

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Phantom of the Opera (Unabridged)

by
Gaston Leroux

Book Information

Gaston Leroux, The Phantom of the Opera (Unabridged)

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322 Pages

Book Level: 7.1

Interest Level: UG

A disfigured musical genius who lives beneath the Paris Opera House falls in love with a beautiful soprano and, in his desperation to have his love returned, embarks on some terrifying means toward that end.

Topics: Emotions, Fear; Emotions, Love; Mysteries, Hauntings/Ghosts; Mysteries, Murder; Popular Groupings, College Bound

Main Characters

Carlotta an opera singer of higher standing than Christine who enlists the aid of her supporters while competing with Christine

Christine Daae a beautiful and talented opera singer who believes her ability to sing is linked to an Angel of Music who inhabits the Opera house, and who is later captured by the Angel and rescued when she kisses him on the forehead and he releases her to her true love

Erik, Opera ghost, Angel of Music all identities of a shadowy figure who lives in the depths of the Paris Opera House and who is the source of much trouble there as he searches for the one thing that has eluded his life thus far--to be loved simply for himself

Firmin Richard & Armand Moncharmin the new co-managers of the Opera house who do not heed their predecessors' warnings about the ghost and find out the hard way what the ghost can do

M. Daae Christine's father; an accomplished musician, who teaches her to sing and play the violin before passing away

M. Poligny & M. Debiegne the retiring co-managers of the Opera house who try to inform the new managers of the Opera ghost's expectations, and end up retiring to escape having to deal with the ghost

Mamma Valerius Christine's benefactress who gives guidance and a home to Christine after her father dies

Mother Giry an Opera house box-keeper who caters to the ghost in Box Five

Philippe de Chagny Raoul's older brother who dies while trying to rescue his brother from the hands of the Opera ghost

Raoul de Chagny a young French viscount who rekindles a childhood affection for Christine and pursues her love through many dangers until they are together at last

the Persian a former chief of police who has spared Erik's life in the past

Vocabulary

apse a projecting part of the building

astrakhan cap a cap made of wool with curled and looped pile

concierge an attendant at the entrance of a building

corps de ballet a ballet company

gibbet gallows

humbug a person who passes himself off as something he is not

siren a woman who sings with bewitching sweetness

Synopsis

He is called a ghost, the Angel of Music, and Erik. The book's title calls him a phantom. During the course of *The Phantom of the Opera*, the story's most illusive figure portrays all of these characters.

As the ghost, he stalks the many corridors and rooms of the huge Paris Opera House, instilling fear in performers and patrons alike. He is the cunning instigator of many horrible tricks meant to showcase his own creative talent.

As the Angel of Music, he sings more beautifully than any other human. His heavenly sound captures the interest of all who hear it, and more importantly, it inspires the young opera singer, Christine Daae, to

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sing in a manner even she cannot believe, because it is so beautiful.

Finally, as Erik, he is given a human face, but one that is painfully disfigured and thus frightening to behold. Tragically, when a person is looked upon with such horror, he is never seen for the person he really is inside.

The Phantom of the Opera is the story of one man's quest to be accepted for who he is and not to be shunned for his appearance. Unfortunately for Erik, only Christine and the Persian, an old acquaintance, show him any compassion. But Christine's heart belongs to Raoul, her childhood sweetheart who won't allow the ghost, the Angel, or Erik to take her from him. While her love is reserved for Raoul, the tender compassion she offers Erik in one brief kiss represents all that he ever wanted—just to be loved for himself.

Ironically, the joy he feels over her acceptance is what eventually kills him. Before arranging his death, he allows Christine to be reunited with her one true love, and they flee Paris to find a place where they can live in peace. And the phantom, shrouded in the cloak of anonymity, passes from the earth in happiness.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

In the introduction to *The Phantom of the Opera*, Max Byrd reveals the preoccupation of the author, Gaston Leroux, with characters who possess a double nature. Have students discuss in what way the phantom is a character who possesses a double nature. Ask them to give reasons for their answers.

