

# SHREK

# THE MUSICAL

a Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide

prepared by Patrick Brady and Jeri Hammond

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## **Synopsis of *Shrek the Musical***

### **ACT I**

The story begins when the ogre Shrek is kicked out of his parents' home on his seventh birthday ("Big Bright Beautiful World"). His parents tell him that life will be difficult as an ogre, since "people hate the things they cannot understand." Young Shrek has trouble fitting in, so he finds an isolated swamp to live in—alone, but content in his ways. He remains at his swamp for many happy years.

One day, several fairy tale creatures arrive at Shrek's swamp, disturbing his solitude. Per order of the cruel leader of Duloc, Lord Farquaad, all fairy tale creatures have been labeled "freaks" and banished from the kingdom. The creatures include the Three Little Pigs, Peter Pan, the Fairy Godmother, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the Mad Hatter, the Big Bad Wolf, and, their leader, Pinocchio. They sing "Story of My Life," bemoaning their terrible circumstances and their lack of a "happy ending." Shrek is displeased with the newcomers and tries to send them away, but they beg him to save them from Lord Farquaad's evildoing. When Shrek finally agrees to seek out Farquaad about this injustice, the creatures happily send him off ("The Goodbye Song").

On his way through the forest, Shrek meets a donkey who is escaping from Lord Farquaad's soldiers; Shrek easily scares the men away. As repayment for saving him, the friendly Donkey insists on helping Shrek journey to Lord Farquaad's castle ("Don't Let Me Go").

Meanwhile, Lord Farquaad, who is torturing the Gingerbread Man, rejoices when presented with the Magic Mirror, which tells him that all he needs to become a legitimate King of Duloc is to marry a princess. Of the options the Mirror gives him, Farquaad chooses Princess Fiona, who is trapped in a faraway castle guarded by a fire-breathing dragon and a lava-filled moat. In a flashback sequence, we see the young Fiona growing up through the years, secluded in the tower, awaiting—any day—her rescue by a handsome prince ("I Know It's Today").

Back in the present, Shrek and Donkey arrive in Duloc at Lord Farquaad's castle. An elaborate song-and-dance number welcomes the pair to the strange kingdom ruled by the small man with massive dreams ("Welcome to Duloc/What's Up, Duloc?"). When Shrek confronts Farquaad about the fairy tale creatures taking refuge in his swamp, Lord Farquaad agrees to clean up the swamp if Shrek will help Fiona escape from the tower. Shrek and Donkey take off to rescue Fiona; Donkey passes the time by singing the "Travel Song."

When they arrive at Fiona's tower, the Dragon—in fact, a lonely female desperate for love—tells the terrified Donkey her plans to devour him ("Donkey Pot Pie"). Shrek, wearing a knight's helmet, rescues Fiona, who wants to savor this dramatic moment she's been imagining for years ("This Is How a Dream Comes True"). After Donkey, Shrek, and Fiona narrowly escape the Dragon's clutches, Fiona convinces Shrek to take off his helmet; she is surprised to find he is an ogre. As the sun sets, Fiona hurries away to spend the night in a cave, away from Shrek and Donkey.

Before they go to sleep, Donkey and Shrek discuss their dreams, and who they might have been in a different life (“Who I’d Be”). As the Act I curtain falls, it is revealed that, when the sun sets, Fiona turns into an ogre.

## **ACT II**

The next morning, Fiona, overjoyed to be free, revels in the beauty of nature (“Morning Person”). Rejoined by Shrek and Donkey, Fiona and her rescuers start for Duloc, but are delayed when Shrek and Fiona argue over whose life has been more unfortunate (“I Think I Got You Beat”). The two begin to develop chemistry. Back in Duloc, Lord Farquaad prepares for Fiona’s arrival. During his bath, he reflects on his less-than-glamorous upbringing, and plans for his grand future as King (“The Ballad of Farquaad”).

