

Little Miss Gingerbread—A Study Guide

- 1) The play opens by presenting the dichotomy between the hard working people of Antberg and the lazy folks of Grasshopperville. To what famous story does this situation refer? Read the original story and see how the ending differs from the ending of *Little Miss Gingerbread*. Why do you think the playwright chose to change the ending?
- 2) Comedy is often created when something happens that goes against the expectations of the audience. In joke-telling, expectations are created with the “set up” and defied with the “punch line.” How would you describe the character of Cuthbert? In what way does his main character trait cause him to defy expectations? How does this create humor? Why do you think Cuthbert loves Miss Congeniality (7.21)?
- 3) Expectations can also be created and defied in the plot of a comedy. Defying expectations creates twists, turns, and surprises that keep the audience interested. What do we learn in the first two scenes that later on turns out to be untrue (or only partially true)? How does this defying of expectations make the story more interesting?
- 4) What does Eudora mean when she says to Beowulf and Grendel (5.8) “Just because his great grandfather defeated your great-grandfather and now every high school students in the world has to read about it, that’s no reason to hold a grudge”? What can you find out about the original story of Beowulf and Grendel? How does it differ from what happens between those two characters in *Little Miss Gingerbread*? Do a poll of adults you know and find out what percentage of them read about Beowulf and Grendel in high school.
- 5) Playwrights’ main tool in presenting a character is dialogue—we learn about characters in a script through what they say. Actors and directors, however, can add many other elements to a character—costumes, tone of voice, the way the character moves on stage. What do Osric’s lines tell us about his character? Based on what you know about him from his lines, what choices could you make as an actor or director to present that character more fully to an audience? What choices would not be appropriate for this character? Why?
- 6) Sometimes comic authors will refer to their own works in a humorous way. Can you find out what play, by the same author as *Little Miss Gingerbread*, Osric is referring to when he says, of one of Snow White’s dwarves, “Why’d he have to be so snippy?” (5.32) Can you rewrite this line to refer to other dwarf names in a comic way? Are there other reference to plays by the same author in *Little Miss Gingerbread*?
- 7) Why do Hansel and Gretel and their father speak German on page 6? Find the original story of “Hansel and Gretel” and compare it to what happens to the children in *Little Miss Gingerbread*. Would you rather be the Hansel or Gretel of the original story or the Hansel or Gretel of *Little Miss Gingerbread*? Why?
- 8) One of the subplots of *Little Miss Gingerbread* involves the bully Dunstan transforming into a UPS Guy named Lou. When *Little Miss Gingerbread* was written, Lou the UPS Guy had already appeared in five other plays. Can you think of other works of fiction in which a character appears in multiple works before his origin is explained? Can you find any of the other plays in which Lou appears? Does Lou’s character seem consistent from play to play? Why or why not?

9) Do you think Fortuna is a good fortune teller? When is she right about her predictions? Why do you think the playwright chose to make her right about certain things? Do you think her character would be more interesting if she were right all the time? Why or why not? Have all the people in your cast write down a prediction about the day of your final performance. Seal the predictions in an envelope and open them after the performance is over. Are there any Fortunas in your cast?

10) How does Katy Did differ from the other characters in Grasshopperville? Where do you think her name comes from? If you could be one of the Grasshopperville characters in real life, whom would you be? Why? If the characters in Grasshopperville stay the way they are in the first half of the play, which one do you think will have the most interesting life? Why?

11) Sometimes comedy is created when two characters or sets of characters completely fail to understand each other. How do the characters in Scene 12 fail to understand one another? How do their worldviews differ? How does this difference create a comic situation? How might the scene differ if the characters all had the same worldview? Could it still be funny? Try writing a comic scene between two characters with different worldviews. Can you rewrite the scene to be serious? How do your comic scene and serious scene differ?

12) On page 18.28–31 Osric and Grendel have an exchange about plastic bags. Why is this funny? Comedy is often based on allusions to things that the audience already knows. To what is this exchange an allusion. How is the usual way of looking at plastic bags turned upside down by Osric? Given what you learn in this exchange, what else might Osric enjoy playing with? Why?

13) By the end of Scene 15, things are looking pretty grim. The children have been captured by the witch to be baked into gingerbread, the Grasshoppervillians are starving, Dunstan is still a bully, and Beowulf and Grendel are about to have a fight. How are all these problems resolved by the end of the play just a few pages later? Consider a book of fiction you have read lately. At what point in the book are the characters at their lowest point? Is it near the end? Why do you think this would be the case?

14) In Scene 17, the anger that has been brewing between Beowulf and Grendel finally erupts. Is this what you expected would happen when the two finally confronted each other? Why or why not? If you knew nothing about the story of “Little Red Riding Hood,” what sort of scene would you expect between the two enemies? What if you had just read the story of “Little Red Riding Hood”—could you have predicted what would happen? Do you think the “fight” between Beowulf and Grendel is funny? Why or why not?

15) Why does Cinnamon tell Osric that Mr. Düsseldorf is the Mayor of Grasshopperville? What does she expect will happen when Osric delivers the message? What do you think would happen if Cinnamon told Osric what she was up to? Write a scene in which Cinnamon is totally honest with Osric and suffers the consequences.

16) *Little Miss Gingerbread* is a quest story. Who goes on a quest? What is that person really looking for? What other quest stories have you read? How are they similar to the play? How do they differ? What do you think is the theme of *Little Miss Gingerbread*? Why?

EXTRA CREDIT: Build a gingerbread house and decorate it with all edible ingredients.