

The Scarlet Pimpernel *Study Guide*

by Michael S. Gilleland & Eileen Cunningham



For the novel by Baroness Orczy



Progeny Press

INTERACTIVE

The Scarlet Pimpernel Study Guide

Table of Contents

Study Guide Authors	4
Note to Instructor	5
Synopsis	6
About the Novel's Author	7
Background Information	8
Ideas for Prereading Activities	10
Chapters 1–5	11
Chapters 6–9	15
Chapters 10–13	21
Chapters 14–18	28
Chapters 19–21	33
Chapters 22–26	38
Chapters 27–31	44
Overview	50
Essays and Projects.....	55
Additional Resources	57
Answer Key	Separate File

Synopsis

Originally produced as a stage play in 1903, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, set during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution, is the tale of a mysterious English nobleman who employs ingenious disguises to help French aristocrats escape execution at the guillotine. Assisting him is a band of other young English nobles; together they compose the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. The revolutionary government of France is determined to track down these Englishmen, break up their campaign, and execute them. To determine the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, they send to England their agent Chauvelin to enlist the aid of Marguerite St. Just, a beautiful French actress who has married the foppish—but very wealthy—nobleman Sir Percy Blakeney, making her the center of aristocratic social life in England. Though Marguerite at first refuses to help, she is ultimately persuaded by Chauvelin's threat to kill her brother, Armand St. Just, who has joined forces with the Scarlet Pimpernel. The story takes many unexpected turns until Marguerite discovers the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel and determines that she must find a way to save both the Englishman and her brother.

Chapters 6–9

Vocabulary:

Write the letter of the correct definition from the box below in the blank next to the word it defines, then use the word in an original sentence of your own. Not all the definitions will be used.

Definition Box

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| a. dangerously, fatally | j. perfect, wonderful, idealized |
| b. justifying, vindicating, exonerating | k. boredom, lethargy, dissatisfaction |
| c. self-controlled, composed, calm, placid | l. unconventionality, quirkiness |
| d. heated, spirited, forcible | m. deprived of, without |
| e. whole-hearted, fervent, enthusiastic | n. revenge, punishment |
| f. noble, grand, elevated | o. agile, capable, skilled |
| g. unemotional, unmoved, detached | p. odious, revolting, repellent |
| h. center, heart, nucleus | q. observe, contemplate, scrutinize |
| i. reuniting, settlement, peace | r. creativity, imagination, artistry |
-

_____ 1. pivot Sentence:

_____ 2. malignantly Sentence:

_____ 3. eccentricity Sentence:

_____ 4. imperturbable Sentence:

_____ 5. reconciliation Sentence:

The Scarlet Pimpernel Study Guide

Questions:

1. Why were people so surprised that Marguerite married Sir Percy Blakeney? What did they suppose were Marguerite's motives?
2. What reason does Marguerite give for marrying Sir Percy? Does she love him?
3. Why has Sir Percy seemed to have lost his love for Marguerite?
4. How was Armand St. Just connected to the Marquis de St. Cyr and his family? What happened to the St. Cyr family and what part did Marguerite play in what happened?
5. Why is Marguerite anxious for Armand as he returns to France?
6. What does Chauvelin discover in the letters taken from Sir Andrew and Sir Anthony?

Analysis:

7. Considering all we know about Marguerite's role in the death of the Marquis de St. Cyr, do you think she is guilty of his murder or for his execution, as the Comtesse does and, apparently Sir Percy does? Why or why not?
8. A *paradox* is a statement that seems to contradict itself, but is true or still makes sense. In Chapter 6, Orczy writes, "Everyone knew that [Sir Percy] was hopelessly stupid," yet a few sentences later writes, "Thus society accepted him, petted him, made much of him, since his horses

The Scarlet Pimpernel Study Guide

12. When an author wants to create suspense and encourage the reader to read on quickly to discover what will happen next, she often will use a technique called a *cliffhanger*. A cliffhanger usually is used at the end of a chapter or other potential stopping point and uses foreshadowing, introduces something new, or breaks away in the middle of the action to excite the reader and make him continue reading because he wants to know what happens next.

Look at the end of Chapters 6, 8, and 9. How does the author use a cliffhanger at the end of each chapter to encourage the reader to keep reading?

