

Beauty & the Beast

High School Study Guide
Written by Robert Hollman



Music by André Grétry
Text by Jean-Francoise Marmentel

Based on the story “La Belle et La Bete” by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont

Premiered on December 16, 1771 in Paris, France

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TEACHER'S INTRODUCTION

This study guide will introduce your students to Grètry's opera *Beauty & the Beast* through lessons that will incorporate the opera's plot and elements of its and the composer's historical background. Short writing activities followed by class discussions will be central to the success of the lesson.

The following pages should ideally be copied and handed out to students. The basic structure of the study guide relies on a simple formula: the students will read, then be asked to participate in an activity or answer a few questions. The lesson plan also calls for a screening of select films, the details of which are listed at the bottom of the page.

The teacher's role is implied in the handouts and should be easy to grasp without further instruction. The structure of the study guide allows a great deal of freedom on the part of the teacher to introduce alternative questions or subjects as they pop up, so feel free to take detours when inspiration takes hold.

The recommended lesson plan is as follows:

1. Distribute and read André Grètry's biography
2. Distribute and read Jeanne Marie LePrince de Beaumont's biography
3. Distribute and read the contemporary synopsis of "Beauty and The Beast"
4. Screen portion or entire Jean Cocteau's "La Belle et Le Bete" (see suggested DVD list)
5. Discuss, write and share writing prompt: "Men Are Always Monsters...Until They Fall In Love"
6. Screen portion or entire "Mask" and/or "The Elephant Man"
7. Discuss, write and share writing prompt: "Are 'Ugly' People Beautiful?"
8. Discuss any similarities to any other stories, fiction, TV, or film
9. Making connections: Screen portion of "The Red Shoes" (scenes where ballerina appears at a seemingly deserted palace in the South of France and where ballerina kills herself at end)
10. Discuss, write and share writing prompt: Can beautiful people be 'ugly'?

"Beauty and The Beast" – Criterion Collection (1947)

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00007L416/sr=1-2/qid=1155061244/ref=pd_bbs_2/102-9860333-5786532?ie=UTF8&s=dvd

"The Red Shoes" - Criterion Collection (1948)

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000001PHT/sr=1-1/qid=1155061954/ref=pd_bbs_1/102-9860333-5786532?ie=UTF8&s=dvd

"Mask" – 1985

http://www.amazon.com/Mask-Director-Cut-Peter-Bogdanovich/dp/B00009AOBI/sr=1-1/qid=1158040060/ref=pd_bbs_1/103-1434020-9298217?ie=UTF8&s=dvd

"The Elephant Man" – 1980

http://www.amazon.com/Elephant-Man-Anthony-Hopkins/dp/B00003CX9S/sr=1-1/qid=1158040174/ref=pd_bbs_1/103-1434020-9298217?ie=UTF8&s=dvd

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ANDRÉ GRÉTRY

1741-1813

André Grétry was born in Liège on February 8, 1741, the son of a poor musician. He served as a choir boy at Saint-Denis, and at the age of 12 became a pupil of Leclerc. Grétry determined to study Italian opera after being inspired by works of Galuppi and Pergolesi. At 18, he composed a mass which he dedicated to the canons of the cathedral at Liège.

Canon Hurley funded Grétry's move to Italy, where he studied under Casali at Rome's Collège de Liège for five years and achieved his first success with an Italian intermezzo, *La Venedemmiatrice*, at the Aliberti Theatre in Rome.

In 1767, Grétry decided to devote himself to the French *opera comique*, and accordingly moved to Paris. For two years the composer languished in poverty and obscurity, until his friend, the Swedish ambassador Count Creutz, helped him to acquire a libretto from Marmontel. Grétry set *Le Huron* to music in under six weeks, and upon its premiere in August 1768, it was a hit.

He followed it with two more hits, *Lucile* and *Le Tableau parlant*, and his stature in the world of French opera was established.

Over his long career, Grétry composed over fifty operas. His best known operas are *Beauty & the Beast*, composed in 1771, and *Richard Coeur de Lion*, composed in 1784. *Beauty & the Beast* was reportedly a favorite of Mozart's, who heard it while working on *The Magic Flute*.

Marie Antoinette appointed Grétry music director of Louis XVI's court and the composer lost much of his property during the French Revolution. Nevertheless, he managed to rise above, or successfully navigate, the politics of the time. Each successive government vied for his favor: the old court showered him with rewards and distinctions; the republic made him an inspector of the conservatoire; and Napoleon granted him the cross of the legion of honor and a pension.

The composer died at the Hermitage in Montmorency on September 24, 1813. Fifteen years later, his heart was transferred to his birthplace. In 1842, a bronze statue of Grétry was erected in Liège.