Although the travelers are close to Duloc, Fiona, having taken a liking to Shrek, raises the idea of delaying their arrival at the castle. Donkey notices the romance blooming between Fiona and Shrek, and encourages Shrek to “Make a Move” and confess his true feelings for the princess. Shrek, for now, does not heed the advice. As daylight wanes, Fiona again excuses herself to a private spot for the night. Later, Donkey stumbles upon Fiona the Ogre, who explains that a witch has placed a curse on her, stipulating that she will turn into an ogre at night until she receives her true love’s kiss.

Meanwhile, Shrek gets flustered as he rehearses his declaration of love for Fiona (“When Words Fail”). When he musters up the courage to confront her, Shrek overhears the princess—he does not see her, as it is dark—saying to Donkey: “I can’t think about Shrek. I’m a princess, after all. Look at me. Who could ever love a beast so hideous and ugly?” Shrek, unaware of Fiona’s secret, misinterprets her words, and is crushed by this news.

The next day, Shrek tells Fiona that he heard everything she said the night before, and he summons Lord Farquaad to meet the princess. As agreed, Farquaad presents Shrek with a deed giving the ogre full jurisdiction over his swamp, to do with as he pleases. Fiona, upset over Shrek’s coldness toward her, immediately accepts Farquaad’s marriage proposal and suggests they wed that very day—before sunset.

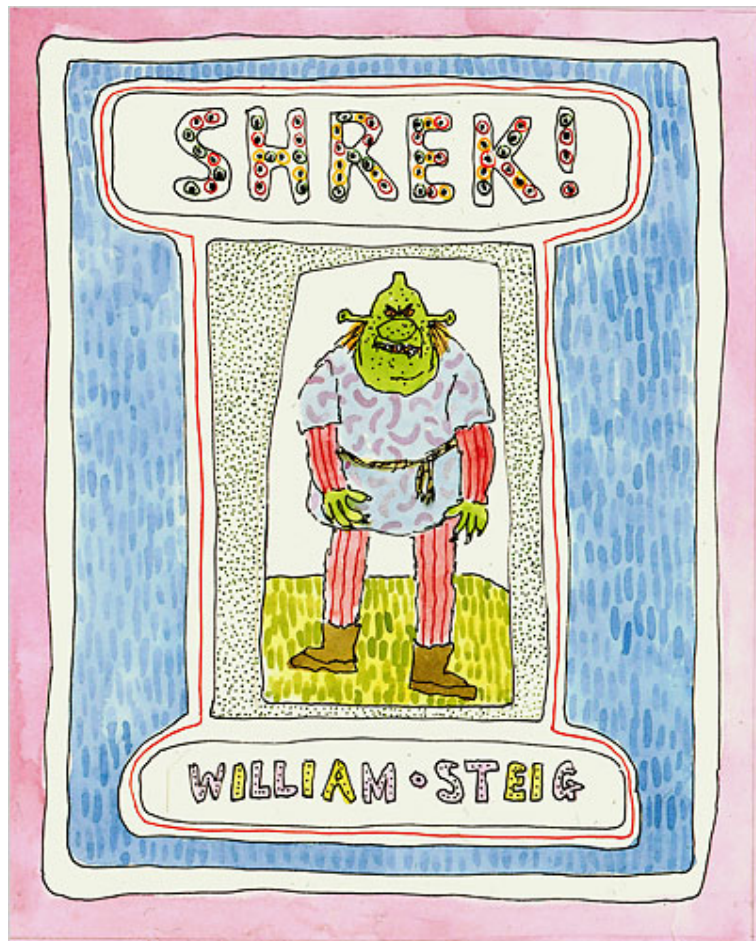
Donkey tries to tell Shrek the truth about Fiona, but a heartbroken Shrek sends Donkey away and vows to live alone as he had always planned (“Build a Wall”). Shrek returns to his Swamp and tosses the Fairy Tale Creatures off his land. The disgruntled Fairy Tale Creatures, on the advice of the Gingerbread Man, consider rebelling against Lord Farquaad. The creatures realize that “What makes us special makes us strong”—and that “letting their freak flag fly” together could be just the thing to overpower the tyrannical ruler (“Freak Flag”).

