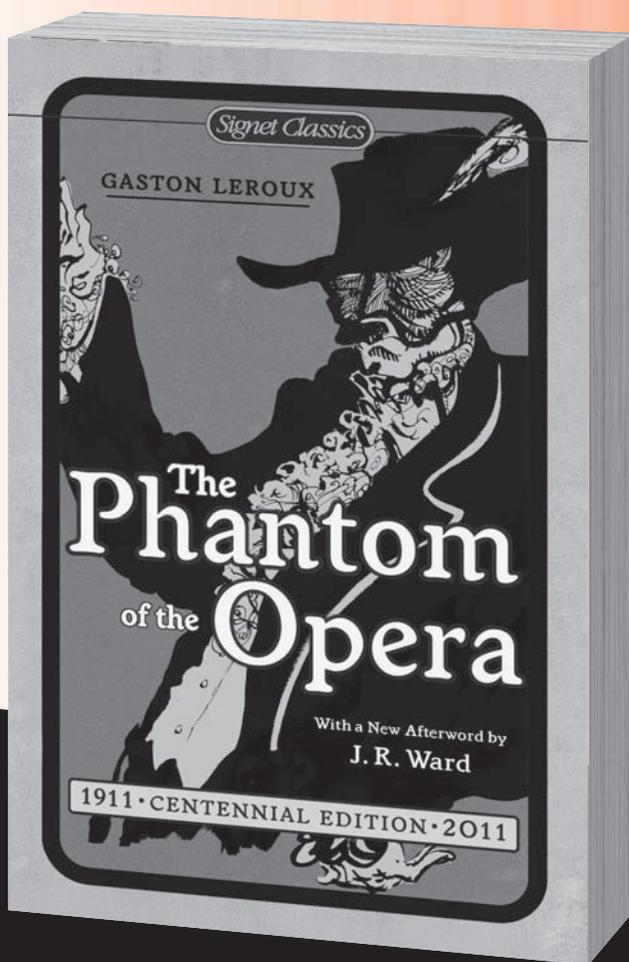


Signet Classics

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSICS EDITION OF

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

BY GASTON LEROUX



BY ALLEN KROMER

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TEACHER'S GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Published a century ago in 1911, Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* might best be considered a forerunner of much of what makes adolescent popular culture tick. Its seemingly-supernatural elements rival those found in horror films that today's teens flock to see; the tragic love triangle that comprises such a vital part of the novel seems a blueprint for the heartache depicted in Stephenie Meyer's *Bella*, Edward, and Jacob; the episodes and events whirl by like clips from music videos. In short, Leroux's novel contains elements that interest many adolescents. However, as many literature teachers know, getting some students to recognize that a text has appealing elements is a labor unto itself. Fortunately, the complexity and fertility of Leroux's story make accessible many of the elements that should resonate with teens. The struggles and triumphs that occur within a love triangle are easily grasped. Then too, through class discussions and activities students can reflect on some of the powerful themes and characters Leroux creates and recognize that an entertaining story can convey profound ideas. *The Phantom of the Opera* is a novel well-suited for

today's students: the creative kids whose passions lie in self-expression, the shy youths who yearn for the affection of a peer, the thrill-seekers who populate the theaters that screen horror films. At one point in the novel Leroux likens the Paris Opera House to a little empire, and for teen readers his seems a world that holds delights for all.

The content and activities in this guide should be considered as a resource for teaching the novel. The Pre-reading activities establish an awareness of the historical and cultural underpinnings of Leroux's novel, the literary techniques he employs in his narrative, and some of the thematic content that empowers his tale. The During-reading content helps students focus on specific elements and events in the text. The Post-reading activities promote a holistic review of the novel and the opportunity to establish and debate meanings. These activities can be used to address curricular requirements, reinforce preferred teaching styles, and promote academic success for students. The best approach is one that is selective, adaptive, and creative.

LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Erik	Disfigured composer who lives in the cellars beneath the Paris Opera House, frequently referred to as "the Opera Ghost"
Christine Daaé	Budding young opera star, Erik's student and Raoul's love interest
Raoul	Phillipe's younger brother and Christine's childhood friend
Phillipe	The Comte de Chagny, a handsome and wealthy aristocrat
Debienne and Poligny	Managers of the Paris Opera House who sell the institution early in the novel
Montcharmin and Richard	New managers of the Paris Opera House, both initially skeptical of the existence of the Opera Ghost
Madame (Mame) Giry	The Opera House boxkeeper (similar to contemporary ushers)
Carlotta	A prima donna, a renowned singer at the Paris Opera House
Joseph Buquet	A popular scene shifter responsible for moving and adjusting sets during the opera's productions
Professor and Mme. Valerius	Christine's benefactors who raise her after her father dies
The Persian	Mysterious Opera House resident, formerly of Iran, sometimes referred to as "the daroga"
Mifroid	Commissary of police, a Parisian law enforcement officer

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

Leroux's narrative in *The Phantom of the Opera* follows a sinuous course—different narrative voices, flashbacks, chapters of widely varying lengths—thus, the synopsis here breaks the novel into sections and also focuses specifically on two chapters, Chapter VII and Chapter XII. These two chapters comprise pivotal parts of the story and convey the heart of the plot: the machinations and actions of the Phantom and the compelling interplay between Christine Daaé, Erik, and Raoul.

Prologue through Chapter VI: Introduction and Intrigue

In the Prologue, the author asserts that the Opera Ghost really did exist, supporting his claims with allusions to and excerpts from different documents. His principle evidence is the discovery of what he claims are the Opera Ghost's remains. The story opens at the farewell performance and party for Debenne and Poligny, the retiring managers of the Opera. Rumors abound about sightings of a ghost prowling the building which seems confirmed when Joseph Buquet, the scene-shifter, is found hanged. At the evening's supper, the Opera Ghost appears and says that Buquet's death was not natural. After hearing of the Opera Ghost's demands (reserving Box Five exclusively for him and paying him twenty thousand francs a month), the new managers conclude that the Opera Ghost is an elaborate joke. After thoroughly examining Box Five, where a series of mysterious events have been reported, Montcharmin and Richard conclude that there is no ghost and the members of the Opera House are trying to make fools of them.

The greatest success of the evening's performance is the debut of Christine Daaé who gets the opportunity after diva Carlotta falls ill. Smitten by her performance, Raoul goes to comfort the girl after she swoons. Christine leaves a note for Raoul stating that she is bound for Perros to visit her father's grave on the anniversary of his death. She tells Raoul that she remembers him and recounts the

events of her girlhood including the death of her father and his vow to send her an "Angel of Music" after he gets to Heaven. In the graveyard Christine and Raoul hear "The Resurrection of Lazarus" played on her dead father's violin; later, Raoul pursues the ghost who escapes after Raoul loses consciousness.

Chapter VII: "Faust and What Followed"

The managers receive a note from the Opera Ghost with additional requirements (rehiring the dismissed Mame Giry as boxkeeper and casting Christine as Margarita) and the threat that if his demands are not met, the Opera House will be cursed. In a similar missive, he threatens Carlotta with disaster if she performs as Margarita. Montcharmin and Richard seat themselves in Box Five for the evening's performance of *Faust*. Having received a letter from Christine telling him to never see her again, Raoul despairs during the performance. Carlotta enters after the second act and upon singing begins to croak like a toad. The two managers tremble when the Ghost makes his presence known to them, and as the performance continues, the Opera House's massive chandelier plummets from the ceiling into the audience, killing the woman hired to take Mame Giry's place.

