

The  
PHANTOM  
of the  
OPERA

IDEAS FOR RESEARCH  
AND DISCUSSION

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# *Filling in the blanks*

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**Director Harold Prince wants the audience to “be collaborators, to use their imaginations to fill in the spaces we’ve deliberately left blank”.**

“Fill in the blanks” of *The Phantom of the Opera*. In diary, story, poem or skit form, create the legends of:

- The Phantom’s early life: from his childhood and time at the sideshow, to his life at the Opera House and the first moment he saw Christine.
- Christine and Raoul’s first meeting on the beach.
- Christine and her father, the famous violinist, and their relationship.
- The Phantom and Madame Giry: how they met, the nature of their bond.
- Christine and Meg Giry: how they became friends, their relationship after the musical.
- Raoul and Christine’s life after they leave the Phantom: do they become married? How do they feel about each other after the events of the musical?
- The Phantom’s life after Christine leaves him: what happens to him in the last moment of the musical?
- Does Christine ever see the Phantom again? What might happen?
- Gaston Leroux, and how he was inspired to write *The Phantom of the Opera*? Did he meet the “Opera Ghost”?



# The Mask

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**Discuss the importance of masks throughout *The Phantom of the Opera*.**

**How does the Phantom use his mask throughout the musical?**

- Does he behave differently with it on or off?
- Do other characters see him differently with or without his mask?
- Why?
- From the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau to Homer's Iliad and The Odyssey; from comic-book heroes like Batman and Green Lantern to the movie *The Mask*; disguises and masks are a continuing theme in history and the arts.



**Divide your class into groups, with each group researching the significance of one type of mask throughout history (African tribal masks, Japanese Kabuki masks, Greek theatrical masks, the “Masques” of the Elizabethan Theatre, Commedia Del’arte etc.)**

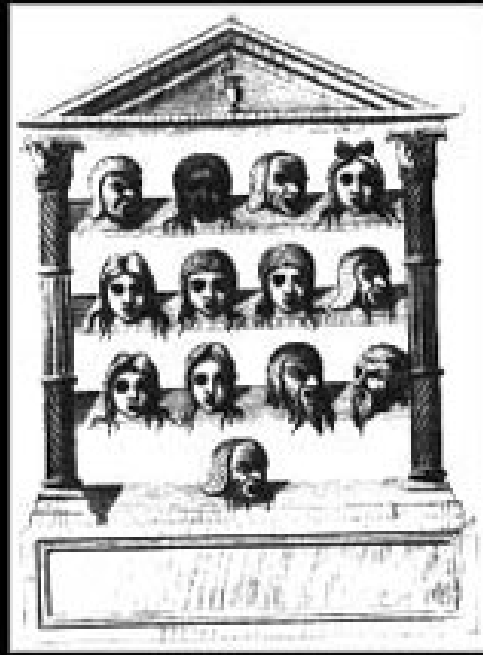
Make sure to include pictures, drawings or photos along with your research. Put your research together on a bulletin board to create a timeline history of the mask.

**How does the Phantom’s mask fit into your research?**



**Maria Björnson fashioned the Phantom's mask after half-masks worn by disfigured soldiers in World War I, often with a detailed eye painted on to "replace" the lost one.**

How does knowing this fact affect how you feel about the Phantom?



**Discuss the use of masks and disguises in the following Shakespeare plays:**

- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *As You Like it*
- *The Merchant of Venice*
- *King Lear*
- *Othello*
- *Twelfth Night*

**Draw or sculpt your own mask.**

- How would your mask be used? For entertainment? Protection?
- What will your mask be showing the world?
- What will it be hiding?

**With your knowledge of the history of masks, and the masks you have created, write and act out a short skit where mask your is used.**

- To hide identity?
- To hide deformity?
- To change personality?

## **Compare these uses of masks.**

- How are they similar?
- How are they different?

The scene where Christine unmasks the Phantom was made famous in the 1925 silent movie of the story, starring Lon Chaney. Of this scene, Andrew Lloyd Webber said “Clearly, one of the biggest problems was the unmasking of the Phantom. In the cinema tremendous impact can be made by virtue of a close-up shot, but we had to devise a way that would make the unmasking effective from any point in a big musical theatre.”

## **If you can, view the silent film as well as the musical. Compare the two scenes of the Phantom’s unmasking.**

Did Lloyd Webber succeed in making the theatrical unmasking effective? Why or why not?

**After seeing *The Phantom of the Opera*, write a diary as if you were The Phantom. Describe the time before Christine unmasks you, then of the days after she has seen your true face. How does your outlook change?**

**The symbol of The Theatre is often an interposed set of comic and tragic masks. Discuss.**

*“It was the voice! My rage equaled my amazement. I rushed at the mask and tried to snatch it away, so as to see the face of the voice. The man said, ‘You are in no danger, so long as you do not touch the mask.’”*

Christine Daaé, from *The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux



# *The Power of Music*

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In *The Phantom of the Opera*, The Phantom pretends to be “The Angel of Music” and inspires Christine to be a great singer.