Meanwhile, Donkey finally gets through to Shrek, telling him the truth about Fiona. Shrek apologizes for mistreating Donkey, and the two set off to stop the marriage of Fiona and Farquaad. Shrek interrupts the wedding at the last moment and confesses his love for the princess (“Big Bright Beautiful World,” reprise). Just as Fiona runs away from the altar and the moon rises over the kingdom, the rebellious Fairy Tale Creatures arrive and expose Farquaad as a low-born “freak” himself (he was born to one of Snow White’s Seven Dwarves). Fiona reappears, having transformed

into an ogre, and Farquaad, horrified, seizes the crown anyway, announcing his intent to lock Fiona away.

Suddenly, Donkey and the Dragon arrive on the scene to save the day, banishing the wicked Farquaad just as Fiona and Shrek confess their love for each other. When they kiss, the witch's curse is reversed, but Fiona is confused when she continues to look like an ogre. Shrek reminds her that he finds her beautiful—and that she *is* beautiful, no matter what the rest of the world thinks. The couple returns to the swamp to live happily ever after—along with their beloved Donkey, and all their Fairy Tale friends.

The ensemble sings the final number, “This Is Our Story,” heralding a new day when fairy tales might be updated to include the voices of *all* creatures—no matter how “different” they may seem. The finale’s lyrics say it best: “We have bold and brand new stories to be told. We will write them. We will tell them. You will hear them. You will smell them.”



## The History of *Shrek*

*Shrek the Musical* is the stage adaptation of the DreamWorks hit 2001 film, *Shrek*, which is itself an adaptation of William Steig's 1990 bestselling children's book, *Shrek!*

### **William Steig's *Shrek!***

Steig's original is a short book filled with colorful illustrations. It opens, as does the film and the musical, with the lovable ogre, all alone in his swamp, pleased with his ability to scare outsiders. "How it tickled him to be so repulsive," the narrator explains. In Steig's book, Shrek meets a mysterious witch who tells him his destiny: "A donkey takes you to a knight," she says. "Him you conquer in a fight. / Then you wed a princess who / Is even uglier than you." (In truth, Steig's Donkey is far less amusing than Eddie Murphy's rendition.) As part of the witch's curse, the donkey must take Shrek to the knight, and this he dutifully does. Here, Shrek easily defeats the knight and dragon, gaining admittance to the castle where he woos the unnamed "ugly princess." Steig's original story is indeed more sinister than the musical. The two ogres do not make friends with any fairy tale creatures, but, instead, live "horribly ever after" at Shrek's swamp, "scaring the socks off all who fell afoul of them."

### ***Shrek: The Animated Motion Picture***

Director Stephen Spielberg was the first Hollywood artist to express an interest in Steig's work, purchasing the film rights for the children's book in 1991. However, John H. Williams, another admirer of the book, ended up bringing the project to the new DreamWorks Animation Studio in the mid-1990s. Williams's children allegedly first brought *Shrek!* to his attention, and he, too, fell for the ogre.

Williams thought Steig's Shrek was a character born to be in a movie, but the book needed to be adapted and expanded. Writers Ted Elliot, Terry Rossio, Joe Stillman, and Roger S. H. Schulman crafted the hilarious screenplay.

Mike Meyers, a comedian who had never done voice-over acting, was thrilled to voice the role of Shrek; he believed in the film, too. "It's a great story about accepting yourself for who you are," he said. "We live in a society with a warped sense of who's beautiful and who's not, and I think the message of this movie is that everyone is beautiful. The story makes a compelling argument for that truth in a very cool way." The public believed in the film, too. In 2001, the film earned a global box office total of \$484,409,218.

Interestingly, the cast never actually rehearsed or performed their parts in the presence of their co-stars. A reader fed their lines to them.

### ***Shrek Franchise***

Due to its overwhelming success at the box office, the creators of *Shrek* decided to continue the character's adventures. The sequels include *Shrek 2* (2004), *Shrek the Third* (2007), and *Shrek Forever After* (2010). In addition, the TV specials *Shrek the Halls* (2007) and *Scared Shrekless* (2010) have been

seen across the country. The spin-off film *Puss in Boots* follows the exploits of a minor character in *Shrek 2*, a talking, swashbuckling cat. There have also been several video games based on the film. The Broadway musical, *Shrek*, is but one of many adaptations of the story.