Dig Deeper:

13. Review Marguerite's role in the Marquis de St. Cyr's execution. Should we be held accountable for bad things that happen because of our actions, even if we did not foresee or intend those things to happen? Explain your answer using Marguerite's situation.
14. Read Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37–39, Romans 12:17–19. What do these verses warn us against? What are we supposed to do instead? How would things have been different for Marguerite if she had followed these verses?
15. Review Marguerite's reflections on her marriage with Sir Percy in Chapters 7 and 8. What does she want above all else from Sir Percy? Because she does not get this from him, how does she treat him in these chapters?

The Scarlet Pimpernel Study Guide

16. Read Ephesians 5:21–33. According to these verses, how should a husband treat his wife? How is a wife to respond to her husband? How does this compare to what Marguerite wants from Sir Percy? How do her actions and attitude toward Sir Percy compare to these verses?

Optional Activities:

1. Many times bad things happen in which we are involved to a greater or lesser degree. We may attend a party in which there is drinking, and a friend or acquaintance may be injured or killed because of driving under the influence. We may suspect or know of the physical abuse of a friend or family member but we do not speak out, and the friend or family member continues to suffer abuse. We may tell a secret and then see a person become humiliated or have his or her reputation damaged when the secret becomes public or is misunderstood. As a group, discuss similar situations and how we can decide when we should act and when we should not. What standards should we use to judge our own actions? How can we decide what is “our fault” and what is just the bad circumstances of life?
2. Discuss how Marguerite views marriage, or at least her marriage to Sir Percy. What does she think should be put into it; what does she think are her responsibilities and Sir Percy’s responsibilities? Do you think they are realistic and healthy? What do you expect from marriage? Make an outline of the most important thing about marriage, then list each person’s responsibilities and expectations. Back up your statements with scripture where possible.
3. *Discussion:* The passage in Ephesians 5 has become very controversial because of the directions to wives. What is the command in verse 21? If we follow that verse first and foremost (understanding that submission does not mean allowing abuse), how would that work in a relationship? How can two people submit to one another?

Answer Key

Note: Most of the questions in Progeny Press study guides deal with students' understanding and interpretation of issues in the novel; therefore, most answers will be individual to the student. Progeny Press answer keys are designed to be as inclusive as possible for the teacher and/or parent, giving enough background and information to judge whether the student has grasped the essence of the issue and the question. We try to point out some directions students' answers might take, which directions might be best, and some errors that may appear. Students are not expected to answer as completely as the answers provided in the Answer Key.

Chapter 1–5

Vocabulary:

Answers may vary but should be similar to the following suggestions: 1. swarming, churning; calm, quiet; 2. slaughter, massacre; opposites will vary, care, concern, peace, joy, accept reasonable choices; 3. insolence, defiance; submission, cooperation; 4. cheeky, impolite; polite, deferential; 5. disguise, facade; actual, real; 6. fundamental, built-in; add-on, act, affectation; 7. arrogant, commanding; polite, subservient; 8. cheerful, exuberant; miserable, grumpy; 9. unrestrained, lavish; restrained, self-controlled; 10. over-dressed, vain; plain, simple; 11. rogue, scoundrel; gentleman, an honest man; 12. mysterious, secret; open, expressive; 13. despicable, disgraceful; good, wonderful; 14. gushing, enthusiastic; quiet, silent; 15. silly, idiotic; sensible, well-mannered

Questions:

1. No one knows the true identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, but he is an Englishman who rescues French aristocrats from the revolutionary government and guillotine. He also is the leader of a band of Englishman who follow his every order in rescuing French aristocrats.
2. Bibot allows the old woman to pass the barricade because she says her son may have the plague. She actually is the Scarlet Pimpernel, and the cart is filled with French aristocrats.
3. In the cart were hidden the Comtesse de Tournay and her two children, Suzanne and the Vicomte.
4. The Comtesse accuses Marguerite St. Just of betraying the Comtesse's cousin, Marquis de St. Cyr and his family to the French republican tribunal, which imprisoned and then executed them.
5. c; f; b; d; e; a; j; h; g; i

Analysis:

6. Answers may vary, but students should recognize that Orczy writes most of Chapter 1 with a perspective similar to that of the people of Paris and is not reflecting her own viewpoint. Her tone is sarcastic and ironic, saying such things as "those aristos were such fools! They were traitors to the people, of course, all of them, men, women, and children, who happened to be descendants of the great men who since the Crusades had made the glory of France." She is attempting to expose the foolishness of accusing even children of being traitors simply because of their ancestry. In later chapters Orczy writes in a much more direct and factual tone, though she often still writes with great irony. Answers may vary about why she writes the first chapter in this way, but it seems that she wants to set up and expose some of the illogic and contradictory thinking that was rampant at this stage of the French Revolution.