## **Discuss the power of inspiration.**

Have you ever been inspired by someone or something?

## **Research and discuss the origins of the words “muse” and “genius.”**

How are they used today?

## **The word “inspiration” comes from the Latin “inspirare,” or “to breathe.”**

Discuss.

**Listen to the tape of *The Phantom of the Opera*, and analyse the following songs:**

- “Think of me”
- “The Phantom of the Opera”
- “The Music of the Night”
- “All I Ask of You”
- “Masquerade”
- “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again”
- “The Point of No Return”
- How do the different songs and the different music make you feel?
- How do you think the composer makes you feel a certain way (what instruments are used, what rhythms, what harmonies, etc.)
- How does the composer use the repetition of musical themes to create moods and build characters?
- How does each song continue the story?
- How does each song tell us different things about the characters?



**What is an Opera? How is it different from a musical?**

Would you say *The Phantom of the Opera* is an opera or a musical?

**Before seeing *The Phantom of the Opera*, survey your class with the following question: How do you feel about Opera?**

- Does it bore you? Excite you?
- After seeing the show, ask the same question. Has seeing *The Phantom of the Opera* changed how you feel about Opera?

In the novel of *The Phantom of the Opera*, Christine describes the music from the Phantom's opera, "His Don Juan Triumphant... seemed to me at first one awful, long, magnificent sob. But, little by little, it expressed every emotion, every suffering of which mankind is capable. It intoxicated me..." While listening to the music from *The Phantom of the Opera*, note the music from Don Juan Triumphant. How does it make you feel? What do you think the composers of the musical are saying about the Phantom's music versus the other operas heard throughout the musical? How does the Phantom's music reflect his inner emotions?

*"The man that hath no music in himself, Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; The motions of his spirit are as dull as night, And his affections dark as Erebus: Let no such man be trusted."*

from *The Merchant of Venice* (Act V, sc. 1)

*"Music oft hath such a charm To make bad good, and good provoke to harm."*

from *Measure for Measure* (Act IV, sc. 1)

How do these two quotes from Shakespeare relate to the use and power of music in *The Phantom of the Opera*?

# The Gothic Novel

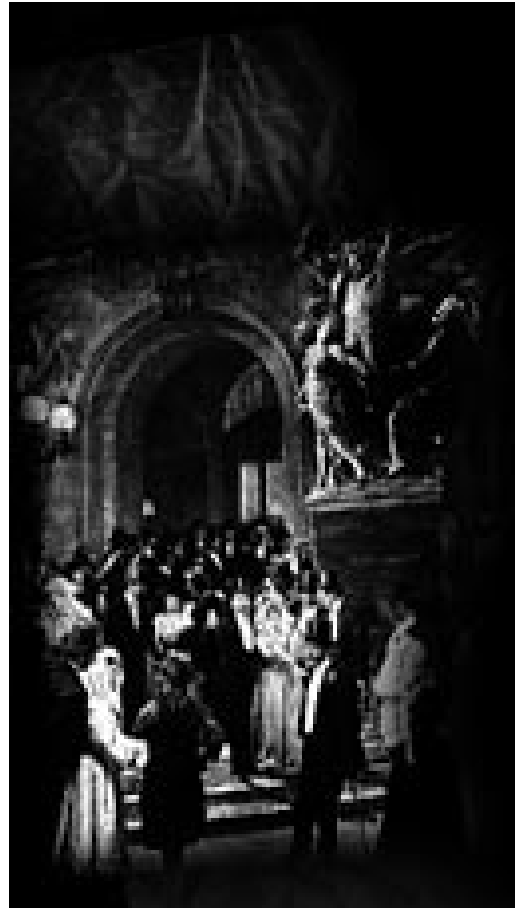
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Although *The Phantom of the Opera* was written in 1911, its events take place in a time known as the Victorian Period, because it was during the reign of Queen Victoria in England (1819-1901).

**Research the Victorian period, placing special emphasis on changing perspectives and attitudes.**

Survey the literature of the Victorian period. Discuss one of the authors below or choose one of your own and discuss how he or she “unmasked” traditional concepts in regard to -

- **The Nature of Government** - *Major Barbara and Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens
- **The Nature of Society** - *The Picture of Dorian Grey* by Oscar Wilde, *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens
- **The Nature of Marriage** - *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, *Candida* by George Bernard Shaw, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
- **The Nature of Science** - *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H.G. Wells, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne
- **The Nature of Identity Itself** - *Dr. Jekyll And Mister Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde



**Create two parallel time lines of the Victorian period. One will detail scientific and social breakthroughs. One will detail works of art, such as the literature discussed above as well as ground-breaking music, art and architecture.**

Discuss how the time lines relate and intersect.

