Cyrano de Bergerac Background Information

NAME ___________________________________________________________

DATE_____________________________________

Reading--_________ period

BACKGROUND Act 1

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.

BACKGROUND Act 2

French Food

Sprinkled throughout the play are various references to food such as rhubarb tarts, fruit flans, cream buns, casseroles, sauces, and pork pâté (pâtes 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 (thinely 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 him.

BACKGROUND Act 3

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 Neuvillette. 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.
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.

**BACKGROUND Act 5**
**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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Fill in the table with the terms and their definitions.*
Background Information for *Cyrano de Bergerac*

- **1600s-1700s**: Classicism
  - French dramas usually centered around characters in history
  - These characters were from Greek and Roman history or literature
  - Violent action was never re-enacted on stage—only talked about
  - Setting of plays only took place with one main character and within a time span of no more than 24 hours

- **1800s**: New Movements
  - France was establishing a republican government after centuries of monarchy
  - There is industrial and commercial developments which cause social tensions
  - Changes in French drama as well as French politics—schools of naturalism, symbolism, romanticism and realism developed
  - Plays began to portray everyday life

- **Edmond Rostand Life and Times:**
  - Was born in Marseilles, France in 1868, while France was under the rule of Napoleon III
  - His father wanted him to be a lawyer, but Rostand preferred French literature
  - He eventually did earn a law degree
  - Produced his first play at the age of 20 and married Rosemond Gerard in 1890
  - *Cyrano de Bergerac* was published in 1897 and became the most popular play of the era
  - People were pleased because the play did not focus on the dark problems of society
  - Rostand volunteered to fight with the French army in WWI but was refused
  - He died in Paris in 1918

- **Cyrano de Bergerac**
  - Play is set in France during 1640-1655
  - King Louis XIII is king and Armand-Jean de Plessis Richelieu is a Roman Catholic cardinal and chief advisor to the kinds
  - Richelieu wants to make France the most powerful nation in Europe and lead France into the Thirty Year’s War---a complicated religious, economic, and military struggle
  - France became Europe’s leading power after the war and the dream of a united Catholic Europe was destroyed
  - One key battle was the French siege of the town of Arras which is the setting for one the scenes in the play

---

**Notes on CYRANO DE BERGERERAC**

- **Three Main Characters:**
  - **Cyrano de Bergerac**
    - He is a long nosed, fencing, poetry writing, fighting, loving, man convinced that no one will ever love him because of his ugly features.
  - **Roxane**
    - “Madeleine Robin” She is the most beautiful woman around. She is also smart, cousin to Cyrano, and head-over-heals in love with Christian.
  - **Christian**
    - dumb as a rock, Gascon (soldier) of Cyrano’s, handsome and totally in love with Roxane.

- **The Story:**
  - Cyrano loves Roxane, but he doesn’t think she could ever love him because of his ugly nose.
  - Roxane is in love with Christian, and he loves her. However, they have never met, and Christian isn’t smooth enough to ask Roxane to be with him (he is handsome but really dumb).
  - Cyrano tells Christian what to say and do in order to help Christian make Roxane love him.
  - Will it work? Will Roxane figure out the tangled web of lies? Will she fall in love with the handsome man, or the smart one? You’ll have to read to find out!

- **Background:**
The story takes place in France between 1640 and 1655. During this time, France was filled with aristocrats (rich people), Gascons (soldiers), townspeople, and there is even a king (Louis XIII).

**Weapons:**
- Have you ever seen a sword fight in the movies? These are called duels. The weapons are called rapiers (long pointed swords – like a mixture between lance and sword).
- These Duels were only fought by the rich, and they were often to the death. There wasn’t even any armor to protect them!

**The real Cyrano:**
- He lived from 1619-1655. His name was Hercule Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (and you thought Cyrano de Bergerac was hard enough!). He was born in Paris and became a writer and a soldier. In fact he wrote science fantasy. Look out moon men…here comes Cyrano! I know you are dying to know…Yes, he did have a really big nose!

**Mr. Edmond Rostand:**
- He was a French playwright (hence the play being written in French).
- The first show came out about 100 years ago. It was his most popular play, and it is still referenced and used today. It was even made into a ballet (imagine a long-nosed man in a tutu!).

**Things to read for**
- Cyrano is a poet. Make note of all the lines he says that rhyme.

### Historical timeline--- *Cyrano de Bergerac*

#### Government/Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1300-1500 AD</th>
<th>1500-1700s</th>
<th>1640-1655</th>
<th>1800s</th>
<th>late 1800s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Ages</td>
<td>Renaissance</td>
<td>Cyrano de Bergerac</td>
<td>Unrest in Politics</td>
<td>Industrialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feudalism</td>
<td>(Monarchy)</td>
<td>is set in time which is</td>
<td>(republic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>During the Thirty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Years War in Europe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Culture/Theater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1600-1700 AD</th>
<th>1800s</th>
<th>Mid-late 1800s</th>
<th>Late 1800s</th>
<th>1897</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classicism</td>
<td>Rebellion in theater=change</td>
<td>Realism about every day</td>
<td>Cyrano de Bergerac is one published</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no violence on stage</td>
<td>Romanticism about history life=no glamour</td>
<td>play cast and producers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>character that was</td>
<td>violence on stage</td>
<td>thought it would fail</td>
<td>thought greatly—WHY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based in history on history</td>
<td>more than one character</td>
<td>Most popular</td>
<td>Most popular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>setting—24 hour time period</td>
<td>setting—longer than 24 hours</td>
<td>During the era</td>
<td>During the era</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex: <em>Hunchback of Notre Dame</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Background Information for Cyrano de Bergerac