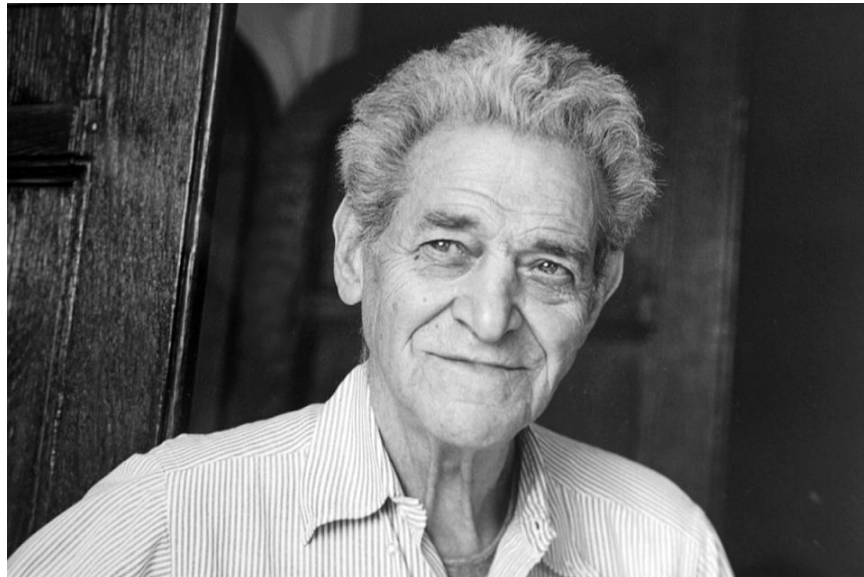
### ***Shrek the Musical***

Plans for a musical adaptation of *Shrek* began quickly after the film's release. David Lindsay-Abaire, the lyricist and book writer, started writing the show in 2002, and Jeanine Tesori, the musical's composer, joined him in 2004. Lindsay-Abaire and Tesori both have stated that their major challenge in adapting *Shrek* for the stage was trying to find out what new elements they could bring to the tale. How could they tell the story without copying the film word-for-word? How was this stage version to be different and relevant?

Like most Broadway musicals, *Shrek* debuted in an out-of-town "tryout" intended to sort out any kinks. It opened in Seattle on September 10, 2008. After cutting a few songs, adding some more, and recasting some roles, the Broadway production of *Shrek* opened on December 14, 2008 to mixed reviews. *USA Today* called the show "a triumph of comic imagination with a heart as big and warm as Santa's." The *New York Times*, however, said, "Aside from a few jolly sequences..., this cavalcade of storybook effigies feels like 40 blocks' worth of a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade."

Nonetheless, the musical ran for over a year, closing in January 2010. After further changes, productions opened in London's West End, Germany, and Israel. *Shrek* toured the U.S. in 2010, and has become one of the most popular shows to produce among regional theatres and schools.

### **William Steig (1907–2003)**



"For some reason I've never felt grown up," said William Steig. It is, perhaps, a very fitting comment from a children's book author. Steig, however, came to writing children's books late in his life. He

published his first two, *CDB!* and *Roland, the Minstrel Pig*, in 1968, when he was 61 years old. The previous 38 years had been spent drawing cartoons for *The New Yorker*, the sophisticated weekly magazine based in Manhattan. By the time he died (in Boston, at the age of 95), he had published, in *The New Yorker*, over 1,600 drawings and 117 covers—an impressive total, earning him the nickname the “King of Cartoons.” Readers of the magazine could reasonably expect to see a Steig cartoon in almost every issue. Some examples of the artist’s delightful work in *The New Yorker* appear on subsequent pages of this study guide.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, to Polish-Jewish immigrant parents, William Steig grew up in a family of artists who encouraged his gift for drawing. When the Stock Market crashed in 1929, the Steigs lost a great deal of money, so, for a time, William—or “Bill,” as his friends knew him—served as his family’s primary breadwinner. He began exhibiting and selling his drawings in the early 1930s. In those days, the \$4,500 that Steig earned in one year was enough to support an entire family.

