

A Nose for the News
A Study Guide for Actors and Audience

NOTE: *A Nose for the News* is a parody of *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand. For several of the questions and activities on the study guide, you will need to have a familiarity with the original play. The complete text, as well as a wide variety of plot summaries, is available online.

1) The play begins *in medias res*, a Latin term meaning, “in the middle of things.” When Flip says “This ought to be good” (1.10), no one in the audience knows what he’s talking about. How does Chris stand in for the audience in the early stages of the play?

2) The conversation between Martha, Claire and Flip in the first few pages is fairly innocuous. How does the tone of their voices, as indicated by the playwright’s directions, change these lines to reveal a subtext? What is that subtext? How might different choices in line delivery by the actors reveal a different subtext?

3) Spice Spencer frequently talks in sports metaphors—that is he compares the situations of the play to situation in sporting events. Can you find some examples of these metaphors? Can you find places where Spice makes reference to sporting events in a non-metaphorical situation? At one point, Spice uses a “mixed metaphor,” that is, he changes the comparison part way through so that it makes no sense. Can you find this?

4) What is ironic about Flip’s line (3.7) “Although I don’t know why anyone would go to the theatre if there was a game on?”

5) In what ways is the opening situation of *A Nose for the News* similar to the opening situation of *Cyrano de Bergerac*? What character from *Cyrano* is represented by Droopy the Clown? How does the Cyrano–Chris–Roxanne triangle differ from the original? What major element has been eliminated?

6) Do you find Droopy the Clown funny? Why or why not? If he’s not funny, how could he become so? If he is funny, what changes would make him not funny?

7) Can you find scenes in the first ten pages of the story that are nearly verbatim excerpts from Rostand’s play? How does the playwright make these excerpts work in the more modern setting of *A Nose for the News*?

8) The “insult” scene (p. 6–7) is perhaps the most famous in the original play. It was also modernized by Steve Martin in his tribute to *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the film *Roxanne*. Notice how the format of the insults is the same in all three versions. Can you think of your own witty insults in the style of Cyrano?

9) If the show is truly set in the 1960s, some of the insults are technically anachronisms. What is an anachronism? Which insults are anachronistic? Why do you think this didn’t bother the playwright?

10) Cyrano's poem on page 8 is in a different poetic format than the original. Here the form is that of two limericks. The limerick was first popularized by Edward Lear. Find some of Lear's limericks and see how they differ from the ones in *A Nose for the News*. Can you write a limerick describing yourself?

11) Raymond is a frustrated beatnik poet, speaking in the style of slang made popular in the 1950s by the beatniks. What can you find out about beatniks and beat poetry? Do you think Raymond would fit into this group? Why or why not?

12) We already noted that Spice talks in sports metaphors. What sort of linguistic references does Brett use? Why do you think he talks like this?

13) How would you describe the relationship between Mr. Gauche and his son, Pierre? What evidence from the play supports your description?

14) How would you describe the relationship between Dolores and Roxanne? Why do you think Dolores behaves the way she does? How might the play differ if Dolores had a different attitude towards Roxanne?

15) The scene on p. 16 in which Chris taunts Cyrano is another that closely parallels the original. Why do you think Cyrano, for once, does not seem to take offense at the mention of his nose?

16) The Chris in Rostand's play is handsome but lacking in wit, so Cyrano writes love letters for him. How does the playwright use a similar situation in *A Nose for the News*? Can you think of another situation in which the same thing could happen? Do you think it's cheating to have someone else write your love letters for you? What about your newscast?

17) Can you write a scene (in either prose or dramatic format) in which Droopy the Clown is the featured performer at a birthday party?

18) What is ironic about Cyrano's line "I'm at a loss for words" (23.12)?

19) Without Cyrano's words, Chris' newscast on p. 27–28 is a little different. How do you imagine Cyrano might have written this story? Take a story from your local paper and rewrite it in the style of Chris. Is the new version funny? Is it good journalism? Why or why not?

20) Does *A Nose for the News* have a message? What do you think the message of the play is? In what speech do you think this message is best summed up? Why do you think the playwright picks this character to deliver the play's message?