

HL Essay Assessment for Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*



Below are several ideas that you might explore in designing your own prompt/question for your HL Essay. The ideas are presented by conceptual connection. You may choose one of these ideas, use them as a springboard, or develop your own. Craft your prompt and focused thesis for an analytical essay of at least five paragraphs. Complete the outline attached for peer review and instructor approval.

IDEA STARTERS

IDENTITY

1. How does Rostand use the tension between eloquence and silence to reveal Cyrano's inability to express his authentic self? *The greatest speaker in the play cannot speak for himself. He can compose Christian's letters. He can improvise poetry while sword fighting. He can humiliate Valvert verbally. He can defy de Guiche. He can inspire starving soldiers.*
2. How does Rostand develop the motif of “panache” to define Cyrano's conception of integrity and heroic identity? *“Panache” isn't simply swagger. By Act V, it has accumulated meaning through Cyrano's choices, language, independence, pride, and refusal to compromise.*
3. How does Rostand use authorship and borrowed language to complicate the distinction between authentic and performed identity in *Cyrano de Bergerac*? *Because who, exactly, does Roxane fall in love with? Christian's face belongs to Christian. The voice initially appears to belong to Christian. The letters physically come from Christian. The words belong to Cyrano. The emotion behind them belongs to Cyrano. And yet Christian also loves Roxane. So Rostand separates the traditional romantic hero into constituent pieces—body, voice, language, authorship, emotion, identity—and asks the audience to decide which of those constitutes the authentic man.*

CULTURE

1. How does Rostand use irony to critique the romantic idealization of beauty and love?
2. How does Rostand complicate traditional masculinity by juxtaposing Cyrano's physical courage with his emotional vulnerability?
3. How does Rostand use contrasts between physical appearance and verbal expression to challenge conventional ideas of attractiveness?

COMMUNICATION

1. How does Rostand use verbal wit and rhetorical performance to construct Cyrano's power in situations where he otherwise feels powerless? ***Examine** the duel, the nose speech, interactions with de Guiche, the balcony scene, and Cyrano's final performance. His language becomes almost a weapon and armor simultaneously.*
2. How does Rostand portray language as both a means of achieving intimacy and an obstacle to authentic human connection? *The paradox is already built into the argument. Cyrano's words create the relationship he desperately wants—and make it impossible for him to possess it.*
3. **How** does Rostand use various forms of irony to communicate/create humor and tragedy? How does he use it to move the plot forward, create conflict, and develop character?
4. How does Rostand use dramatic irony to complicate Cyrano's acts of self-sacrifice, presenting them as simultaneously noble and destructive?

CREATIVITY

1. Consider the literary allusions and figurative language used in *Cyrano*. **How** does the language style differentiate the characters and develop them and their relationships? Are there certain types of figurative language used for specific characters? How does it paint a picture of the life and times? How does it develop the themes?
2. How does Rostand use irony and dramatic structure to portray Cyrano as the architect of his own romantic tragedy?
3. **Analyze** how Rostand develops specific types of imagery (nature, plants, light/dark, etc.) to explore character identity, relationships, love, romanticism, etc. in the play.
4. How does Rostand use letters as a dramatic device to blur the boundaries between authorship, identity, and romantic intimacy?

TRANSFORMATION

1. **Describe and analyze** how a character OR characters are developed and transformed throughout this novel. How do the author's language choices show this transformation through the character's behavior/choices/dialogue?
2. How does Rostand use Roxane's changing understanding of love to challenge her—and the audience's—initial assumptions about romantic attraction?
3. How does Rostand use the fifteen-year temporal shift between Acts IV and V to transform romantic longing into tragedy?

PERSPECTIVE

1. How does Rostand construct Christian and Cyrano as complementary characters to challenge the division between physical and intellectual attractiveness?

REPRESENTATION

1. How does Rostand use dramatic irony to complicate Cyrano's acts of self-sacrifice, presenting them as simultaneously noble and destructive? *Leave room to **evaluate**, not merely analyze. Is Cyrano's sacrifice beautiful? Absolutely. Is it also unnecessary, prideful, damaging to Roxane, unfair to himself, and arguably unfair to Christian? Also yes. That's fertile territory.*
2. How does Rostand develop Cyrano's nose as both a comic device and a symbol of psychological vulnerability?

Developing My Line of Inquiry

1. Question Word:
2. Author:
3. Text:
4. Genre:
5. Literary/Linguistic Aspect
6. Rich Idea
7. Precise Context

Completed Line of Inquiry or Prompt

Developing My Thesis Statement

1. Genre:
2. Author:
3. Literary Element:
4. Rich Ideas:

Completed Thesis Statement

Cyrano HL Essay Assessment Outline



My Refined Prompt/Line of Inquiry:

THESIS STATEMENT:

Paragraph Topic #1:

Textual Evidence	Literary/Stylistic Feature	Reader Effect/Implication

Paragraph Topic #2:

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Textual Evidence	Literary/Stylistic Feature	Reader Effect/Implication

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Paragraph Topic #3:

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Textual Evidence	Literary/Stylistic Feature	Reader Effect/Implication

Paragraph Topic #4: *(You may add additional paragraphs, if necessary)*

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Textual Evidence	Literary/Stylistic Feature	Reader Effect/Implication

Your Name: _____

Peer Signature: _____

Teacher Approval: _____