Often saying that his favorite artist was Pablo Picasso, Steig drew on Picasso’s nonrealistic tendencies and made his own “symbolic drawings,” which are bold, scratchy sketches that capture a mood as opposed to a detailed subject. This technique can also be seen in his children’s books like *Shrek!* Often the colors fall outside the lines, or the lines don’t look neat and organized at all. Steig was known to draw every day of his life, and in his middle age he abandoned preliminary pencil sketches and began using ink the first time through.

Below is a list of some of William Steig’s works. He published 16 collections of his drawings and over 30 children’s books. In their review of Steig’s 1944 series, *Small Fry* (perhaps his most famous work), *The New York Times* spoke for many Americans: “Mr. Steig—not to put too fine a point upon it—is wonderful.” *Small Fry* follows a tiny boy around as he journeys through the absurd, adult-sized world, poking fun at its seriousness (as might Steig himself). After all, “Bill,” according to John Updike, was “one of those adults in whom the creative child has never met discouragement.”

*Man About Town* (1932)

*About People: A Book of Symbolical Drawings by William Steig* (1939)

*Small Fry* (1944)

*The Agony in the Kindergarten* (1950)

*Dreams of Glory, and other Drawings* (1953)

*CDB!* (1968)

*Roland, the Minstrel Pig* (1968)

*Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (1969)

*Amos and Boris* (1971)

*Dominic* (1971)

*Doctor De Soto* (1982)

*Rotten Island* (1984)

*Shrek!* (1990)

*Pete’s a Pizza* (1998)

*When Everybody Wore a Hat* (2003)

## Some Examples of William Steig's Cartoons



from *The Agony in the Kindergarten*

What seems to be going on here? What do you make of the title “The Agony in the Kindergarten?”  
What is going on with this boy’s arms?



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# THE NEW YORKER



Steig's November 2002 Cover of *The New Yorker*

What do you notice in this busy cartoon? Does anything remind you of *Shrek*? What might this cartoon be trying to say about the world?



**an unpublished Steig: "Just A Dream"**

What strikes you about this cartoon? Does it remind you of the creatures in *Shrek* at all? Does it remind you of any other cartoons you've seen?



*"Harry, take it from me. You're doing yourself more harm than good."*

**a *New Yorker* cartoon by Steig**

What do you see here? What kind of story can we infer from the image? Do you look at the cartoon first, or the caption first? Is the cartoon funny without the caption? Or is the caption totally necessary?



*He was once young and foolish.*

**a symbolist drawing, published in *The New Yorker***

How does this drawing differ from other Steig drawings? Take a look at some of the paintings created by Picasso. Do you notice any similarities in the two artists' work? What do you make of this man's face?

## Two Activities to Try

### Ugly/Beautiful

On the cue “GO,” have students walk around the room silently, trying their best to look “ugly.” Challenge them to move beyond their first good ideas, to use all the different parts of their bodies and faces to create a complete—and completely outrageous!—representation of “ugly.”

Count down to a full freeze: 10 seconds...5 seconds...FREEZE. Now, nothing can move—arms, legs, fingers, toes, eyes must all be frozen. Examine the frozen “ugly” statues, then invite students to take a peek around the room (still frozen) at all the different choices everyone made to look “ugly.”

Relax poses and ask students to briefly reflect on what was interesting or surprising about what he or she did and what he or she saw someone else do.

Repeat the exercise, substituting the word “beautiful” or “handsome” for “ugly.”

Then, have students stand still in their spots and, on the cue “GO,” begin to FEEL ugly inside. Ask them to keep the ugly feeling inside; don’t let it show yet on the outside. Think specific “ugly” thoughts. As their inside feelings of ugliness grow, direct students to let them leak out just a little in any part of their body or face: maybe 10 percent leaks out. Then 50 percent. Finally 100 percent—but still silently. FREEZE. Look around. Compare and contrast with the exercise above.

Do the same with beautiful feelings growing inside first, then slowly being revealed to the world. Reflect and discuss.

### Sound and Movement Machine

Starting with one student, begin to create a “Happily Ever After” machine. Ask the student to choose one sound and one movement and to make them loud and clear, trying to maintain a consistent level while repeating the sound and motion.