- **1600s-1700s: Classicism**
  - Usually centered around characters in history
  - These characters were from history or literature
  - Action was never re-enacted on state—only talked about
  - Setting of plays only took place with one and within a time span of no more than hours

- **1800s: New Movements**
  - France was establishing a government after centuries of monarchy
  - There is industrial and commercial developments which cause
  - Changes in French drama as well as—schools of naturalism, symbolism, romanticism and realism developed
  - began to portray everyday life

- **Edmond Rostand Life and Times:**
  - Was born in Marseilles, in 1868, while France was under the rule of Napoleon III
  - His father wanted him to be a, but Rostand preferred French literature
  - He eventually did earn a
  - Produced his first play at the age of and married Rosemond Gerard in 1890
  - Cyrano de Bergerac was published in 1897 and became the most play of the era
  - People were pleased because the play did not focus on the problems of society
  - Rostand volunteered to fight with the French army in but was refuse
  - He died in 1918

- **Cyrano de Bergerac**
  - Play is set in during 1640-1655
  - King is king and Armand-Jean de Plessis Richelieu is a Roman Catholic cardinal and chief advisor to the kings
  - Richelieu wants to make France the most powerful nation in and lead France into the --- a complicated religious, economic, and military struggle
  - France became Europe’s leading after the war and the dream of a united Catholic Europe was destroyed
  - One key battle was the French siege of the town of which is the setting for one the scenes in the play
Cyrano de Bergerac Act 1 Study Questions

- Describe the following characters.
  - Cyrano–
  - Christian–
  - Roxane–
  - DeGuiche–
  - Ragueneau–
  - LeBret–
  - Ligniere–
  - Montfluery–
  - Lise–
  - Valvert–
  - Carbon de Castel-Jaloux–

- What is the setting? Why is it significant in relation to the time in French History?
  -
  -
  -
  -

- What type of people came to the theater?
  -

- Defining characters
  - Cavalier
  - Lackey -
  - Page --
  - Marquis --
  - Burghers –

- Who is in love with Roxane? Give two characteristics of each character (3 men)
  -
  -
  -
• Why is Ligniere in trouble?

• How does Rostand introduce Cyrano? Is his dramatic technique in doing this effective? Why? (the more detailed the better)

• What does Captain LeBret say happened to anyone who makes fun of Cyrano’s nose?

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

• What is LeBret’s advice to Cyrano regarding his love for his cousin? What is Cyrano’s reaction to this advice? Why do you think he acts this way?

• What three conflicts does Cyrano face? GIVE EXAMPLES PLEASE

• In Cyrano’s opinion why have 100 men been sent to attack Ligniere?

• What is Cyrano’s attitude about confronting (facing) Ligniere’s attackers?
At what exact moment in the pastry shop does Cyrano learn that Roxane is talking about someone else? What does this say about Cyrano?

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?

What does Cyrano’s reaction tell you the reader about him?

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

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

How does Act Two end? What is the mood and Why?
1) Why is Roxane so concerned when she learns that DeGuiche is about to order the soldiers to depart for war? What trick does she play as a result of her concern?
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •

2) What is DeGuiche’s reaction to Roxane’s suggestion about how to take revenge on Cyrano?
   •
   •

3) What does DeGuiche propose to Roxane? How does she respond? (2 part question)
   •
   •

4) What do the above actions tell you about Roxane?
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •

5) When Cyrano instructions Christian to memorize Cyrano’s words about love, what does Christian say? What does this show about Christian?
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •

6) Why does Christian return to Cyrano for help?
   •
   •
   •
   •
7) How would you describe Cyrano’s emotions as he speaks for Christian to Roxane?
   -
   -
   -

8) What is ironic about Cyrano’s words to Roxane?
   -
   -
   -
   -
   -

9) What do “a vow made at closer range... a seal placed on a pact that has already been signed... that communion... that taste of another soul” refer to? Why is this action important to the play?
   -
   -
   -
   -
   -

10) What does Roxane do to outsmart the monk and DeGuiche?
   -
   -
   -
   -

11) How does Cyrano keep DeGuiche from interrupting the wedding? What do you learn about Cyrano from the method he chooses?
   -
   -
1) Why does Carbon call upon Cyrano to talk to the Cadets when they are starving and weak?

2) What does Cyrano tell them? What is their reaction?

3) Describe DeGuiche’s relationship with the Cadets and with Cyrano before the battle begins?

4) What is the military significance of DeGuiche’s white scarf?

5) What happens to his white scarf?

6) What does Cyrano think about the scarf, and what does he do for it?

7) Who surprisingly arrives at the scene of battle? How?
8) What realization does Roxane finally come to about Christian? How does this realization affect Christian?

9) What does Christian urge Cyrano to Do? In your opinion, what are his reasons?
1) Why is the act titled “Cyrano’s Gazette?”

2) What do you learn about Cyrano from the conversation of the nuns, DeGuiche, and LeBret before he comes on stage? Why is this information necessary?

3) What information does DeGuiche give to LeBret about Cyrano? Why do you suppose Cyrano’s old enemy has told LeBret about the danger?

4) 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.

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