Chapters VIII through Chapter XI: A Tragic Triangle

After the chandelier disaster, Christine disappears from the Opera House for two weeks.

When Raoul visits Mamma Valerius searching for Christine, the old woman recounts the story of the Angel of Music and that the Angel forbids Christine to marry. Raoul is distraught when he sees Christine in a carriage which speeds off. Later, she writes to request that he meet her at an upcoming masquerade ball. The Opera Ghost stalks through the ball dressed as the Red Death. Raoul wishes to confront him but is prevented by Christine, whom he then sharply criticizes as being dishonest. After a tormented-looking Christine removes her mask and describes her

situation as a tragedy, Raoul wishes to retract his words. Later when he hides in Christine's dressing room, he hears the ghost's beautiful music, notes that Christine calls him "Erik," and watches in amazement as she disappears through the mirror at the back of her room. The next day he finds Christine at the house of Mamma Valerius. When pressed for details about the man's voice in her dressing room, Christine refuses to disclose information. Raoul agrees to let it go after Christine promises to send for him the next day. When they meet, Raoul and Christine bind themselves in a secret engagement. During this idyllic time, the couple tours the Opera House together, but Christine grows increasingly nervous and refuses to take Raoul to the regions beneath the stage. After he vows to remove her from Erik's power, Christine leads him to the Opera House rooftop.

Chapter XII: "Apollo's Lyre"

On the rooftop, Christine recounts her experiences with Erik, the Angel of Music, whom she characterizes as a demon. She says she returns to him only to protect others. She first heard his voice in her dressing room, believed him to be the Angel of Music, and received vocal training from him. When told of her budding relationship with Raoul, the voice threatened to go back to Heaven. She then tells of her first meeting with Erik and the visit to his subterranean realm, a place characterized by its vastness, an underground lake, and Erik's ornate residence. Christine also describes her conflicted feelings for Erik and his unwavering devotion towards her. The only things Erik forbids Christine to do are to look upon his unmasked visage or to hear his composition "Don Juan Triumphant." When she can't stop herself and pulls away his mask, Erik is enraged. Since then Christine is more and more terrified each time she sees Erik.

Chapter XIII through Chapter XVIII: Mysteries and Solutions

The Persian appears to warn Christine and Raoul to flee. Later Christine discovers that she has lost the ring that Erik gave her to

signify her freedom; upon its loss, Erik will supposedly have his revenge. When Raoul returns to his apartment that night, Erik appears outside his window but disappears when Raoul shoots at him with a revolver. At that night's performance, Christine disappears when the lights are inexplicably extinguished. Montcharmin and Richard are criticized for acting oddly during the performance by Opera House employees—they remain locked in their office despite the mysterious events taking place. Mame Giry gives an extended account of her experiences with the Opera Ghost, and Montcharmin and Richard attempt to determine what happened to the twenty thousand francs they gave to the Opera Ghost. They accuse Giry of the theft. To secure additional notes from being taken, the envelope is safety-pinned into one of Richard's pockets; nevertheless, the notes disappear without the safety pin being removed. Raoul discloses what he knows of the Opera Ghost to Mifroid, but the listeners discount his story and consider him crazy. When he hears that his brother has taken Christine, Raoul sets out in pursuit but is intercepted by the Persian. Raoul asks for his assistance in finding Erik and Christine.

Chapter XIX through Chapter XXV: Pursuit and Conflict

The Persian agrees to help Raoul, arming him with a pistol and cautioning him to keep his hand at eye level. The two enter into a secret passage via Christine's dressing room. Hidden, they pass by Mifroid and opera employees discussing the newly-discovered, drugged bodies of the gas man and his assistants and witness the fearsome visage of the rat catcher, a man who appears to be floating, burning head pursuing them. After entering into a secret passage near where Buquet was found hanged, the Persian and Raoul find themselves in what the Persian calls "the torture chamber."

The narrative then shifts to an account taken verbatim from the Persian's manuscript. The Persian tells of his harrowing first visit to Erik's subterranean home, of his experiences with Erik before they arrived in Paris, and

Erik's relationship with Christine. The Persian then describes what happened to Raoul and himself in Erik's house. From the next room, Christine tells the pair that Erik has gone mad with love and has threatened to kill himself and everyone unless she agrees to marry him. Christine's fruitless efforts to free the Persian and Raoul end in their torture. Visions of the African savannah and forests appear and disappear in the mirrors of the torture chamber, and heating elements elevate the temperature until the two hapless men nearly despair. The Persian then finds the catch to a trap door that leads to Erik's cellars; upon their escape there, the Persian discovers barrels of gunpowder that Erik has cached to destroy the Opera House. Given a choice to flood the gunpowder chamber or blow it up with the whole Opera House, Christine chooses the flood and in so doing submerges the Persian and Raoul who lose consciousness.

Chapter XXVI and Epilogue: Redemption and Release

Raoul and the Persian are revived to find Christine married to Erik who returns the two men to their respective homes. Erik then visits the Persian at his home to inform him that he is dying of love. He tells the Persian how Christine showed sympathy towards him, allowed him to kiss her, and agreed to be his wife, overcome with emotions, Erik released Christine so that she could marry Raoul. Erik says that after he dies, he will send Christine's possessions to the Persian. Three weeks later, the Persian learns that Erik, the Opera Ghost, has died. In the epilogue, the author offers additional evidence to convince readers of the existence of the Opera Ghost.

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

These activities are designed to build students' background knowledge and prepare them to understand the novel's themes and appreciate its artistry.

I. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE OF HISTORY AND CULTURE

Drawing Inspiration from the "Introduction"

John L. Flynn's "Introduction" in the Signet Classics edition explains how *The Phantom of the Opera* fits in the broader fabric of popular and literary culture. He provides a catalog of titles that teachers might use as parallel texts to serve as points of reference before beginning to read the novel. The titles include: *Dracula*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," *The Beauty and the Beast*, and *Dr. Faustus* or other Faust legends. Flynn also provides a biographical sketch of Gaston Leroux.

Ask students to read the "Introduction," making a list of key points about the biogra-

phy of Leroux. As a class, make a list of historical events that were taking place at the time Leroux was writing the novel. Post this list so that students can refer back to it while reading the novel.

Survey the students about the texts that parallel the novel. If you determine that a majority of the students have read one of the works, ask students to brainstorm the main themes or motifs in that work. Again post this list for students to come back to and edit as they read the novel. If students are not familiar with any of the texts, ask them to read Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" and together list the themes of the short story. Discuss what the protagonist is trying to do and why. What is Hawthorne saying about obsession?

The Paris Opera House

With a few exceptions, *The Phantom of the Opera* occurs within the confines of Le Relais Paris Opéra, or the Paris Opera House. Leroux's contemporaries no doubt knew of (and were impressed by) Charles Garnier's design. A great resource to help students understand more fully the novel's setting and appreciate

Leroux's choice of that edifice for his story is the "Publisher's Note on the Paris Opera House, from the Original American Edition of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1911) that appears in the Signet Classics edition (pp. 263-267). Ask students to read the note in pairs and to make a list of key points to share with the whole class. Discuss: What details about the building stand out to the students and why?

