

Disney's Beauty and the Beast

a Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide

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Be Our Guest

*at Wheelock Family Theatre's Production of
Disney's Beauty and the Beast*

The story of *Beauty and the Beast* brings to Wheelock Family Theatre audiences a spunky, intellectually curious heroine in Belle. She is admirable from the first for her loyalty to her eccentric father, her love of reading (even though it brands her as “different”), and her refusal to accept a proposal of marriage from an arrogant and boastful nobleman. Over the course of the play, she learns that love sometimes comes from the least likely and least romantic of sources, that the surface is not the whole truth, and that home is where the heart is. Her Beast learns that love cannot be forced, that love means freeing, not caging, your beloved, and that true power comes from giving it away. These two are surrounded by an entertaining collection of characters—some comic, some caring, some evil, some beastly, some silly—who add spice to the central story and help underscore the overall message about the unselfish generosity of love. Welcome to the heartwarming world of this wonderful tale!



On Your Way to the Theatre...

Beauty and the Beast is a story with which many, or even all, students are likely to be familiar, especially in the Disney animated film version, which is the basis for the WFT production. Some students may be curious to see how a live stage production will deal with Lumiere, Mrs. Potts, and the other “Objects” of the animated film. Others may ask, “I know that story already. Why would I want to see it again?” This question may well make for a productive introductory discussion before seeing the play.

- What **are** the reasons for seeing/reading/experiencing a story more than once?
- What questions about the stage production come to mind if you’ve seen the movie?
- What if you’ve already seen a stage version? What questions might come to mind before you see another one?
- How will each new version of this story, no matter where or how it is produced, be the same?
- In how many ways will each version be different?

The Story

A Prince, living in a shining castle, is disturbed one winter's night by an old beggar woman, who comes to his castle and offers him a single rose, in return for shelter from the bitter cold. He is repulsed by her appearance and refuses to let her in. The old woman's ugliness melts away to reveal a beautiful enchantress. Though the Prince is sorry when he discovers that she is, in fact, a beauty, the Enchantress returns his unkindness by turning him into a hideous Beast. His stubborn pride compels him to remain in his bewitched castle with Lumiere, the love-struck candelabra; Cogsworth, the pompous clock; the kindly Mrs. Potts; and an inquisitive teacup named Chip. To break the spell, the Beast must learn to love another and earn their love in return, before the last petal falls from the Enchanted Rose, If not, he will be doomed to remain a Beast for all time.

Belle is an intelligent and beautiful young woman who lives with her father, Maurice, in a small village. When her father is imprisoned by the Beast, Belle offers herself to the Beast in return for releasing her father from his prisoner's cell in the Beast's castle. The Beast accepts Belle's offer to exchange places. As time passes, the Beast falls in love with Belle, but he is afraid to tell her. He offers instead his Magic Mirror and her freedom to rejoin her father in the village. Belle unknowingly betrays the Beast to her would-be suitor Gaston, who leads a frenzied mob to destroy the Beast. At the castle, the Enchanted objects repel the mob, but Gaston manages to stab the Beast in the back. Gaston is thrown to his death.

The Beast, dying from his wounds, tells the weeping Belle that he is happy that he was able to see her one last time. Belle tells him that she loves him. The last petal on the Enchanted Rose falls. A magical transformation changes the Beast into the Prince once again. The spell has been broken! All the servants are also now human again, and the Beauty and her Beast, who is now a handsome Prince, live happily ever after.

The Origins of the Story

Heidi Anne Heiner writes, in *Beauty and the Beast: Tales from Around the World*, "Beauty and the Beast is inarguably one of the most beloved--if not the most-- beloved fairy tale in modern times... The tale has definite literary origins. It was written by Madame Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740 as a novella length book. Villeneuve drew upon folklore for her inspiration as well as other literary predecessors. Her story was then adapted and rewritten by Madame Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1757 into the version we most easily recognize today. The tale is part of a larger group of folktales--Animal Bridegroom stories-- known in countless variations throughout Europe and Asia as well as Africa and the Americas."