A second student joins, somehow connecting physically to the first student, and makes his or her own different sound and movement—loud and clear—and repeats it. Add a third, fourth, etc., until everyone is physically connected as a “Happily Ever After” sound and movement machine.

Let students know that you are going to “push buttons” that make the machine go slower, faster, louder, softer, etc. As they follow directions, have them pay attention to how the outside changes affect their feelings inside. Finally, the machine stops or dies—or explodes!

Reflect and discuss what was interesting or surprising. Ask: what details did you notice, with yourself and with others?

## For Discussion: Some Quotations from *Shrek the Musical*

See if you can identify which character said what, and explain how each quotation relates to the major themes of the musical.

“Now I know he’ll appear, ‘cuz there are rules and there are strictures.  
I believe the storybooks I read by candlelight.  
My white night, my knight and his steed, will look just like these pictures.  
It won’t be long now, I guarantee.”

“They judge me before they even know me. That’s why I’m better off alone.”

“There’s no use wasting good manners on the ogre. It doesn’t have feelings.”

“But we all learn: An ogre always hides. An ogre’s fate is known. An ogre always stays in the dark and all alone.”

“I’d get the girl, I’d take a breath, and I’d remove my helmet.  
We’d stand and stare, we’d speak of love, and feel the stars ascending.  
We’d share a kiss, I’d find my destiny. I’d have a hero’s ending!  
A perfect happy ending! That’s how it would be.  
A big bright beautiful world! .....but not for me.”

“Soon they’ll be writing books about me, instead of those silly little freaks.”

“I thought these two might be different, but now I know they’re just like the rest.  
You’re looking for a monster; it’s your lucky day. I’ll be what you want.”

“I’ve got your back, when things get scary.  
And I’ll shave it, when it gets hairy. Don’t let me go!”

“What makes us special makes us strong.”

“I don’t have a fancy castle and I’m not sophisticated  
A princess and an ogre, I admit, is complicated.  
You’ve never read a book like this,  
But fairy tales should really be updated.”

## Book, Movie, Musical...What Do You Think?

Compare and contrast the book, movies, and musical.

- What aspects of the story work better in the book? On film? In the musical?
- Which is your favorite? Why?
- What did the creators of *Shrek the Musical* need to do to bring the story of Shrek to the stage? What were the challenges involved in translating the characters and storyline of *Shrek* from the page to the screen and to the stage?
- How might you tell “The Story of Your Life” as a musical? What style music would you choose? What would your character’s theme song be?
- Try writing a musical version of a favorite story or scene from a story. Perhaps one of the other classics by William Steig? Hmm... What would Sylvester sing about the Magic Pebble? What would Amos and Boris sing together about their unlikely friendship?

## Once Upon a Time

The story of *Shrek* takes all of the familiar elements of fairy tales and turns them on their head!

- Explore traditional fairy tales. As you read familiar tales, chart and compare fairy tale elements such as: royalty, good and evil characters, magic, the numbers 3 and 7, rags to riches, love, and happy endings. What makes a fairy tale a fairy tale?
- Now consider the story of *Shrek*. How does *Shrek* make use of these traditional elements? How does it poke fun at traditional fairy tales?
- For older students, explore the use of satire in *Shrek*. Visit [read.write.think.org](http://read.write.think.org) for lesson ideas.
- Compare *Shrek* with fractured fairy tales such as *The Stinky Cheese Man* by Jon Scieszka. Check out [scholastic.com](http://scholastic.com) for lessons on fractured fairy tales.
- There are many readers theatre pieces and short plays based on fairy tales and fractured fairy tales. Try performing some!
- Ready to try writing fractured fairy tales? Read *How to Write a Fractured Fairy Tale* by Nel Yomtov.
- A great resource for fairy tale studies: [surlalunefairytales.com](http://surlalunefairytales.com).

## It’s All in Your Point of View

- Explore the idea of point of view. *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka or *The Other Side of the Story* series by Trisha Speed Shaskan are a few possible resources for launching the conversation.
- Write the story of Shrek from different characters’ points of view.
- *Mirror, Mirror: A Book of Reverso Poems* by Marilyn Singer includes poems read from top to bottom and bottom to top that speak from different fairy tale characters’ perspectives. Try writing a point of view or reverso poem about two characters from *Shrek*.