Two useful resources to help orient students include Google Earth and Google Maps, for while they allow students to see Paris's location relative to their own classroom, both provide features that allow students to travel around the Opera House virtually. To locate the building, open the application or navigate to the site and search using "Le Relais Paris Opera." Google Earth, a free downloadable application from <http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>, features a three dimensional model accessed by clicking on the actual building once users have sufficiently zoomed in. If zooming in results in becoming disoriented, users can click on the sidebar link to "Le Relais Paris Opéra" and the map will identify the building. Users can also "enter in" to panoramic photographs that initially appear as spheres onscreen that allow closer views of the building. In Google Maps, users can utilize the Street View feature to go on a virtual walking tour around the building to experience it from different perspectives.

After students have explored the Opera House, ask them to analyze the building to identify those traits that make it an effective choice of setting for a novel that features mystery and horror. Ask students to consider the building's size, complexity, ornate decoration, differing levels, and storied history. Discuss the benefits of using a famous building as a setting for a novel. Ask students to consider how familiarity begets believability, how personal connection often heightens audience response, or how personal experience sharpens imagery.

Following is a list of web sites that might also serve as resources for this activity:

<http://www.oobject.com/physical-cutaway-models/famous-paris-opera-cutaway/1830/> features a cutaway model of the building that illustrates its many levels, size, and complexity. Clicking on the image will link to an additional perspective of the model.

<http://www.cs.yale.edu/homes/shah/pics-OP/2009-07-Switzerland/slides/75-Inside%20the%20Paris%20Opera%20House%20for%20a%20ballet.html> features two high-resolution photographs of the Opera House, including a modern shot of the building's interior. Clicking on the bottom center of the image will enlarge a detail; clicking the back button will link to an exterior shot of the building.

http://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/ARTH_220/social_space.html offers additional images of the building and shows examples how the Paris Opera House has appeared in French art.

<http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Palais-Garnier.pdf> provides considerable content about the building and an overview of its history.

Classical Music: Hearing the Novel

From the very public performances of opera on stage to the intimate performances between Erik and Christine, music permeates nearly every aspect of Leroux's tale. An overview or primer of the style of music Leroux's contemporaries would have been familiar with will allow students to understand his allusions more fully. You may wish to check with music teachers within the school or in the community to locate resources to provide examples of the types of music that Leroux alludes to or to give a live performance. The web offers a broad range of resources to help students hear some of the music that Leroux incorporates into his story. The following links, from the Library of Congress Web site, provide online examples of three of the songs the author mentions when he recounts the farewell concert for Debiegne and Poligny.

Guonod's "Funeral March of a Marionette."
<http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/1916/>

Guonod's "Funeral March of a Marionette."
<http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/9139>

Guonod's "Funeral March of a Marionette."
<http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/4680>

Teachers can play selections as students enter the class or work independently. The music can serve as a focusing activity by asking students to journal about how they react as they listen to the music. During reading when students encounter song titles in the text, ask them to analyze why Leroux would have chosen these particular titles. For instance, why would the songs listed above have been appropriate for a farewell party?

Can't Tell An Aria From Vibrato? Opera for Beginners

Exploring opera can help students understand Leroux's novel more fully, for the characters often concern themselves with staging, rehearsing, and performing operas. *Opera Colorado's Opera for Beginners* guidebook (<http://www.operacolorado.org/education/guidebooks/>) provides a basic, accessible text to help students understand the concepts, terminology, and techniques of opera. After reviewing this resource, draw from it those elements that students would benefit from knowing prior to reading *The Phantom of the Opera*.

A second option available to some teachers would be to invite local performers to sing excerpts from operas for their classes and provide an overview of the medium. In some schools, music teachers or music classes might be able to provide such performances.

II. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE OF LITERARY ELEMENTS

Setting

In popular culture, though often critically panned, horror films are a popular draw for adolescents. One of the novel's aspects that

often appeals to teen readers is the creepy substage settings— the Phantom's realm. This activity asks students to reflect on why an audience would willingly submit itself to frightening images and concepts. It uses the works of Edgar Allan Poe to understand how setting can contribute to that sense of uneasiness since Leroux's novel is reminiscent of Poe in its macabre story and settings.

Begin by sharing the following sources with students and discussing ideas about the popularity of the horror genre:

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501465_162-20021204-501465.html discusses some of the psychological theories behind horror movies' popularity and identifies horror movie fans' most popular traits.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2535221/Horror-film-gene-that-makes-some-scream-while-others-laugh.html> examines the possibility of genetics affecting one's tendency to want to view horror films.

Using the understanding of how horror can appeal to an audience as a starting point, share the Poe stories linked below with students. Ask them to annotate or take notes on the stories' settings. Then, after they have generated ideas about each story's content, hold a class discussion to identify those elements of setting that might create apprehension or uneasiness in an audience. Are the settings themselves unsettling, or are the events that occur in those settings what scares? While the catacombs in "The Cask of Amontillado" are eerie, the broader setting of a plague-ravaged countryside in "The Masque of the Red Death" is equally unsettling. Ask students to consider what the author might have been trying to get at through the descriptions. Then, after students have identified scary elements, discuss how those elements function to create uneasiness. Do they put characters at risk? Do they contain characters or elements that would harm most human beings? Do they create conflict in the plot? After they have thought critically about setting, consider with the students the impact of the confined space of the Opera House.

What feelings did the author want the setting to elicit in the reader?

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2148/2148-h/2148-h.htm#2H_4_0009 is the e-text of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Works of Edgar Allen Poe, Volume II*. Both stories can be located using the Contents links near the top of the page.

Narration

The novel's narrative style includes letters, excerpts from memoirs, first person and third person narration, and lyrics. To prepare students for this complex style and to allow them to think critically about its merits and drawbacks, ask students to compare differing accounts of the same event. Choose a historical or contemporary event that appeals to students. Following is one example.

The Kent State University shootings that occurred in 1970 served as a cultural touchstone for the Vietnam era in America. Surrounded by controversy, the shootings spawned a social and cultural outpouring for years afterward. After reading and viewing the resources below, in a discussion or chart have students define first-person narration, third-person narration, and artistic interpretation. Then, using the examples as a basis for exploration and discussion, ask students to share or record their ideas on their charts about the strengths, weaknesses, and reliability of each narrative approach. Finally, have students individually identify and defend the single narrative approach that they believe most effectively conveys the event.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-05-03-kent-state_N.htm offers a first-hand video account by Alan Confora and a third-person journalistic version.

<http://www.alanconfora.com/?q=node/5> is an account of the shootings and the days that preceded them.

<http://human-highway.com/lyrics/lyrics-04.html#103> presents the lyrics to Neil Young's "Ohio," a song written in response to the shootings and recorded by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82CYNj7noic> is the Youtube video of the band's performance of "Ohio."

Imagery

Some of the images in *The Phantom of the Opera* linger in readers' minds long after they have finished the book. To practice the skills needed to understand the complexity of images, students can interpret a series of paintings, analyzing them on general and specific levels. While the medium is different, the skills necessary for analyzing visual images and literary images are similar.

