversation, congratulate them on imagination and pass out playbooks.
7. Begin reading the setting instructions; remind them of the time period. Envision the set; place the characters into the setting. **Necessary background**

information: Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619 - 1655) was a French duelist and satirist who wrote science fiction; the play is set during 1640 and 1655 at the time France and Spain were in a conflict in Arras; Gascons were soldiers from the province of Gascony and renowned for their courage, chivalry, and wit. Read through the character list, reinforcing pronunciation. Select readers reminding them of the roles they created in the “marketplace.”

8. After giving them time to peruse the text, begin reading aloud. This is drama scripted!

E. Evaluation/ Assessment

1. Oral quiz after reading to reinforce terms, and knowledge of background
2. View video to assess level of participation.

Lesson Two: Characters coming alive!

A. Objective:

1. *Lesson Content:* Identify dramatic terms and use that information to find examples in the films. View the films *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Roxanne* during the opening scene only. Explore theatre traditions in different cultures. Referring to the previously written journal entries, a double entry will be written. Review of characterization techniques.
2. *Concept Objective:* Recognize that characters have different goals and feelings. How do the dramatic techniques of soliloquies and asides engage the audience more fully? Understand how drama allows participants and audience to investigate emotions and behavior vicariously and safely.
3. *Skill Objective:* Ability to refer to previous knowledge and apply to a new genre. Critical viewing of the film media. Developing empathy. Cultural concepts in a historical perspective.

B. Materials:

Appendix C - Literary Terms, Drama
Appendix B - Vocabulary
Playbooks
Cyrano de Bergerac (Depardieu) Film
Roxanne (Martin) Film
Overhead projector

C. Vocabulary: soliloquies, asides, parody, wit

D. Procedures

1. Definitions from overhead
2. Read through Act 1, stopping for vocabulary
3. View the two videos, showing the contrast in opening scenes and the “nose” speech, stopping at the end of the first act.
4. Students will take notes on when they see soliloquies, asides, parody and wit.
5. Define and discuss *precieuses* and the cultural effect of the theatre performance.
6. Respond to video differences in journal (homework) guidelines in class

E. Assessment

1. Quality of notes taken
2. Expression and fulfillment of journal writing

Lesson Three: What kind of character are you?

A. Objective:

1. *Lesson Content:* Identify characters by describing their behavior in relation to personal experience through journaling. Grammar lesson on the complexity of sentence structure. Create an awareness of the complexity of sentence structure, particularly in conversation. Label characters according to the definitions given, finding textual examples to support your labeling. Discuss how the “public” Cyrano is exposed at the end of Act I as a hopelessly romantic poet who then swaggers off to defend Lign`ere against a hundred men.
2. *Concept Objectives:* Expanding on characterization, explain how situations and characters in drama/theatre are similar or different from those in life. Expand on characterization, in particular, specialization of dramatic characters.
3. *Skill Objective:* Writing to express new knowledge in a personal context. Building on dramatic characterization terminology. Sentence structure knowledge. Reading skills. Review of previous knowledge, “ballade” and application to a new context.

B. Materials:

Appendix C
 Playbooks
 Grammar text
 Journals
 Overhead projector

C. Vocabulary: foil, antagonist, confidante, protagonist, ingenue, admirer

D. Procedures:

1. On the overhead or board quote Cyrano from Act I, “And, to prove that the pen and the sword may not be incompatible partners, the world will now see a ballade, made to measure for you.” (Remind them of the definition for “ballade” from the poetry unit. Also use previous knowledge of sentence diagramming.) Dependent clauses illustrated in any grammar text are the reference point. Mini-grammar lesson using sentences from the text.
2. List characters and characteristics using Appendix C. In drama, there are three characterizations you do not commonly encounter in ordinary fiction. One is “foil,” the other is “confidante,” and last is “ingenue.” In addition, to those three types we will find the antagonist, protagonist and admirer. Ingenue is a nice French term for a young, usually beautiful, innocent girl. A foil is a character that is used to contrast with another to show us the main character’s true thoughts. The protagonist is the main character in the plot with whom we usually feel sympathy. The antagonist is the opponent and can be a force rather than a character. Using these definitions let us identify the characters from *Cyrano de Bergerac*.
3. Find examples from the text to support the characterization.
4. Class discussion on reading.