**Gaston Leroux wrote in the original novel of *The Phantom of the Opera*, “None will ever be a true Parisian who has not learnt to wear a mask of gaiety over his sorrow and one of sadness, boredom or indifference over his inward joy... In Paris, our lives are one masked ball...”**

- How does Leroux and his novel fit into your timeline?
- What social ills was he trying to “unmask”?
- *The Phantom of the Opera* belongs to a genre called “Gothic” fiction, which combines equal parts of horror and romance.

**Compare the story of *The Phantom of the Opera* with the works of these other Victorian novelists, all of which use elements of the “Gothic” formula:**

- Bram Stoker - *Dracula*, “*Lair of the White Worm*”
- Robert Louis Stevenson - *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, “*The Bottle Imp*”
- Mary Shelley - *Frankenstein*

**Using your research into the Victorian period, account for the great popularity of the “Gothic” novel, and its fascination with horror, repressed sexuality and the dual nature of man.**

*“All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.”*

Oscar Wilde

# Christine

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**In his treatise on fairy tales and fables, *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim makes the statement, “Each fairy tale is a magic mirror which reflects some aspects of our inner world, and of the steps required by our evolution from immaturity to maturity.”**

Relate this statement to Christine.

How is *The Phantom of the Opera* the story of her maturity, of her “growing up”?



**During *The Phantom of the Opera*, Christine is torn between three powerful men: Raoul, The Phantom, and the memory of her dead father.**

Does she ever become completely free and her own person? If so, when?

**In fairy tales and fables, a kiss always has magical properties (turning a frog into a prince, awakening Sleeping Beauty, etc.)**

What effect does Christine’s kiss have in *The Phantom of the Opera*?

## **Compare Christine's story with the following myths and fables:**

- Pandora's Box
- Sleeping Beauty
- Alice Through the Looking Glass
- Bluebeards Castle
- Snow White and Rose Red
- The Frog King
- Pygmalion and Galatea
- Cupid and Psyche
- Svengali

## **Research the changing role of women during the Victorian Period.**

How does Christine fit in to your research?

Would you say she was a "modern" woman? Why or why not?

## **How did literature written during the Victorian period reflect the shifting role of women in society?**

Compare Christine with women in the following works:

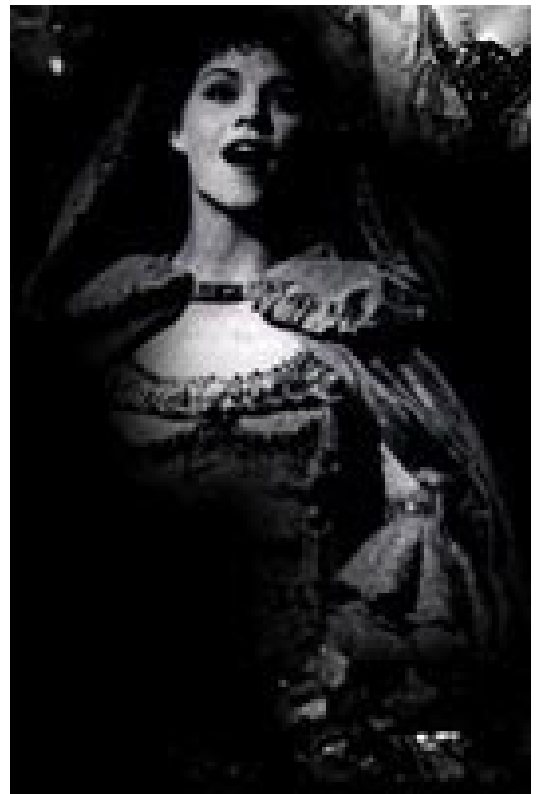
- *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert
- *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen
- *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
- *The Mill on the Floss* by George Elliot
- *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy
- The Frog King
- Pygmalion and Galatea
- Cupid and Psyche
- Svengali

**Do you think Christine made the right decision by staying with Raoul? Why?**

What would you have done?

Discuss the phrase, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” with regards to Christine.

Remember that she is the only character to see “*the man behind the monster,*” when she sings, “*Yet in his eyes / All the sadness / Of the world... / Those pleading eyes / That both threaten / and adore...*”



# The Outcast

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## What is an outcast?

### Have you ever been cast out of a group because of race, gender or physical difference?

How did it make you feel?

Have you ever cast anyone out of your group? Why?

### Compare the character of the Phantom with outcasts in the following works:

- *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare
- *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare
- *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison
- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- *Paradise Lost* by John Milton
- *The Inferno* by Dante
- *A Separate Piece* by John Knowles
- *The Book of Genesis*
- *1984* by George Orwell
- *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
- *Beowulf*
- *Grendel* by John Gardner
- *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley



**Write and act out a skit in which someone is unable to attend a play or a movie because they are confined to a wheelchair, or a student is barred from a club because of gender, race or religion.**

**Has seeing *The Phantom of the Opera* changed the way you feel about outcasts?**

In what way?