To read more and for lists of Beauty and the Beast variants check out:
www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cinder/BB1.htm and <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/>



Madame Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve

Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, a Parisian author, wrote the original story, *La Belle et la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast), in 1740. The tale was originally novel length and included a lengthy backstory about the two characters. Drawing from fairytales and folklore, it included fairy kings and queens and was geared toward a more adult audience. It is said that Madame de Villeneuve wrote the story to prepare young women for arranged marriages in 18th century France. *La Belle et la Bête* was a social critique speaking to the fact that women had very few marital rights before, during, and after the marriage.

Madame Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont

Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont published an adapted, shortened version of *La Belle et la Bête* in her *Magasin des Enfants* (Children's Collection) in 1756. Madame de Beaumont's version serves as the basis of the story that audiences are familiar with today. She spent over a decade working as a governess to upper-class children and she wrote with them in mind. She refocused the story from one in which the Beast was in search of his humanity, thus leading to his transformation, to one in which the heroine needed to change. In her version, it is Belle who must look beyond the surface appearances to recognize the humanity in the Beast. It evolved into a morality tale serving to educate children.



Linda Woolverton



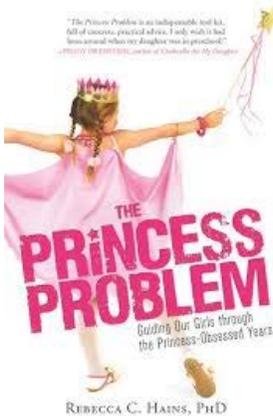
In 1991, Linda Woolverton set a precedent as the first woman to write an animated feature for Disney. She adapted the Beauty and the Beast story for the motion picture studio, but it was an uphill battle. Her struggle to make Belle a heroine for modern audiences was met with some resistance. Revisions to one scene written by Ms. Woolverton, in which she showed Belle marking a map and choosing destinations to explore, suggested placing the character in a kitchen, baking. Ms. Woolverton was not ready to create a character cut from the same cloth as other female fairy tale prototypes. With the help of the film's lyricist, Howard Ashman, she crafted a character that was headstrong and book-smart. Ms. Woolverton states, "If you depict girls and women in these roles we've never seen before, then it becomes an assumption for younger generations."

To learn more about Linda Woolverton check out:

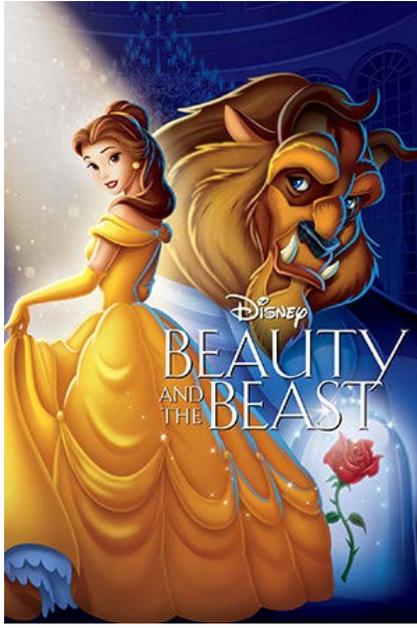
<http://time.com/4344654/beauty-and-the-beast-linda-woolverton/>

<https://www.makers.com/linda-woolverton>

Linda Woolverton's Belle is a stronger heroine than many of her predecessors, something to celebrate, and yet the way she is treated by other characters is something to question. Fairy tales, as a genre, present archetypal characters: beautiful and beastly, good and evil, and play out our human hopes and fear. They are our dreams and nightmares on the page.



Dr. Rebecca Hains, author of *The Princess Problem: Guiding Our Girls through the Princess-Obsessed Years*, has created a parent-child discussion guide for Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* that suggests conversation starters for various age levels about such topics as The Pretty Princess Mandate, Gender Stereotypes, and The Romance Narrative and Beast's Bad Behaviors. You may find the discussion guide at: <https://rebeccahains.com/parent-child-discussion-guides/beauty-and-the-beast>



The Disney version cuts several elements of Belle’s family and background. In other tellings, she has two older sisters and three brothers. Her father is a formerly wealthy merchant who has lost all his money, much to the discontent of Belle’s spoiled sisters. Hearing that the last of his ships may have come in after all, their father leaves the village to take charge of the cargo. The older sisters ask for expensive presents, but Belle asks only for a rose. On the other hand, the Disney version adds several characters who do not appear in Madame de Beaumont’s or other early versions of the tale: Gaston, Lefou, Monsieur d’Arque, and, of course, the enchanted “people/objects.”