E. Assessment:

1. The ease with which students are able to find examples from the text will prove the grasp of the knowledge of characterization.
2. Using a flash card or round robin technique, have the students identify character types and match with names.
3. Informal assessment: class participation in discussion

Lesson Four: Sayings ring true!

- A. Objective:
1. *Lesson Content:* We will use *Cyrano* to understand common sayings and phrases with increasing cultural and literary awareness. Read Act II, discussing the character of Ragueneau as an admirer and foil first, the extraordinary reaction of Cyrano when he discovers Roxane loves Christian, the camaraderie of the cadets, and finally the unbelievable deal with Christian. Introduce or review the literary elements of comedy and tragedy, and the literary terms of irony and hyperbole.
 2. *Concept Objective:* Recognize that drama permits exploration of human behavior despite cultural, ethnic, temporal, and spatial differences. Increasing cultural and literary awareness will be incorporated by understanding common sayings and phrases from Core Knowledge. Literary elements of comedy and tragedy, and literary terms of irony and hyperbole will be understood and applied to the play.
 3. *Skill Objectives:* Reading for understanding of human behavior. Memorization of sayings from Core Knowledge. Learning literary elements and literary terms. Discussion participation.
- B. Materials:
- Appendix C
 - Appendix D
 - Playbooks
 - Copy of Steve Martins “nose” quips from the [cyrano.kensai](http://cyrano.kensai.com) web site
- C. Key Vocabulary and Sayings from Core Knowledge:
- All for one and one for all!
 - The best laid plans of mice and men oft go awry.
 - Nose out of joint
 - Don’t cut off your nose to spite your face.
 - The pen is mightier than the sword.
 - comedy, tragedy, irony and hyperbole
- D. Procedures:
1. Brainstorm ideas for the sayings in Appendix D; most sayings will be clear at this point in the reading. Record answers in notes to be used for quiz.
 2. Define comedy and tragedy (Appendix C) and decide through discussion into which category *Cyrano* fits. This will spawn some controversy.
 3. Define irony and hyperbole using the “nose” speech as an illustration.
 4. Continue reading Act II, applying characterization as you go. Ragueneau serves not only as an admirer of Cyrano but as a foil. Roxane is not our favorite character when she breaks Cyrano’s heart. We see the cadets as brave and loyal, but also a little crass. The conspiracy with Christian at the end of Act II is almost unbelievable. Stop frequently to insert vocabulary word definitions, and to invite discussion of the content.
- E. Assessment:
1. Discussion participation grade
 2. Note taking and vocabulary completion

Lesson Five: The farce of romance and the delay of DeGuiche

- A. Objectives:

1. *Lesson Content:* Reading and viewing Act III with both the *Cyrano* film and *Roxanne*. Comedy will be stressed in this Act as will the effectiveness of the parody of the Steve Martin film. Vocabulary review as we read. Discussion of the “bittersweet theme of unrequited love silently and nobly borne.” (Masterpieces 159).
 2. *Concept Objectives:* Discover the recurrence of common themes in different cultural and historical periods. Awareness that comedy is a difficult literary and real life word to define.
 3. *Skills Objectives:* Continue to reinforce the French pronunciation as we read. Vocabulary memorized and understood in context and by use of charades. Literary term of comedy learned. Reading with expression.
- B. Materials: Playbooks, Appendix B, notes, Appendix C, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Depardieu) Film, *Roxanne* (Martin) Film
- C. Vocabulary: From Appendix B select words, Comedy from Appendix C
- D. Procedures:
1. Read aloud with emphasis on pronunciation, expression and characterization, Act III. Stop to discuss the comedic situations, actions, and words of the characters.
 2. Show the film sequence that matches Act III in *Cyrano* and *Roxanne*. Guide the discussion of how we have recurrent themes in different cultural and historical periods. (Always preview and edit the film sequences; *Roxanne* can be rather “sophisticated.”) Unrequited love has always been a major theme. Is the importance we give love merited? Remind them of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, and solicit response to the differences and similarities between that drama and *Cyrano*. Does Cyrano show a deeper love for Roxane by granting her wishes and sacrificing his own feelings? Could we produce an updated version that is more realistic? What are the choices we usually make for a love interest based upon? Would you appreciate the wit and “smooth talking” or the good looks the most? Several activities could be used to make this more interesting, such as creating a boyfriend or girlfriend sectioned flip book of different characteristics which are appealing. Acting out a student written scene is usually quite effective.
 3. Students write a double entry journal for the “Friday” journal entry after the reading and discussion of Act III.
 4. What is comedy? That with which we feel uncomfortable? Define.
 5. Terms and Act III vocabulary quiz material reviewed by way of playing charades or Round the World.
- D. Assessment:
Quiz students over terms and characterization, matching is effective at this point.