Ask students, in pairs, to look at a painting and describe in general what they see or what is happening. Then have students make a list of the particular elements that they see in the painting, identifying ideas conveyed by these details. Pairs of students can share their reactions to the same paintings. While many paintings will work, those linked here are similar to *Phantom* visually or thematically.

Edouard Manet's *The Dead Toreador*

<http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/edouard-manet/the-dead-toreador-1865#supersized-artistPaintings-192152>

Mary Cassatt's *The Opera* 1878

<http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/mary-cassatt/the-opera-1878#supersized-artist-Paintings-190390>

Mary Cassatt's *In the Box* 1879

<http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/mary-cassatt/in-the-box#supersized-artistPaintings-190193>

III. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE THROUGH INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THEMES

One of the novel's strengths is its complexity. Leroux presents a range of themes that resonate with most readers:

- The individual against society,
- Man's inhumanity to man
- Judging character based on appearances (Beauty and the Beast)
- Romantic love
- Giving into one's obsessions.

Using shorter works of fiction can help students practice identifying and communicating convincingly about theme. After discussing the themes above, have students read three or four short stories that contain thematic content similar to Leroux's. Then, have students work individually to identify each story's thematic content and compose a statement that accurately interprets the artist's message on that content. They should note those textual elements that contribute to the story's theme. Remind students that acceptable answers must be textually supported. Once students have completed their statements of theme, collect them and lead a discussion that requires students to evaluate which statements best convey a story's theme. A small group might arrange the statements of theme for a particular story at the front of the room according to effectiveness as a starting point for the discussion; if their opinions differ, subsequent groups might rearrange the statements.

The following texts are well suited as resources because they convey themes similar to Leroux's:

William Faulkner's "Barn Burning," Ralph Ellison's "Battle Royal," Colette's "The Hand," Gish Jen's "In the American Society," Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People" and "A Good Man is Hard To Find," Edgar Allan Poe's "Hop Frog," Leo Tolstoy's "How Much Land Does A Man Need?" and O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi."

DURING READING ACTIVITIES

I. WHOLE TEXT ACTIVITIES

Designed to deepen understanding of the novel, these activities are best completed as students read the novel. Instructors might collect works in progress to gauge students' understanding, monitor appropriate completion of the reading schedule, and provide feedback and clarification to reinforce comprehension and encourage learners.

Heaven and Hell

The Great Chain of Being, a scheme devised to rank all sentient beings in the Universe,

Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

Ask students to consider the importance of appearances and what people attracts people to each other. Have students read and analyze one or more of the articles linked below on contemporary research on physical attraction. Ask students to take notes, using a notes organizer such as Cornell notes. Ask students to consider two guiding questions as they read: According to researchers, what traits are important in creating attraction? and What kinds of evidence support these claims?

USA Today's Sharon Jayson investigates a range of variables that can affect attraction in this article: http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-02-10-attraction_N.htm

Jayson provides evidence that brain scans indicate that romantic love can endure: http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-11-16-brain-love_N.htm

National Geographic's Christine Dell'Amore summarizes research about attractiveness based on skin tones: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/11/101103-attractive-women-men-faces-skin-color-evolution-diet-health/>

Once students have completed their investigations, have a class discussion to create and post a catalog of different ideas about attraction. Refer back to this research when students are analyzing the novel.

might be the source of the common conception of Heaven being "up" and Hell being "down." This concept is useful for analyzing the Paris Opera House in Leroux's novel, for the author uses figurative language to associate different levels of the Opera House with Heaven, Hell, or realms in between. Analyzing and noting such references can help students understand more fully the characters associated with the respective regions, understand the conflicts within the novel, or simply appreciate Leroux's compelling use of figurative language.

Start by having students look at and analyze an image of the Great Chain such as the example here created in 1579 by Didacus Valades: <http://www.stanford.edu/class/engl174b/chain.html>

As students read, have them record references to Heaven or Hell and consider concepts or things associated with the respective realms as well. The novel resonates with allusions to angels and demons. In addition to listing references, have students analyze and record the functions that the allusions perform. In some instances, for example, a reference to Erik as “the Angel of Music” might help readers see the scope of his talents and his attractiveness to Christine and her devout benefactress, Mamma Valerius. After students have created a list of allusions, discuss how the imagery serves to describe a character’s transformations or feelings.

A Contrast of Classes

Characterization of social classes affects readers’ interpretation of the people and events in the text and can help students grasp the novel’s meaning on a global level. Ask students to complete a reading journal or graphic organizers like bubble maps or cluster maps that detail the novel’s content as they read. Ask students to consider the classes in the novel as aristocratic/wealthy and working class/poor. In addition to identifying characters by their class, have students list traits and connotations assigned to those characters and classes. A starting focus might be to examine the characterizations of Philippe, Comte de Chagny, (p. 19) and Mame Giry, box-keeper (bottom of pp. 155 to 159). Students can then use the class characterizations to consider some of the novel’s themes. For instance, some of the aristocratic characters act considerably less than noble; Montcharmin and Richard are buffoons whereas Mame Giry is loyal and honest despite the derision she typically faces from her “superiors.” Such instances underscore the concepts of appearance versus reality or judging character using physical appearances. Remind students to think even about minor characters like the door-shutters, corps de ballet, and firemen, for when considered as a

class, their characterization and presence plays a significant role in the novel.

The Phantom and Christine: Charting Characters’ Complexities

The two central characters in the novel, Erik and Christine, are at once round and dynamic, going beyond stereotypes of a “beauty and the beast” story. Leroux develops these characters fully and documents the changes that they undergo. Erik changes from paramour to demon to martyr; Christine transforms from novice to prima donna to heroine.

To review characterization, go back to stories or characters students have already discussed. Or, read with the class Eudora Welty’s “A Worn Path,” which provides fertile ground to consider the ways authors create people. In this story Phoenix Jackson develops on literal and figurative levels as she makes the arduous trip towards town.

Using online resources like those linked here can also provide concise definitions and useful resources to help students remember how writers create their characters.

http://udleditions.cast.org/craft_elm_characterization.html provides an accessible, comprehensive resource on characterization.

http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson800/Characterization.pdf provides graphic organizers to help readers record information.

After reviewing characterization, have students fold two sheets of typing paper in half vertically, one each for Erik and Christine. In the first column, have students list character traits of each person as they read. Remind students to keep entries for the two characters separate on the respective sheets. In the second column, have students record their analysis of that trait—what does the information tell readers about the characters? Is the trait new in the novel’s context? Does the new information change the way the reader views the character? Use students’ individual perceptions to create a class chart for each of the characters which can be used for review and discussion during reading.

II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING

Discussion questions represent an opportunity to assess understanding and to strengthen comprehension of the novel and its literary elements. Students can answer the questions individually, they can work as groups to answer a series of questions to refine their understanding of a section, or one student can work exclusively on a single question to become the class expert who then shares his/her expertise with peers and the instructor.