Consider the “object” characters, a Disney invention.

- What role do these new characters play in the telling of the story?
- How do they add humor to the play?
- What difference might it make if Mrs. Potts were a human housekeeper, Cogsworth a human butler, etc.?
- What funny moments do you remember?
- How do the following phrases, used by or about the “object characters,” add to the humor of their characters?
 - “ticked off” - Cogsworth
 - “tightly wound” - Cogsworth
 - “shed light – Lumiere
- Did you notice any other examples?

Turning the story into a musical adds emotion in the form of songs and action in the form of dances—both of which shape our response to the different parts of the story.

- What is the tone established by the musical score?
- How does it shift from the beginning to the end of the play?
- How do songs help to establish the characters and their hopes and conflicts?
- In other words, how do the songs help tell the story?

To learn more about the making of the 1991 animated film, check out:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSFk0_30TbA
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHNTuJBvMQ>



The Making of the Broadway Musical

“When Walt Disney Pictures’ full-length animated feature film *Beauty and the Beast* was released, critics praised its songs worthy of a Broadway musical. It was observed that Broadway is as vital to the film’s staging and characterizations as it is to the songs themselves. *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* went on to win Academy Awards for Best Song and Best Original Score and made history as the first animated feature ever to receive a nomination for Best Picture Oscar. When the decision was made to actually bring it to the Broadway stage, everyone associated with the production knew that would have to be extraordinary.”

- What are the unique challenges to making the story of Beauty and the Beast come alive in a live musical performance...without the animation or special effects of film?
- You try it! Create designs for set, costumes, lighting... How would you bring the story from the page to the stage?

Once Upon a Fairy Tale

“The child intuitively comprehends that although these stories are *unreal*, they are not *untrue*...”

Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*



The experience of watching *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* provides a wonderful launching point for a study of the fairy tale genre.

“Fairy tales are a genre in literature. They have their roots in the oral tradition. Fairy tales with very similar plots, characters, and motifs are found spread across many different cultures. Fairy tales also take on the color of their location, through the choice of motifs, the style in which they are told, and the depiction of character and local color.”

Elements Found in Fairy Tales

- Special beginning and/or ending words: Once Upon a Time, Happily Ever After
- Good Character (kind, generous, innocent, helped by others)
- Evil Character (witch, demon, monster, evil stepmother)
- Royalty (castle, princess, prince, king, or queen)
- Poverty (a poor working girl, a poor family, a poor shepherd)
- Magic and Enchantments
- Recurring Patterns and Numbers (3's, 6's, and 7's)
- Universal Truths (love, fear, coming of age)

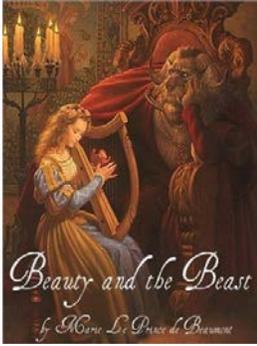
Common Motifs

- Talking animals/objects
- Cleverness/tricksters
- Origins: where do we come from?
- Triumph of the poor
- Human weakness explored
- Human strengths glorified
- Magic words or phrases/repetition
- Guardians/helpers
- Monsters
- Youngest vs. Oldest (sibling rivalry)
- Sleep (extended sleep, death-like trances)
- Impossible tasks
- Quests
- Tests of character
- Gluttony/starvation
- Keys, passes

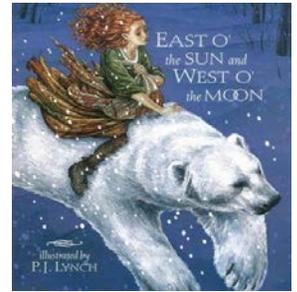
From: www.surfturk.com/mythology/fairytaleelements.html

Read, compare, and analyze a collection of fairy tales.

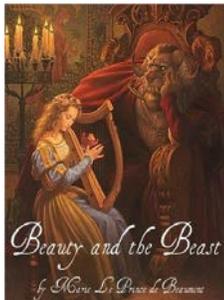
- Where do you find these elements?
- Create a feature matrix (large table/chart) and compare these elements/motifs across tales.
- Interactive Read Aloud: Wave a wand when there is magic, hold up three fingers when something happens in threes, etc.
- Write your own original fairy tale incorporating these elements.