Lesson Six: Pro or An- tagonist?

- A. Objective:
1. *Lesson Content:* Complete the definition and textual understanding of protagonist and antagonist while reading Act Four. Discuss the skills a playwright uses to present a character with which the audience will sympathize.
 2. *Concept Objective:* Identifying the importance of the dramatic element of characterization.
 3. *Skill Objective:* Recognize that characters have different goals and feelings.
- B. Materials: Playbooks, Appendix B, Appendix C

- C. Vocabulary: antagonist, protagonist, vocabulary from Appendix B
- D. Procedure:
 1. My students love to read aloud. Have them give reasons for wanting to read a certain character's part and reassign reading parts for Act IV. This exercise will encourage the recognition that characters have different goals and feelings. Review appropriate vocabulary before reading. What makes us sympathize with Cyrano? Why are we against De Guiche? Is Christian an antagonist or a foil? Rostand has been criticized for making the other characters pale beside Cyrano. Would you like to see Roxane have more sense, Christian tell the truth, or De Guiche be a nastier enemy?
 2. Add to protagonist and antagonist notes.
 3. Write down predictions and outcomes for the protagonist and antagonist and use in a class discussion about predictions and outcomes of the story.
- E. Evaluation:

Quiz over Acts I, II, III and vocabulary

Lesson Seven: If I Could Change, I Would!

- A. Objective:
 1. *Lesson Content:* Explore similarities and differences between life and drama activities by explaining the consequences of a character's behavior and suggest alternative behavior. Identify characters by describing their behavior in relation to the student's personal experience. Researching period costumes and distinguishing the importance of costume to Cyrano's character interpretation. Read Act V.
 2. *Concept Objective:* Costuming is an important element in the presentation of a character. Realizing that characters are real people because of emotions and fears/desires.
 3. *Skill Objective:* Research skills in using the Internet and the library to discover the different historical costuming periods. Applying the research to understand the element of characterization that is dependent on costuming. Realizing the importance of costuming to personality or presentation of character in real life. Empathy with difficult life decisions.
- B. Materials: Playbooks, computer with internet access, library resources
- C. Vocabulary: search engines, web sites
historical costuming
cavalier
aristocracy
- D. Procedures:
 1. Present the importance of costuming to characterization. Relate to the importance the students feel about their clothing or "costume." Do "clothes make the man?" Use magazine pictures or overhead transparencies of stereotypical characters. Cartoons are sometimes available.
 2. Assign research projects on finding information and pictorial evidence of costuming in 17th century France. The main characters in Cyrano are cavaliers, nobles, or aristocracy. The web site in the bibliography is excellent; students may find others. Some may have to use library computers or books that can be shared with the class. If you have Internet access in the classroom, this is an excellent assignment for exploring nomenclature and key words.