Prologue through Chapter VI

- In the Prologue, the text indicates that Leroux “acquired the certainty that the Opera Ghost was more than a mere shade” (p. 2). What types of evidence does Leroux cite in his efforts to convince readers? What evidence do you find most compelling? Does the Prologue convince you of the existence of a ghost?
- Early in the Prologue Leroux alludes to “the most extraordinary and fantastic tragedy that ever excited the Paris upper classes ... the kidnapping of Christine Daaé, the disappearance of the Vicomte de Chagny and the death of his elder brother, Count Phillipe . . .” (p. 1). What effect does this hyperbole have on readers? Why would Leroux allude to these crimes so early on?
- Chapter I contains several details that depict workers at the Opera as superstitious. How does the credibility of the characters contrast with the presentation Leroux provides in the Prologue?
- As the first chapter proceeds, different characters provide a broad range of descriptions of the Opera Ghost. What do the descriptions have in common? Do they lend credibility to the existence of the ghost, or do they elicit skepticism in readers?
- On pages 14-15, Leroux foreshadows Buquet's death; then, different characters recount his demise. What effects does this repetition have on readers? Which character does the death seem to affect most significantly?
- What sorts of words does Leroux employ to describe Christine's first performance as Margarita in *Faust* (p. 18)? What adjectives would you use to describe this diction? What effect do these words have on readers?
- After reading the first description of the Comte de Chagny (p. 19), how would you characterize him? What kinds of traits and beliefs does the description imply rather than overtly stating?
- How does Raoul compare to his brother in the descriptive passages on pages 19 and 20? In what ways do the descriptions of the aristocracy differ from the descriptions of the working class in the early stages of the novel?
- Christine tells the Opera Ghost, “Oh, to-night I gave you my soul and I am dead!” He replies, “Your soul is a beautiful thing, child...No emperor ever received so fair a gift. *The angels wept to-night*” (p. 24). What associations might most readers make based on this exchange? How would you characterize the tone of the Opera Ghost's words?
- What attitude do Montcharmin and Richard adopt towards the Ghost in Chapter III? Given the events that have occurred at this point in the narrative, do you believe that their conclusions are wise? What are the reasons for their decision?
- In the first two letters from the Opera Ghost in Chapter IV, what tone does he use towards the new managers? Do these attitudes seem consistent with your feelings about the Ghost? Why or why not?
- When Leroux recounts Christine's girlhood (Chapter V), what elements and literary techniques does he incorporate to elicit sympathy from readers? In what ways do his efforts succeed? What shortcomings did you identify?
- At this point in the novel, what is Christine's attitude towards the Angel

of Music? What is Raoul's? What evidence and ideas would you use to account for these differences in attitude?

14. In Chapter V, Leroux uses the format of "an official report" to describe what happened to Raoul in the churchyard. Why do you think he uses this format? Some of the elements in the passage seem exciting—do you think the format heightens or decreases the level of excitement for readers?
15. In the extended paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 63, Leroux describes the setting in the Opera House as Richard and Montcharmin approach Box V. What types of imagery does the author use in the paragraph? What effects do these images have on readers?

Chapter VII: A Closer Look

1. In his first letter to the new managers, the Opera Ghost issues an ultimatum and threatens that if his demands are not met, "[the managers] will give Faust to-night in a house with a curse upon it" (p. 67). How does the Ghost's lack of specificity in his threat affect readers? In this instance, is a general threat more effective than a specific threat? Why or why not?
2. Richard responds to the letter with a shout. In the conversation that runs from the top of page 67 to the top of page 69, identify the verbs that Leroux uses to show how the characters communicate: "roared," "repeated," and so on. Analyze the diction to identify the different attitudes that the characters have. Remember, as the talk proceeds, the emotions often change.
3. In the passage identified in question 2, what frustrates or angers Richard and Montcharmin? Do the new managers seem to be in control of their enterprise?
4. Perhaps to build sympathy for Christine, Leroux characterizes Carlotta in less-than-flattering terms in this chapter. What attitudes, actions, and words does the prima donna use that depict her in a negative light?

5. During this night's performance, Christine gives a poor performance—one of Carlotta's friends says that the young singer is "bleating." To what do you attribute Christine's sub par performance? Do you think that the reasons for her performing poorly are reasonable?

Charting the Acts

At the beginning of the chapter, the Opera Ghost writes, "So it is to be war between us?" Much of the chapter consists of acts of aggression between the Ghost and the new managers. This activity will allow students to see more clearly the antipathy between the managers and the Ghost, a vital tension to understand the book in its entirety. Using a two-column chart or other graphic organizer, have students list the acts that the Ghost and the managers execute towards each other. The Ghost clearly specifies his wishes in the first letter. How do the managers respond to his demands? What is the Ghost's response? Once students have generated actions by both parties, ask them to analyze the events within the context of what they know about the book so far. After analysis, have students write a brief passage or participate in a class discussion to determine who is acting within their rights in this instance: the Opera Ghost or Montcharmin and Richard?

Figuring Out Faust

Understanding the Faust legend will help students appreciate the novel more fully because of its thematic similarities and presence throughout the novel. Leroux's novel features the opera adaptation of the work. A good starting point is to view a synopsis of Gounod's *Faust* (<http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/history/stories/synopsis.aspx?id=12>) to get some sense of the overall plot and to allow students to reflect on the themes of the story.

Ask students to look for parallels between Christine and Margarita (the character Christine is supposed to depict on the night of the disaster), Raoul and Valentine (both earnest youths concerned with female honor

and victimized by more powerful characters), and the Opera Ghost/Erik and Faust or Mephistopheles. (Note: some teachers might prefer to share the Faust content here and wait until students have finished reading the novel to lead students through the comparison of characters.)

To further the understanding of Faust and the medium of opera, share a clip from a videotaped production available online to give students the virtual experience of seeing a live, professional opera production. The version linked below works very well to show students the emotion, special effects, methods of characterization, and the ability of music to move an audience.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFwYQRHVNaA&feature=related>

The excerpt (14:36 to 24:50) depicts Faust's recognition of his unfulfilled desires and his decision to serve Satan in return for renewed youth. The agreement is signed in blood, and Faust is rejuvenated.

The Night the Lights Went Out

The chandelier's plummeting from the Opera House ceiling resonates with readers, but the event spans only two brief paragraphs at the end of Chapter VII. Learning about the real life inspiration and analyzing the event's significance within the novel will help deepen students' understanding of the Opera Ghost's abilities.

In May 1896 a huge counterweight that supported the Opera House's massive chandelier broke free and fell into the audience, killing one woman and injuring others. This account from the *New York Times* provides a brief, contemporary account:

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9902E1DE153BEE33A25752C2A9639C94679ED7CF>

First, have students read Leroux's version and the source above. Then, lead a class discussion to gauge how students rate the fearfulness of the accident. Why would audience members be particularly susceptible? Would

the event's unpredictability or the perceived safety of the venue make such an event more terrifying? Then, review Chapter VII to see how the chandelier's fall fits into the broader events of the plot. How does the falling chandelier compare to the other events that the Opera Ghost has perpetrated? Is there any escalation leading up to the event? How does the event function metaphorically? What are possible figurative meanings for the fall of the chandelier? Finally, review again the last two pages of the chapter (pp. 78-79) and have students identify the events for which the Opera Ghost is responsible. Do the events occur simultaneously, or do they occur in rapid succession? What might students be able to infer about the Opera Ghost's abilities based on the events that conclude the chapter?