Compare and contrast different cross cultural variants of the Beauty and the Beast (Animal Bridegroom) story...



Compare and contrast Beauty and the Beast across media (the book, the animated movie, the live action film, the stage musical)...



VS.



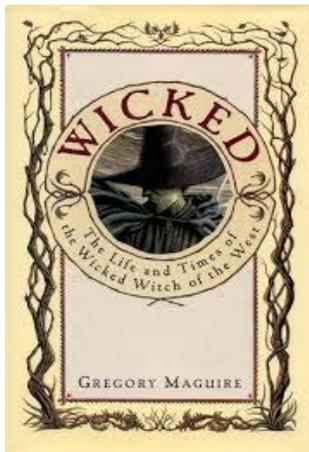
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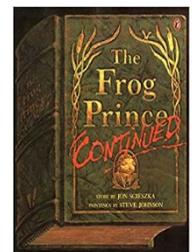


Read contemporary fairy tales told from a different point of view, such as:

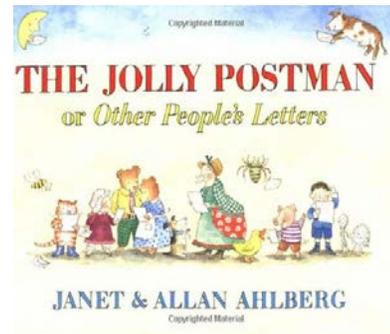


Write your own retelling of a fairy tale from a different perspective—such as *Beauty and the Beast* from the point of view of Chip or the rose...

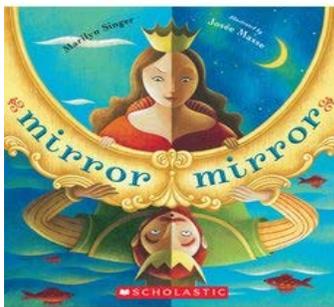
Read a story, such as *The Frog Prince Continued*, then write your own tale about what happens after “And they all lived happily ever after.”



Other authors employ letter form to tell new stories with fairy tale characters. Read:



Try your hand at writing a letter from one fairy tale character to another--taking on the voice and motivations of that character.



Poets often explore fairy tale themes and motifs in their poetry. Read different fairy tale poems, such as those found in *Mirror, Mirror* by Marilyn Singer. These are poems that when read top to bottom and bottom to top tell different stories. Below is her poem about *Beauty and the Beast*:

Longing for Beauty

By Marilyn Singer

A beast
can love
beauty.
A moist muzzle
can welcome
a rose.
A hairy ear
can prize
a nightingale, singing.
Beneath fur,
look!
A soft heart
stirs,
longing.

Longing
stirs
a soft heart.
Look
beneath fur.
A nightingale singing,
can prize
a hairy ear.
A rose
can welcome
a moist muzzle.
Beauty
can love
a Beast.

Compare and contrast the two poems above. Then try your hand at turning a fairy tale into a poem.

Resources to support an exploration of fairy tales:

[https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/72267.Fractured Fairy Tales for Children](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/72267.Fractured_Fairy_Tales_for_Children)
[https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/12256.Most Beloved YA Fairytales Retellings](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/12256.Most_Beloved_YA_Fairytales_Retellings)
<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/>
<http://libguides.mssu.edu/c.php?g=185298&p=1223898>
<https://writeshop.com/genres-how-to-write-a-fairy-tale/>
<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/activities/teaching-content/myths-folktales-and-fairytales-writing-writers-activity/>
<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/2017/bookshelf-bests-once-upon-fairy-tale-stories-elementary-classroom/>
<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/2017/bookshelf-bests-enchantments-fantasy-worlds-middle-school/>

