

M8 Worksheet “The Hunchback of Notre Dame”

Many of you will know the love story between the hunchback of Notre Dame and the ‘gypsy girl’ Esmeralda. You may know it through the popular Disney animation released in 1996. The film is based on the novel by the French author Victor Hugo and was written over 180 years ago. Below you will find a description of parts of the story. Read the text carefully and try to work out what is happening. The following questions should guide you:

Is Esmeralda’s mother a ‘gypsy’?

Who brought Esmeralda up?

The novel tells of a French prostitute called Paquette, who yearned to have a child. She gave birth to a beautiful girl, who she named Agnes. One day a group of horsemen came to the town where they lived. They were vagabonds and thieves who were travelling through the country.

The novel describes them as having blackish-brown skin, with curly hair and silver rings in their ears. The faces of the women were even darker and their hair was tied in ponytails. The children were like monkeys. They were all heathens. They were said to be fortune tellers and there were rumours that they stole children and were cannibals.

Paquette wanted to have her beloved daughter’s fortune read and so took her to the ‘gypsies’. They stroked and caressed the girl, but she was scared and began to cry. Great happiness was foretold for the girl, she would become a most beautiful and virtuous queen.

The next morning, when little Agnes was still sleeping, Paquette crept out to visit a neighbour and tell her the good news. But when she returned the door was open and the child had disappeared, the only sign of her being one of her shoes on the floor.

The mother was distraught, nobody had seen anything or could help. After crying for a long time over her daughter’s tiny shoe she screamed in frenzy ‘To the Egyptian camp! To burn the witches!’ But the ‘gypsies’ were gone.

The novel then tells the complicated story of the hunchback and Esmeralda. Paquette, also known as La Chantefleurie, became a religious hermit, a recluse.

At the end of the novel Esmeralda is to be executed. She runs away and is caught by the recluse, who lives in a locked cell. Esmeralda asks what she has done to hurt her. But instead of answering the recluse only mutters ‘Daughter of Egypt! Daughter of Egypt! Daughter of Egypt!’ She then replies by shouting at the alleged Egyptian that she once had a beautiful daughter named Agnes, who had been stolen from her and eaten. Esmeralda replies that she had probably not even been born when it happened. The recluse disagrees and says she must have been with the ‘gypsies’ at that time. Her daughter would have been the same age as Esmeralda. It had been fifteen years since the ‘gypsies had stolen her child and eaten her with their teeth.

As the horsemen approached Esmeralda begged for pity, she had never done anything to hurt the recluse. She should release her and have pity, because just as the recluse was searching for her child, Esmeralda was searching for her parents. In desperation the recluse showed Esmeralda the little shoe, whereupon Esmeralda opened the little bag that she wore around her neck and produced the other shoe. They both immediately understood what had happened and their despair changed to unbridled joy.

Sources:

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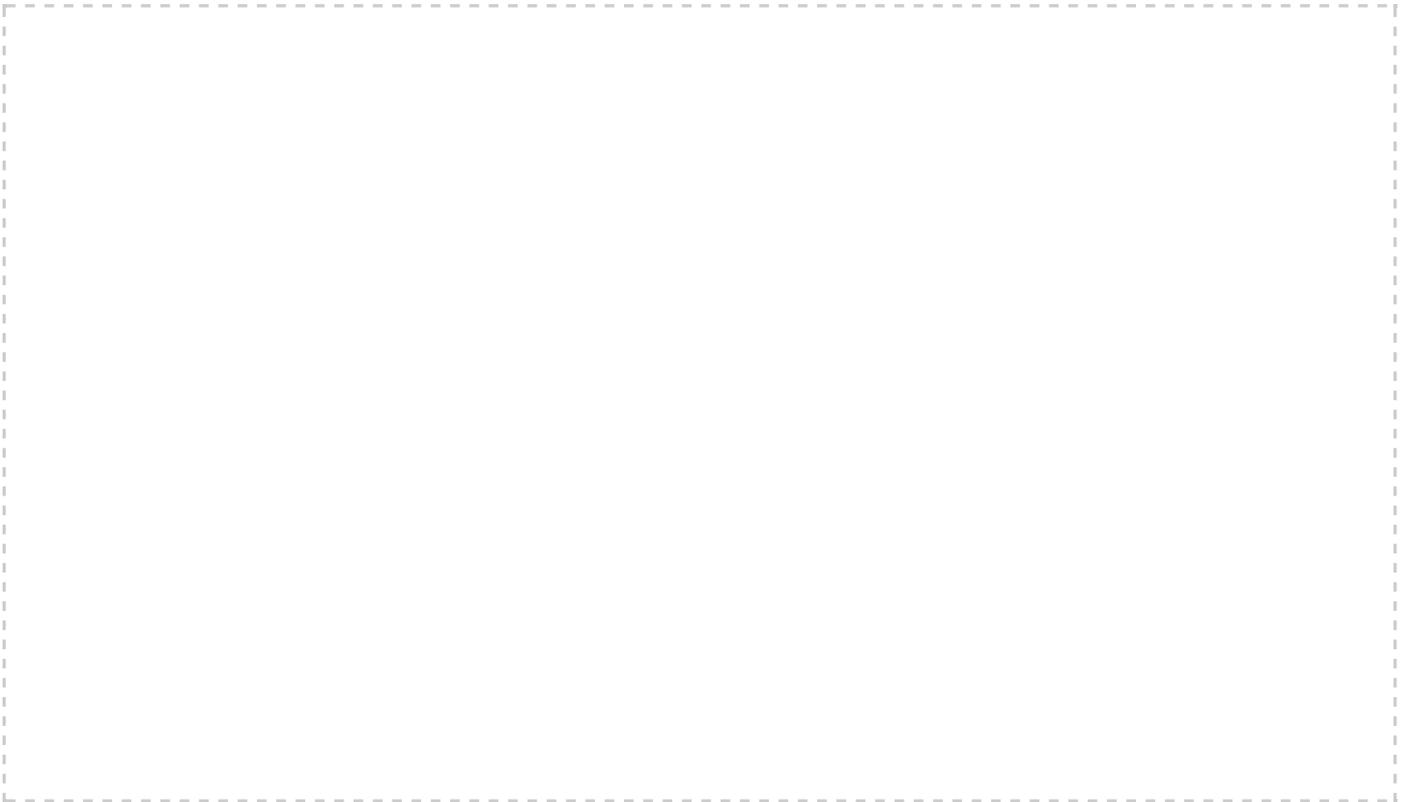
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Tasks

1. Name the underlying fear or anxiety being experienced here.



2. Explain the reasons for the hatred expressed by the recluse for the group described as 'gypsies' and who the words 'Egyptians' 'heathens' and 'witches' refer to.



3. Evaluate the following statement 'This novel is dangerous because it supports the old preconception that "gypsies" kidnapped children'.

4. The Disney film 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' omits this part of the story. Suggest reasons why.



This project has been funded with support from the European Union. The author exclusively is responsible for the publication content. The publication does not reflect the views of the European Commission and the European Commission is not responsible for usage of the data contained therein.

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