

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Princess Bride

by William Goldman

written by Michelle Ryan

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The Princess Bride

Introduction

The Princess Bride can be confusing for many readers. The novel is written by William Goldman, but throughout the novel, Goldman contends that he is writing an abridgment of a story originally written by S. Morgenstern. The purpose of the abridgment is to create an adventure story without the political satire that Morgenstern included in the novel. Goldman claims that he is writing the abridgment in the way his father told the story when Goldman was a child. In fact, the book is Goldman's original work, and Morgenstern's "original version" never existed. The novel's origin is not the only fantastical element found within the pages. Goldman alludes to his family throughout the story, but they do not exist in the form that is described. Goldman is married with two daughters. He does not have a son.

The Princess Bride was made into a movie that has become a cult classic. Many students may be familiar with the film, which may aid or hinder the reading.

Teachers should be aware that profanity is used on two occasions. In addition, the chapter "Buttercup's Baby" alludes to a sexual situation between Westley and Buttercup.

Note: All page references come from the Ballantine Book edition of *The Princess Bride*, copyright 1973, 1998.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. explain and discuss the author's use of the frame story in writing the text.
2. cite and explain the fantastical elements as they appear in the text.
3. discuss the author's use of time as a plot device in the text.
4. compare the characters within the story and their personal motivations.
5. discuss the author's treatment of men and women throughout the story.
6. cite examples of figurative language as they are used throughout the text and explain their effect.
7. recall the plot elements in the story and give a chronological depiction of the events without the insertion of flashbacks and author interruptions.
8. identify and discuss how Goldman prepares the reader for an encouraging scene but then ends with tragic results.
9. explain the significance of S. Morgenstern and his role in the narrative.
10. discuss the success of *The Princess Bride* as a story and Goldman as a storyteller.
11. discuss the following theme: Life is not fair.
12. explain how love is used as motivation for characters throughout the novel.
13. list the skills of each character and his or her purpose in the story.
14. discuss the importance of setting in the novel.
15. explain Goldman's purpose in omitting parts of the novel and characterize the parts of the novel that Goldman claims to omit.
16. discuss the relationships that Goldman is a part of as he reveals them in the novel.
17. cite examples of foreshadowing throughout the text.
18. explain the major and minor conflicts throughout the novel and discuss their resolutions.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the way in which Goldman creates different layers in his novel. What are the different layers, and what is the effect of their insertion in the story?
2. Goldman claims that his version of the original Morgenstern story is the true love and adventure version, and he has omitted the political satire from the story. However, what Goldman claims may or may not be true. Cite and explain instances of satire throughout the novel.
3. Discuss the ways in which the story of *The Princess Bride* could be considered fantasy. What elements of the story seem to be possible, and which seem to be something out of a fairy tale? Cite specific examples from the text.
4. In the novel there are four separate groups of people from very different worlds: Goldman, who inserts himself as a character; Vizzini, Fezzik, and Inigo; Prince Humperdinck and Count Rugen; Westley and Buttercup. Discuss how each of these worlds begins separately and how they are intertwined within the text. Is there any one world that does not ultimately connect with the others? If so, what is it?
5. Evaluate the motivations of each of the character in the story. Explain how the characters' motivations evolve throughout the narrative. Do they evolve in a positive or negative way? Explain.
6. Discuss the roles of men and women within the novel. Are men portrayed more positively than women? Is the man's role in the story stronger than the woman's role? Explain.
7. *The Princess Bride* offers many lessons to its readers. For example, Goldman learns from a friend's mother how: "Life isn't fair... We tell our children that it is, but it's a terrible thing to do. It's not only a lie, it's a cruel lie. Life is not fair, and it never has been, and it's never going to be." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain. Does the novel seem to express the same sentiments?
8. Goldman writes a frame story interrupting the story at key points. Do his intrusions add or detract from the story? Why or why not? What might Goldman's reason for doing this be?
9. Discuss the characteristics of a hero. Is there a hero in this book? If so, who is it? How does this person become the hero? If there is not a hero, explain why.
10. Discuss *The Princess Bride* as a story. How effective is William Goldman at story telling?

The Princess Bride

One – “The Bride”

VOCABULARY

adversary – enemy
antiquity – history
bewilderment – confusion
careening – knocking, rolling randomly
droll – odd, humorous
dullard – a stupid person
dumpling – a term of endearment
hovel – hut
inadvertent – accidental
moldering – decaying
scullery – kitchen
sublimity – perfection
supplication – humbleness
undaunted – resolutely
unfathomable – unimaginable
visage – face

1. Chronicle the list of beautiful women before Buttercup. At what point does Buttercup start to be noticed for her beauty? How does Buttercup feel about beauty? What does the text say about Buttercup's hygiene?

2. Who is the farm boy, and what is his connection to Buttercup? How does the farm boy respond to Buttercup's requests?

Four – “The Preparations”

NO VOCABULARY

1. What is the nature of this chapter, and how does it move the story ahead?

2. What does Goldman describe as missing from the pages he omits?

41. When Prince Humperdinck arrives in the Zoo of Death, what does he scream at Westley? What happens next?

42. What is the sound that petrifies the people in the city? How does this sound affect Inigo? What do Fezzik and Inigo do as a result of the noise?

43. After Westley is killed, what does the albino decide to do with the body? How does this lead to his mistake?

Eight – “Honeymoon”

VOCABULARY

afflicted – injured
cleric – a member of the clergy
contemplated – thought about, pondered
cowardice – lack of courage
crescendoing – gradually increasing
fauceted – ran quickly
forlorn – miserable
impediment – hindrance
imperiously – commandingly
lumbered – moved slowly
propriety – appropriateness
reminiscing – remembering
squabbled – argued; bickered
swarthy – dark complexioned
unendurable – unbearable

1. How are Fezzik, Inigo, and Westley able to retrieve the key from Yellin?

2. Describe the wedding.

3. What does Buttercup do after the wedding?

4. Fezzik, Inigo, and Westley make it into the castle. Explain how the three men are separated once inside.