Chapter VIII through Chapter XI

1. In Chapter VIII, what pieces of evidence lead Raoul to believe that Christine is susceptible to "the malevolent designs of some mysterious and unscrupulous person" (p. 81)?
2. How does Mamma Valérius's attitude towards the Angel of Music differ from Raoul's? Why do you think that the elderly woman believes so fervently?
3. At the masked ball in Chapter IX, Raoul asks Christine, "For what hell are you leaving, mysterious lady . . . or for what paradise?" (p. 93). Based on your understanding of the novel through this point, do you feel that Christine's relationship with Erik is more hellish or heavenly? Why?
4. In the passage that begins at the bottom of page 95, what effect does hearing the "voice without a body" have on Raoul?
5. In Chapter X, what motivations does Raoul have to discover the identity of the Angel of Music? Consider noble and petty reasons behind his quest.
6. When Christine proposes a "secret engagement" to Raoul in Chapter XI, what conclusions can you draw about

her character? What are her reasons for proposing such an arrangement? Does she seem more worldly or innocent?

7. Erik insinuates to Raoul, "She is wearing the ring again to-night; and you did not give it to her . . . you must go and ask Erik!" (p. 106). What are Erik's motivations for uttering this to Raoul? What does he hope to accomplish? What character traits might one infer from these words and action?
8. During their secret engagement, Christine and Raoul tour throughout the Opera House, an edifice that Leroux likens to an empire (pp. 105-107). What literary techniques does the author use to develop the idea of Opera House as kingdom? What tone does this tour set in this section of the novel?
9. Throughout the novel and particularly in Chapter XI, Leroux details the different levels of the Opera House. Erik occupies the realm underneath the stage; others occupy the upper reaches. What types of imagery does Leroux use to round out the setting of the Opera House? And what associations might readers make with the different levels based on the details Leroux uses in his depiction?

Chapter XII: A Closer Look

While Chapter VII represents the mystery, suspense, and motivations behind Erik's terrorizing the Opera House, Chapter XII best exemplifies the relationships between Christine, Erik, and Raoul.

1. Leroux sets this chapter on a beautiful spring evening. What mood does this set for the ensuing conversation? Is the mood sustained? Or consistent?
2. What recollections does Christine share that support her early belief in the existence of the Angel of Music? Is her faith based more on selfless reasons or on selfish reasons?
3. Christine tells Raoul, "We have nothing to fear except the trap-doors, dear, and here we are miles away from the trap-

doors . . ." (p. 121). Do you think her assertion is correct? Why or why not? What might careful readers infer from her statement about her character?

4. After listening to some of Christine's account, Raoul exclaims, "Why, you love him! Your fear, your terror, all of that is just love and love of the most exquisite kind, the kind which people do not admit even to themselves The kind that gives you a thrill, when you think of it . . ." (p. 122). Using the evidence in the balance of Chapter XII, defend or refute Raoul's claim. Does Christine love Erik?
5. The final image of the chapter is "an immense night-bird that stared at them with its blazing eyes and seemed to cling to the string of Apollo's lyre" (p. 130), an image that contrasts the earlier idyllic setting at the chapter's start. What are the central events in the chapter that might warrant such a brooding image?

Beauty and the Beast

Many students may attribute most of Christine's revulsion towards Erik to his ghastly appearance and conclude that the Ghost's appearance is the chief strike against his chances of wooing Christine. Have students create a two column chart (perhaps using the template posted at http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/tchart_eng.pdf) to list Erik's traits, words, and actions in this chapter that are either attractive or repulsive to Christine. Once students have compiled their evidence, discuss whether or not they believe Erik could ever win Christine's love. After reaching consensus about that topic, ask students to discuss what their conclusion suggests about how they view Christine. Is she superficial? Or is her revulsion merely human?

Legends of the Fall

Western culture resonates with tales of individuals whose curiosity overcame them; obsession typically results in dire consequences. In Leroux's novel, Christine suc-

cumbs to the temptation to view Erik's appearance; in turn, the unmasking radically changes her attitude towards her mentor and captor. In this activity students will reflect on several traditional stories to understand more fully what happens before and after pivotal decisions. Ask students to read Book 3 of Genesis and the story of Pandora's Box. Then have students analyze the world before and after the characters succumb to temptation and eat from the tree and open the box respectively. What is the nature of the change in each case? Are there influences beyond simple curiosity that inspire each woman to act? Are the changes reversible?

<http://www.biblica.com/bibles/chapter/?verse=Genesis+3&version=niv> Genesis, Book 3 (New International Version)

<https://www.msu.edu/user/richa457/fengeraa/handouts/MythFolkLegend/Pandora.pdf>

Pandora's Box

Then, have students consider Erik's attitude towards Christine before and after his unmasking. Similarly, analyze her changing attitude towards him. Ask students to reread Chapter XII to identify the characters' changing states of mind. In the examples above, most readers consider succumbing to temptation as a mistake. Is Christine's unmasking Erik a mistake or not?

Show students the unmasking scene from the 1925 Lon Chaney film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Ask students to compare the depiction of Erik in the film to that in the text. How faithful is the screen version to the novel?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa3bHKWZoJg> focuses exclusively on the unmasking.

Charting the Tragic Triangle

Christine's wavering affection, Raoul's devotion, and the rivalry between Erik and Raoul for Christine's love highlight the love triangle in the novel. Have students create a chart that illustrates the relationships between the

three central characters by drawing a triangle and listing each character's name at the different points. Then using Chapter XII, ask students to note the emotions, attitudes, and actions of each of the characters for the other two. For instance, Raoul feels fear, jealousy, and uncertainty towards Erik, while Erik feels jealousy, animosity, and superiority towards the young aristocrat.

Chapter XIII through Chapter XVIII

1. In Chapter XIII Christine calls Erik "a very curious genius" who "does things that no other man could do . . ." (p. 133). What effect does her description have on your impressions of Erik? Do her words change your impression of Christine? How?
2. When Raoul thinks that Erik visits his apartment (p. 135), he attempts to shoot him. How are his actions in this section different from those he has demonstrated before? Would his attempts endear him to Christine? Why or why not?
3. When Christine disappears, the managers are engaged in absurd behavior that none of the other Opera House workers understand. Thinking back over the section, do the absurd managers' comic actions decrease the overall tension? What effect does the comic section have on the balance of the section?
4. Analyze Raoul's behavior and attitudes in the first pages of Chapter XV. In what ways do they contrast Erik's typical mien? Does Raoul seem a worthy adversary to Erik? Why or why not?
5. Raoul wonders, "Why, in a final access of pity, had she insisted on flinging, as a last sop to that demon's soul, her divine song: 'Holy angel, in Heaven blessed/My spirit longs with thee to rest!'" (p. 149). What are some possible reasons for Christine's singing this to Erik at this point in the novel?
6. In Chapter XVI, Leroux depicts Mame Girya as a dedicated ally to the Opera Ghost. What motivations does she have

- to serve him with such devotion? In what ways does the section underscore Erik's masterful ability to manipulate individuals psychologically?
- Montcharmin and Richard scheme and fret about the allowance they have paid to the Opera Ghost. How does this characterization compare to the chief motivations of others in the novel? Are the main characters concerned about worldly gain to the same degree? How does this affect your attitude towards the two managers?
 - In Chapter XVII, the two managers obsess over keeping their money away from Erik. After reviewing the chapter, analyze the changes that Erik has led Montcharmin and Richard to make. In what ways have Erik's efforts weakened or changed the two men?
 - When Raoul discloses his knowledge of Erik to Mifroid, the commissary suspects that the young aristocrat is a mad man. What conclusions does Mifroid rely on as he discounts Raoul's information?
 - At this point in the novel, Erik seems to be the most competent at devising plans and executing them. In what ways do his abilities increase the tension in the novel? Are there characters in the novel who seem to be able to thwart his plans or quash his desires?