- *The Jolly Postman* by Allan and Janet Ahlberg or *With Love, Little Red Hen* and others by Alma Flor Ada could inspire letter writing from different characters' points of view.
- For older readers, *The Sisters Grimm* series by Michael Buckley invites readers into another world of fairy tale characters.

## Shrek, Sylvester, and Spinky: Celebrate the Works of William Steig

- The performance of *Shrek the Musical* is a perfect tie-in to an author study of William Steig. The biographical information at the beginning of this study guide is a great place to start. Author study materials may also be found on [readingrockets.org](http://readingrockets.org) and [scholastic.com](http://scholastic.com), among other sites.
- Read and enjoy the many wonderful books by William Steig. These books offer rich discussion opportunities including an exploration of themes and sophisticated vocabulary.
- How are the other books similar to and different from *Shrek*!? Which is your favorite? Why?

## Let Your Freak Flag Fly!

The themes in *Shrek* offer a wonderful opportunity to discuss and celebrate difference.

- Discussion Question: Have you ever made a snap judgment about someone and later discovered you were wrong?
- Make your own "Freak Flag" with images of the many quirky and wonderful things that make you, you!
- Write a bio-poem or an "I am" poem.
- Shrek says, "Onions have layers, Ogres have layers." Write a poem about Shrek's layers? Yours?
- Read books that celebrate differences such as *I'm Gonna Like Me* by Jamie Lee Curtis or *Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun: Having the Courage to Be Who You Are* by Maria Dismondy.

## Dear Farquaad

FARQUAAD'S DECREE: *All fairy tale creatures have been banished from the kingdom of Duloc. All fruitcakes and freaks will be sent to a resettlement facility.*

- Write a persuasive letter to Farquaad telling him why his decree is wrong.
- Learn about times in history when people have joined together to change things that were unfair.
- Hold a fairy tale character protest. Make signs such as Humpty Dumpty's "Equality for Eggs Everywhere!"
- Discuss how Farquaad's misuse of power is an example of bullying. Consider the role of the bystanders. What happens when the fairy tale characters unite, stand up, and speak out?
- Read books such as *One* by Kathryn Otoshi to further explore this concept.



## You've Got a Friend in Me

- Friendship is an important theme in *Shrek*. Donkey and Shrek make an unlikely pair. What makes their friendship work?
- Write about a friend. How are you alike? How are you different? What makes for a true friend?
- Read other books about unlikely friendships such as Steig's *Amos and Boris*.

## Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey is a classic narrative pattern, seen in works from Homer's *Odyssey* to *The Wizard of Oz*. Hero Tales involve a quest, helpers, external and internal challenges or obstacles, and transformation.

- What elements of a Hero's Journey Tale can you find in *Shrek*?
- How does Shrek change over the course of the story?
- What does he learn?
- Read *The Once Upon a Time Map Book* by B.G. Hennessy. Create a map of Shrek's travels.
- Write your own Hero's Journey Tale. Create a map to help you plan the obstacles your hero will face along the way.

## Happily Ever After

- Consider the ending of *Shrek*. How is it like other fairy tales you have read? How is it different?
- Read *The Frog Prince Continued* by Jon Scieszka. Write a sequel to *Shrek the Musical*.
- Select another fairy tale or book by William Steig and write what happens after the original story ends.
- There are many themes running through *Shrek the Musical*. Design a poster for *Shrek*, using one of these quotes: "Beautiful isn't always pretty." "What makes us special... makes us strong." "We are different and united." "Take me as I am." "I always dreamed I'd get a happy ending." "Fairy tales should be updated."
- Now that you have seen the play, what were your favorite parts? Write a review or a letter to the cast.
- In a *USA Today* piece, author Susan Wloszczyna writes about lessons we can learn from *Shrek*: [usatoday30.usatoday.com/.../2010-05-19-shrek-lessons](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/.../2010-05-19-shrek-lessons) **N.ht**. What did you learn from *Shrek*?