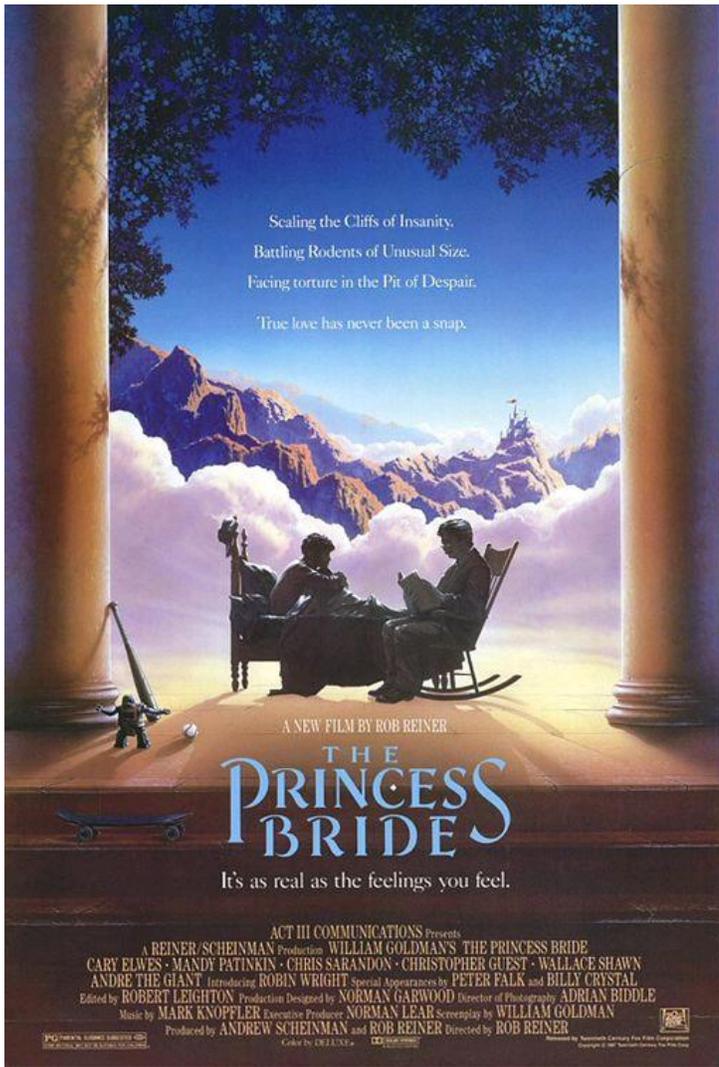


Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____ Due: _____



***The Princess Bride* (1987) directed by Rob Reiner**

Cast

Cary Elwes as Westley
Robin Wright as Buttercup/Princess Buttercup
Mandy Patinkin as Inigo Montoya
Chris Sarandon as Prince Humperdinck
André the Giant as Fezzik
Christopher Guest as Count Tyrone Rugen
Wallace Shawn as Vizzini
Peter Falk as The Grandfather/Narrator
Billy Crystal as Miracle Max
Carol Kane as Valerie
Fred Savage as The Grandson

Crew

Director: Rob Reiner
Producers: Rob Reiner and Andrew Scheinman
Writer: William Goldman
Editor: Robert Leighton
Director of Photography: Adrian Biddle
Music: Mark Knopfler

Distribution/Studio Company: Twentieth Century
Fox
MPAA Rating: PG
Running Time: 98 minutes

Background and Introduction to *The Princess Bride*

I'm willing to bet that many of the fictional stories that you heard growing up as a child were fairy tales. There's nothing more nostalgic for people than fairy tales because they conjure stories of kings, queens, castles, adventure, and true love. Generally, fairy tales appeal to boys and girls as well as men and women. Adapted for the screen from his own novel, William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* is a contemporary "cult classic" (a work that is popular and has acquired a highly devoted but relatively select audience but may or may not be successful at the time of the work's original publication) fairy tale that uses the framing device of a grandfather reading the story of a hero and his princess to his grandson. This story within a story is one of the most beloved fantasies and one of the most manageable epics we will screen this year. Watch how the movie presents itself almost as a live-action Disney animated film. While you watch the film, study what conventions and motifs are inherited in fairy tales. Also, compare how this fantasy film compares with other fantasy films you've seen (e.g. *It's a Wonderful Life*), especially live-action fantasies. What cinematic techniques are shared between these works?

The Princess Bride is not one of the most artistic films ever created nor is it highly unique, so the question remains: What makes *The Princess Bride* such a beloved film? College campuses screen the film annually and the screenings always sell out. Some filmgoers love the movie so much that they even camp out in the afternoon to obtain tickets for the evening's screening. One of your discussion questions will ask you how you feel about the film. If the film is dear to you, explain why. If the film is overrated, state your claim. There isn't an incorrect answer; however, support your opinion using filmmaking terms we have studied.

Comprehension Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions as you watch the film.