Page to Stage Activities

- Story Circles. Students sit in a circle and each student adds on a word at a time, creating a collaborative story.
- A Real “Yarn”: Students sit in a circle and pass a roll of yarn, pre-knotted at intervals. While the student unwinds the yarn they tell part of the story. When they come to a knot in the yarn, it is the next student’s turn to take over the story telling.
- Tableaux (frozen pictures): Imagine the illustrations in a fairy tale coming to life. Work in groups to create three tableaux: one of the beginning, one of the middle, and one of the end. Have classmates guess the fairy tale. When the teacher waves a wand, or places a hand over a student’s head, that student can speak the lines of that character.
- The enchanted object characters are fascinating ones to explore. Try creating living objects.
- Character Wax Museum: Each student chooses a fairy tale character to learn more about, then becomes a wax character-- ready to answer questions as that character for visitors when a button is pushed.
- Dramatize a Tale: While the teacher reads, students dramatize the story in a narrative pantomime.
- Choose a favorite fairy tale and bring it to life, as a reader’s theatre piece, a puppet show, or a musical. Create a shoebox model of the piece, showing the set and costumes you would design to bring the story to the stage.

What's in a Name?

Since the story is originally French, some of the names are, too. Students might like to know that...

- Belle = Beauty
- Lefou =The Fool
- Lumière =Light (a good name for a candelabra)
- Madame de la Grande Bouche = Madame Mouth, or Loudmouth (an opera singer)
- Monsieur d'Arque = Mr. Bow, or Arch (think of him as ready to aim an arrow from his bow to wound Maurice)
- Maison des Lunes =House of the Moons (the moon as a symbol of instability and therefore insanity—with a pun on “loons,” meaning insane people)

Other names are not French but still are used in a clever way. For example, Mrs. Potts is a **teapot**. Her son is a teacup and, since teacups often get **chips** in them, Chip is his name. And, of course, a teapot and teacup make a “family.” Cogsworth is a clock, and **cogs** are part of the movement of a clock that makes it keep time. Babette is a traditional name for a maid, so it makes sense that Babette is a feather duster, something which maids use in cleaning.

Learning How to Love: Exploring the Themes of Beauty and the Beast

One of the most wonderful aspects of this story is the subtle and gradual way it reveals what it means to love. Compassion, respect, self-respect, loyalty, looking beneath the surface to the true worth of an individual, trust, generosity, and selflessness all come to be part of love. In contrast, selfishness, arrogance, conceit, cruelty, lack of self-respect, and the desire to control or hurt others mark those who are unworthy or incapable of finding love.

Becoming a Beast

How did a handsome prince become a beast in the first place? At the opening of the play, we learn that it was because he refused to show compassion to an old woman who asked for shelter. This situation is a common one in fairy tales; it's a test of character. If, as one saying goes, “Character is what you do when no one is looking,” then the prince fails.

- Discuss with students situations in which a compassionate action was or was not taken, and the reasons for each choice.

Difference

Belle defends the eccentricities of her father Maurice and loves the creativity that produces them. In return, he tells her that it's not bad to be different from "the common herd." He tells her, "You're never strange... don't ever change."

- Invite students to talk about what it means to be "different." Have they ever felt they were different? When have they experienced people being judged because of their difference? Belle says to the Beast, "I know how it feels to be different. And I know how lonely that can be." Discuss.

Balancing Self and Others

Disney's Beauty and the Beast shows us a range of characters who do and do not manage the balancing act between self and others. Explore where each character falls on the line between selfishness and selflessness.

Gaston, for example, is all self. No real consideration for Belle, or anyone else, penetrates his brain. It's all about him, all the time. He says, "To the depths I'll descend... to get what I want in the end."

Lefou and the Silly Girls, on the other hand, have no sense of self at all. They will do whatever Gaston demands, humiliating themselves at his whim.

- What about the Beast? Belle? Maurice? Discuss, with examples. Consider times when a character stands up for something in which they believe, takes a risk or accepts a challenge, sacrifices something for another, or tries to force another to do something. What results? Why?

Learning to See

It's not easy to see a person clearly, for who they truly are. Belle at first sees a fearsome beast, then an unreasoning dictator. The Beast sees an intruder, then a disobedient troublemaker. At last, each begins to look more carefully. Belle says, "There's something there..." and the Beast realizes, "She's never looked at me that way before."

- Students may have experience with making judgments about someone based on appearance or first impression. These experiences could make for good discussion or essay prompts. Are there times when the first impression was confirmed? What about times when the first impression turned out to be incorrect? What can be learned from each situation?

- Is it important for Belle to be very beautiful? Is it important for the Beast to be very ugly? Why or why not? How do your thoughts apply to the saying, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”? In what way is there both beauty and ugliness in everyone? Discuss your responses.