3. Despite Cyrano's bravado and expertise as a soldier, he yearns for true love. He is a man who has strong beliefs and is willing to make enemies to defend them. Yet there is a tender, loyal side to him which we find endearing. Using a caricature drawing of the soldier Cyrano on one side of the paper, and a caricature drawing of Cyrano playing a lute on the other half, have students fill in descriptive words and phrases. They should choose a typical speech from the play to place in a speech or thought bubble illustrating the two sides of Cyrano. The illustration and word associations are strong visual memory tools for understanding.

- E. Assessment
Quality and appropriateness of the word association drawing
Careful research into costuming will be evident in presentation of findings

Lesson Eight: I Can Feel It!

- A. Objective:
1. *Lesson Content:* Role playing with facial expressions of grief and injury to create physical empathy with emotion. Awareness that physical empathy can translate into emotional empathy. (This is a precursor to the puppet project.) Journal record of reactions.
 2. *Concept Objective:* The physical experience of drama can increase awareness and empathy. The use of drama creates meaning that can be shared in writing.
 3. *Skill Objective:* Relaxation and focus for expression. Translating physical experience into writing expression.

- B. Materials:

For the teacher: Read Brian Way's book or a creative drama explanation.

Music appropriate to mood setting.

- C. Vocabulary: role playing

- D. Procedure:

1. Have students find a comfortable and private area in the room where they will not see each other. Initiate the role playing activity of creating facial expressions of grief and injury; give them suggestions for content and physical reaction. Use music to enhance mood and direction giving. It is most important that students participate. Some students have difficulty with this activity and need constant encouragement.
2. Discuss or record in journals the feelings that stem from controlling the physical reactions to express emotions. Help them understand the art of acting and empathy.
3. Read the final Act with expression, stopping them if necessary when expression is not evident and reviewing the exercise. This may take time and patience.

- E. Assessment:
Journal response and visual assessment

Lesson Nine: Paper Bag Puppets

- A. Objective:

1. *Lesson Content:* The students will be able to utilize previous knowledge to create a visual and kinesthetic product to symbolize the character traits of the main characters. They will choose a character and make a puppet that will have a speaking part when finished.

Vocabulary and Literary Terms Test

VII. HANDOUTS/WORKSHEETS

Appendix A	Journal Entries (To be used the week before the unit)
Appendix B	<i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i> Vocabulary
Appendix C	Literary Terms - Drama
Appendix D	Sayings and Phrases
Appendix E	Paper Bag Puppets
Appendix F	Essay Test

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Print

Altenbernd, Lynn and Lewis, Leslie. *A Handbook for the Study of Drama*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966.

Last, Ellen. *A Guide to Curriculum Planning in Classroom Drama and Theatre*. Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1990.

Rostand, Edmond. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. A new English version by James Forsyth. Woodstock, Illinois: The Dramatic Publishing Company, 1968.

Way, Brian. *Development through Drama*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1967. ISBN 0-391-00296

Film

Depardieu, Gerard. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. ORION Home Video, April 1998. ISBN 079289975X
Martin, Steve. *Roxanne*.

Web Sites

falson.jum.edu/~ramseyil/drama.htm (Provides drama resources, lesson plans)

<http://cyrano.kensai.com/index4.htm> (Provides a wealth of information including a publishing center for student papers, movie background, history, sources, and links to other sites.)
members.aol.com/TownGown/cyrano__1.htm (Provides a complete summary of the play, scene by scene, as well as many others interesting activities, and links)

www.ed.gov/database/ERIC...Digests/ed297402.html (lesson in creative dramatics)

www.siue.edu/COSTUMES (the French cavalier, the court dress of the mid-1600's is beautifully illustrated here)

Primary

Morgan, Kelly. *Lecture/teaching session* at the Tennessee Academy of Arts. Summer 1995.

Appendix A

Journal Entries

You will be writing on these topics during this week but you also need room after the entry to respond at a later date. We will be reading a selection that may change or enlarge your experience with the topics below. I call this a double entry journal. The minimum is half a page for each entry.

Monday - “Some people find it hard to express their true feelings. Have you had an occasion where it would have been best to tell your true feelings?”