1. “Inconceivable” means impossible to comprehend or grasp fully or totally unlikely. Does Vizzini use the word correctly? Are the situations that Vizzini describes truly inconceivable?
2. How do the interruptions from the grandfather and grandson affect the suspense of the film? In your opinion, does this help or hinder the film? Keep in mind that this is considered a family film.
3. What **editing** technique does Reiner employ to switch scenes? Is it fitting for this genre? Why?
4. Although simple, Fezzik, the giant, says frank, important lines. One is “People in masks can’t be trusted.” Explain Fezzik’s advice, which can be considered a **moral**, *outside of the plot of this film*.
5. What is Inigo’s goal? Is his desire selfish and corrupt like Ethan’s from *The Searchers*? Explain.
6. What is Vizzini’s tragic downfall as a character? What leads to his demise?
7. Draw a diagram to the right that explains how the **180° rule** is used in the Westley vs. Vizzini scene.
8. What is Prince Humperdinck's grand scheme that he has in store for Buttercup?
9. Who is the more evil **villain**: Prince Humperdinck or Count Tyrone Rugen? Explain.
10. Explain *both* happy endings for both stories in the film.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions after you watch the film. We'll discuss them in a seminar.

1. A **frame story** (also **frame tale**, **frame narrative**, etc.) is a narrative technique whereby an introductory main story is composed, at least in part, for the purpose of setting the stage for a fictive narrative or organizing a set of shorter stories, each of which is a story within a story. The frame story leads readers from the first story into the smaller one within it. What is the **main story** of *The Princess Bride* and the story within it? Does *The Princess Bride* work as a **frame story**, or do you wish that the fairy tale within the main story stood by itself? Explain.
2. Like *Back to the Future*, *The Princess Bride* is a film beloved by many filmgoers; however, it isn't miraculous in an artistic sense. It is more of a "cult film," a film that continues to enchant viewers for an appeal that can't be specifically pinpointed. How do you account for the film's popularity? State how you view the film and explain how you feel using filmmaking terms for support.
3. *The Princess Bride* is the closest film we'll see to being a love story, but as the grandfather promises to his grandson, the story is a hybrid of genres. Within the film is action, adventure, comedy, and so much more. Primarily, the film is a love story. What characterizes Wesley and Buttercup's love? What makes their love special or unique?
4. "As you wish" is a **motif** that reappears throughout the film. What does this quote mean each time it is used?
5. Explain how the **theme** that appearances are deceiving is evident throughout the film (e.g. Westley masked, the story of the Dread Pirate Roberts, and when Westley is paralyzed). What does this theme teach you?

Genre Study

The Princess Bride is a hybrid of the genres of **romance**, **epic**, or **fairy tale**. Here are the definitions of these genres according to Wikipedia...

While most films have some aspect of romance between characters (at least as a subplot) a **romance film** can be loosely defined as any film in which the central plot (the premise of the story) revolves around the romantic involvement of the story's protagonists. Common themes include the characters making decisions based on a newly-found romantic attraction. The questions, "What am I living for?" or "Why am I with my current partner?" often arise. The appeal of these films is in the dramatic reality of the emotions expressed by the characters. Another prerequisite is that the film has a happy ending (or at least bittersweet) and many would argue that no film with a sad ending may be correctly defined as "romance;" however, this second prerequisite is admittedly disputable and many screenwriters and directors will push the boundaries of the genre in this aspect.

An **epic** is a genre of film which places emphasis on human drama on a grand scale. They are more ambitious in scope than other genres, which helps to differentiate them from similar genres such as the period piece or adventure film. This often entails high production values, a sweeping musical score by an acclaimed film composer, and an ensemble cast of bankable stars, placing them among the most expensive of films to produce. Generally speaking, the term "epic" refers to movies that have a large scope, often set during a time of war or other conflict, and sometimes taking place over a considerable period of time. A historical setting is typical, although fantasy or science fiction settings are also used. The central conflict of the film is usually seen as having far-reaching effects, often changing the course of history. The main characters' action are often central to the resolution of this conflict. The definition of epic has expanded over the years to include films that in general have a large scale or scope of history, time, or events.

A **fairy tale** is a fictional story that may feature folkloric characters such as fairies, goblins, elves, trolls, giants, and talking animals, and usually enchantments, often involving a far-fetched sequence of events. In modern-day parlance, the term is also used to describe something blessed with princesses, as in "fairy tale ending" (a happy ending) or "fairy tale romance", though not all fairy tales end happily. Colloquially, a "fairy tale" or "**fairy story**" can also mean any far-fetched story. Fairy tales commonly attract young children since they easily understand the archetypal characters in the story. The advent of cinema has meant that such stories could be presented in a more plausible manner, with the use of special effects and animation; the Disney movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937 was a ground-breaking film for fairy tales and, indeed, fantasy in general. Disney's influence helped establish this genre as children's movies, despite the fact that *Snow White*, as well as the company's other early feature-length films, were originally intended for adults as well, and has been blamed for simplification of fairy tales ending in situations where everything goes right, as opposed to the pain and suffering — and sometimes unhappy endings — of many folk fairy tales. Other works have retold familiar fairy tales in a darker, more horrific or psychological variant aimed primarily at adults. Likewise, *Princess Mononoke* and *Pan's Labyrinth* create new stories in this genre from fairy tale and folklore motifs.

Directions: Answer the following questions of genre study based on your viewing of *The Princess Bride*.

1. What are some of the **conventions** (widely used and accepted devices, practices, or techniques) of science fiction films that *The Princess Bride* exemplifies in **style, subject matter, and values**?
 - a. What conventions of **style** in romance, epic, or fairy tale films does *The Princess Bride* exhibit? For example, what techniques (e.g. camera shots or camera movement) does the film use?
 - b. What conventions of **subject matter** in romance, epic, or fairy tale films does the film exhibit?
 - c. What conventions of **values** in romance, epic, or fairy tale films does *The Princess Bride* exhibit? What lessons does *The Princess Bride* teach or what behaviors does the film approve?
2. Of the three genres listed above, in what genre would you place *The Princess Bride*? Why?