Daring to Love

An interesting aspect of the way the fragile love of Belle and the Beast begins to grow is that the two lovers don’t sing of their love to each other until the very end of the play. The first love song comes from Mrs. Potts, watching in a motherly way as the two dance for the first time. This is how it grows, she sings: “Barely even friends, then somebody bends, unexpectedly. Just a little change, small to say the least, both a little scared, neither one prepared—Beauty and the Beast.”

- Does it make sense to you that the lovers don’t sing their own song? Why don’t they, at this point?
- What do you think of this long-delayed sequence of expressing their love? What does it add to the way the play unfolds?

The Bad Guys

In a way, the characters of Gaston and Monsieur d’Arque might be thought of as unnecessary; there are plenty of obstacles to the love of Belle and the Beast in their own circumstances. So why are those two evil characters in the play?

- **Gaston** is always an unappealing character, but he seems to get worse as the play goes on. Explain how this is true. How does he display a number of the qualities that can be thought of as “anti-love”? Where does he show cowardice, for example, coercion, or cruelty?
- **Monsieur d’Arque** turns up the heat of evilness even further. Explain how being put in an insane asylum would be the worst possible punishment for Maurice. What motivates d’Arque to be so cruel?
- How do you react to these characters? Do they frighten you? Make you angry? Is it realistic that they could stir up the whole village, creating an angry mob to attack the Beast? Why do the villagers behave that way?
- If Belle is the heroine, who is the villain? Gaston? The Beast?
- Is Gaston a bully? The Beast? Discuss examples of bullying behavior. When do characters stand up for self or others? When are characters bystanders? What makes it difficult for an individual to stand against a crowd?

Transformation

A lesson in *Beauty and the Beast* is “a thing must love before it is loveable.” What does this mean? Who is most affected by this lesson, and how?

- What do the characters learn about themselves throughout the course of the play? How are they transformed? Who is changed by the end of the play? Who stays the same?
- Compare and contrast the Beast and Belle. How do they both change? What is the turning point in how they see each other? How they see themselves?
- In what way does the Beast “rescue” Belle? In what way does Belle “rescue” the Beast? In what ways do the characters “rescue” themselves?

The Rose: Before the Last Petal Drops

What do you think is the meaning of the rose? Remember, it was what the old woman offered the handsome prince in return for shelter at the very beginning of the story. She told him that he would have to love and be loved by another by the time the last petal dropped, or remain forever a beast.



- Why do you think the old woman/Enchantress left the rose with the newly-created Beast? Do you think she hoped that the Beast would be able to break her spell?
- Why do you think the Beast kept the rose in the forbidden West Wing? What does that indicate about his state of mind?
- Why was it important for Belle to break the rule about entering the West Wing and therefore see the rose?
- Why did the Enchantress set a time limit for the Beast’s learning to love? Why not let him have all the time he wanted?
- How does the symbol of the rose build suspense in the story?
- What does the mirror symbolize?
- Was a rose a good symbol for the lesson the Beast needed to learn? Can you think of other objects that have at one time or another had symbolic meaning, either for you or for people in general? Discuss. How do symbols help us to think about complex subjects?
- Invite students to choose and draw an object that they believe symbolizes them, then write artist statements to explain why.



As You Leave the Theatre...

Even though every audience member sees the same play, each person will react to it in a personal way. The “best part” will be different for everyone. However, it is interesting to see how the individual elements of the production combine to produce the overall impression that will form the lasting memory of *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* at Wheelock Family Theatre, for every person who sees it.

- Which actor made the biggest impression on you? Why?
- Which role would you like to play, if you could? Which role would you *not* want to play? Why?
- How well did the costumes, especially the difficult ones for the Beast and the “object people,” succeed in making the characters “real” to you? Are there any you would have changed? How?
- How did the lighting design increase the effectiveness of certain scenes? Which ones?
- Which song or dance did you enjoy most? Explain why.
- In this play, “things aren’t always what they seem to be.” What does this saying mean? What are examples from the play where this was true? From your own experiences?
- Of all the moments and all the ideas in the play, which one will you remember most? Write a letter to the Wheelock Family Theatre to tell them which—and why.