Tuesday - “When I was a teenager, I thought my nose was ugly and was the first thing people saw. Do you have a feature that drives you crazy?”

Wednesday - “Protecting people or animals who are weaker than you are is important because...”

Thursday - “Sometimes telling the truth can be very costly. Write about an instance where telling the truth caused or would cause a lot of trouble?”

Friday - “Write a Valentine love letter to an imaginary person describing all their wonderful attributes.

Appendix B

Cyrano de Bergerac Vocabulary

From the “French”:

prote'ge'	rendezvous	panache
touché'	Madam	Mesdames
merci'	Mademoiselle	sachet
sou	Monsieur	Messieurs
de trop	voilà`	Pre'cieuses
escapade	vicomte	Cordon Bleu
feint	reverie	salut
effrontery		

Other “English” vocabulary

contemptuously	wit	supine
rabble	braggart	caper
convivial	insolent	felicitation
peremptorily	inquisitive	anguish
truculent	falsetto	pedantic
fop	buffoon	florid
divest	sotto voce	ecstasy
thespian	jovial	ravenous
extricate	histrionic	ominous
accomplices	petulantly	ludicrous
dithering	vehemently	furor
contrived	amid	glutton
unprecedented	bevy	impudence

Appendix C

Literary Terms - Drama

You will take notes on the following terms and keep them in your notebook. As we read, you will find and record examples from the text. You will be tested on these terms during the unit.

1. soliloquy

2. aside

3. confidante

4. foil

5. antagonist

6. protagonist

7. tragedy

8. comedy

9. irony

10. hyperbole

Appendix D

Sayings and Phrases

There are several sayings that can be applied to the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. As we read, you will find topics that seem to illustrate the following sayings. When you have a good example, please share with the rest of the class.

- The pen is mightier than the sword.
- All for one and one for all!
- The best laid plans of mice and men oft go awry.
- Nose out of joint (I know, this one seems tacky with Cyrano.)
- Don't cut off your nose to spite your face. (This one is a bit tacky too.)

Appendix E

Paper Bag Puppets

We have studied how the author creates a character and now is your chance to create a puppet with the caricatured features of one person from the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Please keep in mind that the features you choose should immediately identify your puppet. For example, a puppet of Ben Franklin could wear spectacles and have a kite made of *Poor Richard's Almanac* stuck to him.

Your character is:

The easily identified physical features are:

The achievements and personality characteristics are:

What materials will you need to acquire?

Your character will deliver a memorized soliloquy to the class audience. This soliloquy should present a problem from the play or comment on the events of the play. An alternative assignment is for a small group to write and perform new dialogue that develops from a new twist to the plot and resolution using the same characters. Use the space below to brainstorm ideas and share with your teacher.

Appendix F

Essay Test - *Cyrano de Bergerac*

The following questions are to be answered in paragraphs containing a thesis, support for the thesis, and a conclusion. You may use your books to quote material that supports your thesis.

Choose two of the following questions or statements:

1. A hero is a larger-than-life character who generally has a tragic flaw that leads to his downfall. Describe Cyrano as a tragic hero.
2. Romance (looking at the world through rose-colored glasses) is the cause of the delusions “lovers” have about their beloved. How are Roxane, Christian, and Cyrano deluded?
3. How does de Guiche serve as an antagonist to Cyrano?
4. What redeeming qualities does Christian have? How does he serve as a contrast or foil to Cyrano?
5. Cyrano had friends as well as enemies. Naming names, tell why certain characters were his loyal friends. Contrast that with why his enemies rankled so also naming names.
6. Does the character of Roxane fit the image of the Renaissance woman? What beneficial characteristics does she possess?
7. What is the moral of this story concerning personal integrity? Hint: The “dukes” response to Roxane in Act V.
8. Give examples and explain why Cyrano may be so accomplished. As Brissaille says, “Name any art or skill you can, and he is its master.”

Please answer the following movie question in essay form.

1. We live in a different age than Cyrano, but obviously there are parallels in any world. Considering the themes of good literature, compare the movies *Roxane* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* to explain some of those parallels.