Chapter XIX through Chapter XXV

- At the start of Chapter XIX, what information does the Persian use to gain Raoul's confidence? Do you think the Persian's experiences inspire similar confidence in readers? Why or why not?
- As this section progresses, Leroux discloses some of the secrets behind Erik's actions that were considered by characters in the book as mysteries. How does the revealed information about how Erik executed his deeds affect your attitude towards Erik? How do you view him differently now that some of his tactics are known?
- In the last chapters of the book, Leroux uses footnotes to explain or clarify aspects of the story. Do you think that the footnotes interfere with the narrative? Do the footnotes lend credibility to Leroux's story? Why or why not?
- The two men are passed by "a shade . . . carrying no light, just a shade in the shade . . ." (p. 192). The Persian is unclear as to the identity of this threat. Who might this mysterious individual be?
- Leroux increases the tension soon after with the appearance of the rat catcher, who appears to the Persian and Raoul as "a whole, fiery face" (pp. 193-195). What varied types of sensory imagery does the author use to create suspense in readers? Which of the characters' senses are affected?
- Beginning with Chapter XXI, Leroux incorporates what he calls "The Persian's Narrative," an account allegedly taken from a memorandum composed by the Persian. Why does the nature of the story make this borrowing necessary? What elements does the Persian's account have that lend believability to the entire tale?
- As he recounts his experiences with Erik, the Persian discloses many details that were unknown to Christine, Raoul, or any other character in the novel. After analyzing the new information, do you think of Erik in a more positive or more negative way? Why?
- In the Persian's narrative, he describes the character of "the little Sultana," the daughter of a high-ranking official. How would you characterize this young girl? How does her evil nature compare to that of Erik? Is she better than the Opera Ghost? As bad? Or worse?
- During their torture in Erik's chamber, what obstacles do the Persian and Raoul face? What physical ordeals do they undergo? To what psychological duress

are they exposed? Which of the types of torture is greater—the physical or the psychological?

10. In Chapter XXV, why does Christine agree to marry Erik?
11. At the end of Chapter XXV, what has happened to Raoul and the Persian? What do you think will happen to them next?

Chapter XXVI and Epilogue

1. In Chapter XXVI, Leroux shifts from the Persian's memorandum account to a version that he alleges to have received first-hand from the Persian. While first-hand accounts are typically viewed as solid sources, what aspects of the Persian's retelling might affect its credibility? Think about how long after the actual events the story took place, the ability of the author to record accurately, or similar elements as you consider your answer.

2. When Erik visits the Persian, he retells the events that led to the captives' release. As his story unfolds, how does Leroux use elements of style like structure, diction, and characterization to make the story more effective?
3. How did Christine move Erik to save Raoul and the Persian from drowning?
4. Why does the Persian weep on p. 251 as Christine had wept with Erik? Do they weep for similar reasons?
5. Does Erik's change of heart about allowing Christine and Raoul to marry seem in keeping with what has been revealed about his character?
6. In the Epilogue, Leroux uses evidence similar to what he shared in the Prologue to prove the existence of the Opera Ghost. What is the most effective new evidence that he cites to convince readers of Erik's existence?

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

These activities provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of the text, to apply their learning to elements and concepts that supplement the novel, and to draw from their beliefs and life experiences to appreciate the novel more fully. Most can be adapted for completion by individual students or small groups of students.

I. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND ESSAYS

1. In his introduction to the Signet Classics' *The Phantom of the Opera*, John L. Flynn asserts that Erik's "acts of violence are committed solely for the woman he loves and to protect his world of anonymity" (p. viii). Using your understanding of Erik's character and actions, defend or refute Flynn's assertion. As you consider your response, identify and incorporate the best textual evidence to support your argument.
2. In his novel, Gaston Leroux employs a range of stylistic and narrative techniques. Excerpts, song lyrics, transcripts, footnotes, and other devices combine to convey the tale of the Phantom who haunts the environs of the Paris Opera House. Review the text and identify those techniques that are most successfully employed to convey the story. After you have identified the elements, share three or four ways the techniques you identified make Leroux's story more compelling.
3. In some ways, *The Phantom of the Opera* is a study on the nature of beauty and ugliness; the novel's characters and plot seem to underscore the idea that appearances are a poor foundation for judging character. While Erik is cursed with a gruesome visage, some of his acts are inspiringly positive. And some of the "beautiful people" in the novel act in less than admirable ways. Reflect on

- your understanding of Erik. Then decide whether or not you think his appearance reflects his nature. After you reach your conclusion, identify the best examples and arguments to support your claim.
- Leroux consistently depicts women in his novel in unflattering terms: some are unintelligent, others superstitious or naive, some vain, others vulnerable. Perhaps the only exception to this generalization is the character of Christine Daaé. Review your notes and the novel to strengthen your understanding of the character of Christine. Then, using textual support, argue whether or not you believe that Christine is a strong female character.
 - One of the central reasons that Christine falls under Erik's sway is that she believes that he is the Angel of Music, an entity introduced to her by her deceased father. In the Opera House, Erik's power grows because the superstitions of many of the employees make his feats more impressive. Although he seems to be in control for much of the text, Erik is susceptible to comparable misguided beliefs, those that represent self-delusion never come to fruition. After reflecting on your understanding of Erik, identify what you consider to be the most flawed of his beliefs. Once you have identified two or three of his misguided beliefs, explain how these beliefs contribute to his suffering or downfall.
 - In his afterword to the novel, J. R. Ward claims that "the story . . . is a classic tale of good versus evil: Raoul is the fine young man . . . Erik . . . is the deformed madman . . ." (p. 268). Using your understanding of the novel, consider whether or not you think Ward's assertion is accurate. As you work, compare the two characters to identify any exceptions to the writer's premise. Is Ward wholly correct? Or should her interpretation be qualified?
 - As they search the catacombs for Erik, Raoul exclaims to the Persian, "I do not understand you. You treat him as a monster, you speak of his crime, he has done you harm and I find in you the same inexplicable pity that drove me to despair when I saw it in Christine!" (p. 182). Like Christine, the Persian knows Erik intimately. After reflecting on your knowledge of Erik, identify some of his traits that might inspire pity or positive feelings. What about this "monster" inspires pity in those who know him best? As you prepare to share your ideas, incorporate three or four positive character traits in Erik's personality.
 - At the end when Christine says she will be Erik's "living wife," he is transformed and releases the Persian, Raoul, and, eventually, Christine. Is her agreement noble? Or self-serving? Write a response that presents your opinion and provides evidence from the text as support.
 - At the novel's conclusion, Erik is transformed after a single kiss, releases his three captives, and resigns himself to die from love. Having reflected on the novel, weigh Erik's flaws against his merits. Then, decide whether the redemptive power of love can offset the acts of a lifetime. As you think, identify those characters in the novel who would agree with this assertion. Which would disagree and condemn Erik? When you share your ideas, explain which group you think is correct.

II. GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

"Things I Wish I Could Tell You"

In literature and in life, much goes unsaid. Sometimes individuals are afraid to voice their thoughts; others fail to seize an opportunity to speak; in other instances, a loved one might die before innermost feelings are aired. By considering the things that characters in *The Phantom of the Opera* might like to say, students can gain a clearer understanding of characters, their aspirations, their motives,

their fears. Have students compose letters from one character to another to communicate those ideas or feelings that are left unsaid in the novel. Letters might be evaluated on accuracy to story elements, accuracy of voice, scope of content, and creativity. Possible letter topics might include:

- Erik writing to Christine after she and Raoul have left to express his regrets, his hopes for the couple, or to explain his motivations for acting as he did.
- Christine to Raoul to clarify the reasons behind her actions (many times she simply disappears or sends cryptic notes), to express her feelings towards Raoul, and to provide a contrast between him and Erik.
- Raoul to Erik to plea for Christine's release, to express his outrage at the Ghost's treatment of his beloved, or to thank him for eventually releasing him.
- Mame Giry to the Phantom to protest against her treatment at the hands of Montcharmin and Richard, to inquire about the likelihood of Meg Giry's ever becoming Empress, or to share how the Opera Ghost's good treatment fills her with gratitude and pride.

Letters to the Author

This activity allows students to voice their appreciation or criticism of the novel by writing a letter to Gaston Leroux. In the planning stages, have students brainstorm those elements that they liked the most and those they liked the least; then, have students compose letters to the author to share their ideas. These letters can also include questions to the author about his life, novel elements, or to ask him to respond to criticism of his novel.

Erik as Tragic Hero?

By the novel's end, students will have seen the many different faces of Erik, the Phantom of the Opera. To develop a deeper understanding of his character, ask students to determine whether or not Erik is a tragic hero. First review the idea of the tragic hero. The following web sites may be useful to

review the idea of the tragic hero: <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/s/santorar/engl190v/trag.hero.htm> describes the essential elements defining the tragic hero.

http://www.class.uidaho.edu/engl257/Classical/tragic_heroism.htm gives more detail defining the classical tragic hero.

Then have students review Erik's life story, the main events in his life, his actions, his attitudes, and other pertinent elements to defend or refute whether or not Erik should be considered a tragic hero. Students might work individually or in small groups. In some classroom settings, dividing the class into halves and having one half argue one premise while the other counters can provoke spirited discussion and afford students the opportunity to apply and test their understanding of Erik's character with their peers. Another assessment option would be for students to write written responses to assert their views. In any case, requiring specific details or quotations will require students to return to the text and to review it critically.

Phantom Goes Hollywood: Planning A Film Adaptation

Since many adolescents appreciate and understand modern films, this activity draws on their expertise to develop a deeper understanding of the novel. As a whole class, identify those elements that a film must have: cast, setting, director, special effects, cinematography, and other film elements. Then, ask students to cast characters, choose a suitable director, choose an appropriate place to film, select music appropriate for a soundtrack, and the like for a film adaptation of the novel. As they work, remind students that they must make creative decisions that are appropriate for the novel and that they must provide justification for their choices. Once the individual or group has completed the thought process, have students create and present their ideas as a publicity packet with film information, a poster that advertises the movie, a cover letter that explains why their film would be most likely to succeed, and other suitable elements. In some cases having students

create a storyboard rendition of a central scene produces good results both in improving a project and helping students understand a pivotal event in the novel more fully.

Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity? Erik on Trial

In today's courtroom, some lawyers might attempt to defend Erik by using the insanity defense. Ask students to first review and list as a class what they know about a plea of insanity. Then students can review these online resources to add details to their initial list. <http://www.law.cornell.edu/background/insane/insanity.html> explains the evolution of the defense hosted by Cornell University.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/crime/trial/faqs.html> offers a FAQs page about the insanity plea.

To put Erik on trial, start by identifying the most serious charge against him. Divide the class and assign one half the role of the prosecution and the other the defense. Then divide each half into smaller working groups where students will compose opening statements. Using the text for support, ask students to draft their thesis statements about whether Erik is guilty of the charge or not and include some of the support for their position in the body of their argument. Employing small groups for this process ensures that more students will participate and contribute in central roles and that later they will hear three or four opening statements for their side of the issue.

First the prosecution and then the defense present their opening statements. Then, an open floor discussion follows with groups, in turn, elaborating on their ideas in order to convince the class of their position. The teacher as moderator manages the exchanges and ensures broad participation. At the end of the open floor period, groups reconvene to reflect on the evidence, consider their stance once again, and compose closing statements that they then read to the whole class. The teacher can serve as the judge to determine whose arguments and support are more effective, or student jurors can cast votes to decide the trial's outcome.

The Movie Is Never As Good As The Book!

In adapting most literary works for film, scriptwriters and directors must adapt the original works so that they can be retold within the confines of a couple of hours. While there are many adaptations available of Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera*, perhaps the most popular and publicized, was the 2004 film adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical. While the film is visually stunning and musically moving, the production takes license with the original novel. Allowing students to contrast the novel with the film will allow them to think critically about both media and weigh the merits of Leroux's original story. Use or adapt one of the following strategies.

Clip Comparison

Preview the film to identify those scenes that are most central to its success. Possibilities might include the chandelier scene, the rooftop scene, or the concluding scenes. Then, ask students to identify the elements that are unique to each depiction. After students have reflected on each version, ask them to identify the strengths of both versions either in discussion or through a written response. A second possibility might be to ask students to identify the elements from the novel that would strengthen the film version.

Book Versus Movie

One approach when viewing the entire film is to have students analyze the film version to identify those elements that appear in the novel that do not appear in the film. Omissions of plot events, characters, or images are fairly frequent in many film adaptations. In the 2004 adaptation, for instance, the Persian and torture chamber do not appear. Once students have identified those elements that are missing in the film, have them analyze whether or not the missing elements detract from the movie version. Some students will be disappointed that elements in the novel that held their attention do not appear in the film and criticize the film. Others may conclude that the novel element was superfluous and not necessary for the narrative's success.

A second approach is to consider two film versions' depiction of Erik. If students have already completed the During Reading characterization of Erik, they might complete a comparable investigation of the movie version. Then, they could analyze which version contains the characterization that results in the most believable character.

To extend this activity, show students clips or the entirety of the 1925 Lon Chaney version of *Phantom*: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5224364451553593147>

Showing excerpts of the pivotal scenes might be the best approach particularly if students

have already viewed the 2004 Schumacher version. Have students pay close attention to the intertitles that convey the spoken word and textual content in silent films. Then, have students write a series of original intertitles using the novel as a guide to convey the information in the scene they have selected.

The Phantom of the Opera. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Perf. Gerard Butler, Emmy Rossum, and Patrick Wilson. Warner Brother Pictures, 2004.

The Phantom of the Opera. Dir. Rupert Julian. Perf. Lon Chaney, Mary Philbin, and Norman Kerry. Universal Studios, 1925.

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