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JEANNE—MARIE LEPRINCE DE BEAUMONT

1711-1780

Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont was born in Rouen, France in 1711. She was born into a large family that could not provide her with a dowry sizeable enough to enter into an advantageous marriage. She turned to teaching, which was a radical move for an unmarried woman of her station. She entered into a brief and unhappy marriage thereafter, producing one child. The marriage lasted for two years and was annulled in 1745.

In 1748 Madame de Beaumont moved to England. There she worked as a governess to the children of the Prince of Wales and published educational magazines for young girls. She herself wrote many of the not-so-subtle stories published in the magazines, the most famous of which is “Beauty and the Beast,” first published in 1757. Beaumont’s version of the fairy tale was by no means the first, but has proven to be the most popular source for adaptations. Grétry used it to write his opera, Jean Cocteau used it to make his 1946 film *Beauty and the Beast*, and Disney drew on her tale as well for their adaptation.

Beaumont’s magazines were published in both England and France. Voltaire notably hated both her and her writing, and a man named Frédéric Melchior Grimm—whose claim to immortality resides in a mass of correspondence published after his death—thought her ideas fit for parrots. She had a popular following in France nonetheless and wrote prolifically throughout her life.

In 1762, Beaumont married a man named Thomas Pichon and moved to Savoy, a small dukedom in the Rhone-Alps region, which is today part of France. She died in 1780.

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BEAUTY & THE BEAST SYNOPSIS

Act I

Sander used to have a lot of money, but he lost it all on a long trip. He's on his way home but he and his servant, Ali, get shipwrecked on a strange island. They walk through a dark forest when they get caught in the storm and the only shelter they can find is a seemingly deserted castle.

Sander picks a rose in the castle garden for his beautiful daughter, Zémire, whom he promised to bring home for her. Prince Azor, who sees Sander pick the rose, is infuriated. Sander is frightened by Azor's appearance – he was cursed for his selfish behavior and turned into a beast. The only thing that can turn Azor back would be unselfish love.

Azor threatens to kill Sander if Sander doesn't bring Azor one of his beautiful daughters. When Sander gets home, he doesn't want to tell any of his daughters that he'd rather die than sacrifice any of them - but Zémire finds out what's going on from Ali and goes to the castle to confront Azor.

Act II

Zémire is very scared of Azor at first, but less so after she gets to know him better. She discovers that behind the scary, monstrous face is a kind, sensitive person. She becomes attracted to him. Months go by and she enjoys her time with Azor but also misses her family. She asks Azor if she can visit them and he will on the condition that she promises to come back before the sun sets.

Zemire makes the promise but at home finds her father sick and her sisters longing for her to stay. The father and sisters persuade her to stay and though it appears to work Zemire finally resists. She breaks free and runs back to Azor's castle...to find Azor dying from heartbreak.

Zemire is in love with Azor and tells him so on his death bed. By doing this, the curse is lifted and Azor turns back into a handsome prince and lives.

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WRITING AND DISCUSSION: MONSTERS UNTIL THEY LOVE

Tough, rough and insensitive, men and boys always seem to act like ‘monsters’ until they fall in love. When in love, they act like caring, emotional human beings. They become sensitive and emotional. The “beast” gets soppy, becomes needy, and starts talking love. Have you ever noticed this yourself? Write a couple of paragraphs relating your impression. Then, try to develop a theory that explains why men behave in this way and share it with the class in the discussion that will follow. You may also consider whether women change when they fall in love, and if so, in what ways.

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WRITING AND DISCUSSION: ARE ‘UGLY’ PEOPLE BEAUTIFUL?

In this story and other fictional tales (remember the “Frog Prince?”) we have discovered that behind an unattractive face is a very attractive person. This happens in real life too. Perhaps you’ve read about or known someone afflicted with a disfiguring disease who is very kind and loving. Have you ever experienced this firsthand or known anybody like this? Is it fair to say that unattractive people have unattractive personalities and vice versa?

Write a couple of paragraphs relating your opinion. Then, consider whether how someone looks physically is a good measure of their personality or perhaps useful in predicting how they will behave if you interact with them. Maybe hair color and imperfections don’t matter, but the way someone smiles, sneers, laughs, or shakes your hand matters a great deal? It’s up for debate. Discuss with your classmates.

WRITING AND DISCUSSION: CAN BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE BE UGLY?

Sometimes the most attractive person can also be the meanest and ‘ugliest.’ Someone may be pleasant to look at, but nevertheless cruel and hurtful. Have you ever experienced this? Has a ‘beautiful’ person tried to make you feel ugly? If yes, jot down the details of your experience. If no, use your imagination to make up a fictional experience in which you meet someone beautiful who is in the end ugly nonetheless. Then, consider whether you would prefer to meet someone who is beautiful on the outside, or someone who is beautiful on the inside. Explain your reasoning in the class discussion that will follow.

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