

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast

by
Robin McKinley

Book Information

Robin McKinley, Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast

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247 Pages

Book Level: 6.2

Interest Level: UG

A daughter gives her life to save her father and is doomed to live in a monster's castle.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Misc./Other; Phoenix Award/Honor

Topics: Family Life, Daughters; Family Life, Fathers; Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Horror/Thriller, Monsters; Recommended Reading, ALA Outstanding Books for College Bound

Main Characters

Beast the master of the enchanted castle

Beauty (Honour) Huston a young woman who feels she is not as beautiful as her sisters

Gervain Woodhouse former metalworker for Mr. Huston; married to Hope Huston

Grace Huston Beauty's sister, who is engaged to Captain Robbie Tucker, who is presumed lost at sea

Hope Huston Beauty's sister, who is married to Gervain Woodhouse

Mr. Huston Beauty's father and owner of a shipping company that had financial difficulties

Vocabulary

egregious conspicuously bad

fractious cranky or unruly

ogre a cruel or brutal person

pillion a pad behind a saddle for a second person to sit

precocity characterized by unusually early development or maturity

seraphical angelical; like an angel

Synopsis

Beauty, her two sisters, and her father live the life of luxury in the city. Beauty feels that she is short and plain, especially when compared with her two very beautiful sisters. Her father, Mr. Huston, made his fortune by building a shipping company, but Mr. Huston's luck turns bad when all his ships are presumed lost. One of the ships was commanded by Captain Robbie Tucker who was engaged to Beauty's sister, Grace. The other sister, Hope, falls in love with Gervain, a metalworker from her father's company. He arrives at the Huston home and invites the whole family to go with him to his hometown where he plans to become a blacksmith. Mr. Huston agrees, and after everything is auctioned off, the group leaves for Blue Hill.

The group moves into an abandoned house with a blacksmith shop on the edge of a forest. Gervain tells Beauty that the forest is enchanted by a monster who lives in a castle in the center of it. After several months, Mr. Huston gets word that one of his ships has returned to port, so he travels to the city to claim it. On his return trip, he gets lost in the forest and finds himself at the enchanted castle. He is treated with hospitality until he picks a rose to take home to Beauty. The Beast, who is master of the castle, confronts Mr. Huston and tells him that he must bring his daughter to live with him forever in the castle or return himself to give his life as punishment.

Mr. Huston returns home with his saddle bags filled with riches from the Beast. He tells his tale and Beauty decides to go to live with the Beast. She is a stubborn person, so her family resigns themselves to live with her decision.

She is treated well at the castle. The air itself is her servant and all the furniture and objects in the castle move to serve her. The Beast is cordial and each evening he asks her to marry him. Each time she refuses, but she feels guilty about the refusal. Through the Beast's magic, Beauty learns that Robbie Tucker is alive and his ship has returned. Beauty knows that Grace is considering a proposal

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from a young minister, so Beauty pleads with the Beast for a short visit to her family. The Beast agrees, but warns her to stay only a week or he will die. She honors the agreement, but leaves from her home to return late and becomes lost in the forest. She finally returns to the castle to find the Beast ill. She realizes that she loves him and agrees to marry him.

The spell is broken immediately. The Beast turns into a handsome prince, but Beauty hesitates to marry him because she is so plain. He takes her to a mirror, and she is surprised to see that she has become beautiful.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did Beauty think she was plain looking?

Both her sisters were tall and slim, with tiny waists, short, straight noses, dimples, and small, delicate hands and feet. They both had dramatic coloring, perfect skin, and natural curl in their hair. Beauty had mousy hair that was neither blond or brown and would not curl. She was short, thin, and awkward with large hands and feet. Her skin broke out in spots.

Literary Analysis

Why is the point in the story where Beauty learns to love the Beast and thus breaks the spell, the climax of the story?

The climax is the point at which all conflicts are resolved. After the spell is broken, Beauty is no longer a prisoner of the Beast. The Beast is no longer under the curse of an evil spell. Beauty's family will have no more financial problems because she is marrying a wealthy prince.

Constructing Meaning

What insight into human nature do we gain from this story?

All too often in our media-driven world people and things are judged by their appearance. People measure themselves using models who are not the norm. Beauty had two incredibly beautiful sisters, and she felt she did not measure up to the high standard of their looks. Few women today can compare to the supermodels they see in magazines and on television. This story should teach us that there is more to happiness and love than physical beauty.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story is not set in a particular country, but the scenery in Blue Hill is described in vivid detail. Invite the students to illustrate a portion of the story using whatever media they feel comfortable with. The artwork can be of the forest, the house, or the enchanted castle. Stress that the work does not have to be a perfect rendition to reassure the non-artists, but encourage them to put the descriptions into a picture, even if the picture is primitive or abstract. A picture containing only dark colors and mysterious shapes would be an apt illustration of the enchanted forest.

Understanding Characterization There are many versions of this story in books, movies, and television. Have the students bring in different versions of the story of Beauty and the Beast. Discuss similarities and differences between this book and the ones the students find.

Understanding the Author's Craft This book is told in the first person by Beauty. The students could analyze how the story would have been different if it were told in the third person by an all-knowing narrator, or if it were told by the Beast. Have the students re-write one of the sections of the story using a different perspective, or write an essay on how the story would have been different.