The phantom is a very complex character. He is capable of treating Christine with tenderness as he teaches her to sing like no other singer, and he is capable of creating great havoc at the Opera house.

Literary Analysis

A major part of the information about the character of Erik, who is also known as the Angel of Music and the Opera ghost, is conveyed to the reader through the use of flashbacks. Flashbacks give information about something that happened prior to the actual story. Have your students identify the use of one flashback in *The Phantom of the Opera*. Ask them why the author includes it and how it adds to the effect of the story.

The Persian delivers the major flashbacks about his prior experiences with Erik before the Opera house period. His revelations about Erik's character help the reader to understand to a much greater degree why Erik is the way he is. There would be too many gaps if these flashbacks were not offered. Another flashback involves the early childhood memories of Raoul and Christine. It gives insight into why Raoul was so taken with Christine from the moment they became acquainted again.

Inferential Comprehension

In *The Phantom of the Opera*, Erik, as the Angel of Music, is hurrying to finish his musical masterpiece, *Don Juan Triumphant*. In the legend, Don Juan is a handsome nobleman, who is able to get what he wants. Ask students to discuss the symbolic nature of Erik's *Don Juan Triumphant* as it pertains to his life and the story.

Erik wants desperately to be seen as a Don Juan-type figure. His horrible disfigurement won't allow others to see that quality in him. He sees his marriage to Christine, the event for which he is composing his masterpiece as his greatest triumph.

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Constructing Meaning

A major lesson offered by the author of *The Phantom of the Opera* is that every individual deserves to be "loved for his own sake." One would have to conclude after reading this story that the phantom, unfortunately, was not allowed to fully experience this and had to settle for the simple gesture of a kiss on the forehead, which served as "being loved for his own sake." Have students consider how much society equates an individual's appearance and status to his/her lovability. Then ask if they think it is possible in today's world to be loved just for your own sake.

People are constantly bombarded with images of those who is the most beautiful, the best dressed, and the most desirable. Unfortunately, we have begun to believe that our value as people is defined by our image. It might still be possible to be loved for our own sake, but it will take a clarity of vision to do so.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Most of the action in *The Phantom of the Opera* takes place in the grand Opera House of Paris. The reader soon learns that this Opera house is no ordinary building. Instead, it is a maze of corridors and rooms spread over multiple layers, some of which go below ground level. Ask students to refer to the story for facts relating to the structure of the Opera House. For example, Erik's house and the lake are found on the fifth level underground. Then have them make a map or drawing to show the various levels both under and above ground. You might also have them indicate on their drawing where the major events in this story take place.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors As revealed in the introduction and the Publisher's Notes to *The Phantom of the Opera*, the story takes place in Paris around the time of the Franco-Prussian War. This is alluded to by the character of the Persian, who remarks that Erik worked on the construction of the Opera House, but building was suspended because of the war

and the siege of Paris. Have students research this important time period in French history. Then have them make a time line of the significant events of this period. Ask them to discuss how these historical events may have affected what they read in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Comparing and Contrasting At the beginning of *The Phantom of the Opera*, there are two characters who serve as co-managers of the Opera House--M. Debiegne and M. Poligny. These two have figured out how to keep the Opera's ghost (O.G.) happy--give him everything he wants. Unfortunately, the stress of dealing with a demanding and clever ghost proves to be too much, so they decide to step down. Two new co-managers step in, Fermin Richard and Armand Moncharmin. Despite their predecessors' warnings, however, these two ignore the ghost's demands and suffer the consequences. Ask students to compare the two sets of managers according to the way they each handle the stresses of operating a large Opera House and how they deal with O.G., the Opera ghost. Then have them make a chart that illustrates their comparison.

Describing Actions or Events Although there are many crimes committed in *The Phantom of the Opera*, the author chooses not to dwell on the details of any police work. Have students imagine that they are police officers assigned to solve the mystery of the Opera ghost. Have them tell how they would go about finding clues that will eventually help them solve this mystery.