

AP PACKET LES MISÉRABLES

DEFINE THE FOLLOWING WORDS:

- fortissimo –

- unabashed –

- warble –

- implacable –

- dyspeptic –

- opulent –

- de rigueur –

- derivative –

- urchin –

- gobsmack –

LES MISÉRABLES BY LISA SCHWARZBAUM

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Since everything about *Les Misérables* is **fortissimo** — including but not limited to its **unabashed** pursuit of awards that are shiny or globular or both — you have perhaps already heard a little about the movie now storming the Bastille of your wallet. You may already know that to make his movie adaptation of the internationally popular theatrical musical conjured from the 19th-century political novel by Victor Hugo, director Tom Hooper (*The King's Speech*) bade his actors sing live during filming. You probably already know that Anne

Hathaway, as the wretched single mother-turned-prostitute Fantine, is reputedly a formidable Oscar favorite for her sobbing and **warbling** and haircutting-in-real-time. You've learned, from posters and trailers that Hugh Jackman as former convict Jean Valjean, looks impressively stricken and that Russell Crowe, as **implacable** police inspector Javert, looks disconcertingly **dyspeptic**.

What's left to learn is this: *Les Misérables* provides compelling reasons for Crowe to be peeved, beginning with the humiliation of having to sing Broadway-style, when it clearly is so not his thing, and ending with the Cap'n Crunch wardrobe into which the gentleman is packed. (O, for Crowe's costumed glory days in *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World!*) Jackman has a right to be cranky too, although he's too much of a trouper to show it as he overremotes on demand and sings of finding God after he steals a pair of candlesticks from a nice priest. (Long story.) Hathaway looks happy enough channeling Liza Minnelli for her tremulous rendition of the Susan Boyle-appropriated anthem "I Dreamed a Dream," but that's no doubt because she knows that soon after the song, she's pretty much done for the night.

Shall I go on about all the ways in which this fake-**opulent** *Les Miz* made me long for guillotines while millions of viewers who have softer, more generous hearts than I may swoon with money's-worth contentment? (At least it doesn't skimp on length: The movie is approximately as long as the 1832 Paris uprising it depicts.) Sacha Baron Cohen and Helena Bonham Carter mug and prance as the comic-relief grifters Thénardier and his missus, outfitted in what has become **de rigueur** for both BCs — Pétrouchka makeup and prosthetically grungy teeth. Amanda Seyfried and Eddie Redmayne play the young lovers Cosette (Fantine's muppet daughter, raised by Valjean) and the boy-band-styled student revolutionary Marius like lab rats, their pale faces and lashless eyelids often observed in the merciless close-up that is one of Hooper's mix-it-up signature shots. (He is similarly devoted to tilted perspective and the room-at-a-45-degree-angle shot.)

It's a daunting challenge, to be sure, to turn a big musical into a viable movie. For every great *Cabaret*, *My Fair Lady*, and *The King and I*, there's a dud *Rent*, *Evita*, and *Mamma Mia!* But this steam-driven military weapon of an enterprise is a sobering reminder of just how tinny a musical *Les Misérables* was in the first place — the listless music and lyrics by Alain Boubil, Claude-Michel Schönberg, and Herbert Kretzmer, the **derivative** characters fashioned from *Oliver!* scraps. And even if you do come to Mr. Hooper's neighborhood loving the show, having seen seven stage productions and named your cat Gavroche after the **urchin** who hitches his fate to those of grown-up revolutionaries, well, you're in for a **gobsmacking**: This "prestige" production is at heart a minor road-show carnival, leaving behind little but tinsel as it rumbles through the streets of Awardstown. **C**

SOAPSTONE

Identify the following elements of SOAPStone for the article. (Complete sentences are NOT required.)

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| SPEAKER | |
| OCCASION | |
| AUDIENCE | |
| PURPOSE | |
| SUBJECT | |
| TONE | DIDLS – YOU WILL ANALYZE TONE THROUGH DIDLS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES |

DIDLS

DICTION The denotative and connotative meaning of words.

Schwarzbaum ends the article with the following statement:

This "prestige" production is at heart a minor road-show carnival, leaving behind little but tinsel as it rumbles through the streets of Awardstown.

1. Why did she choose to put "prestige" in quotation marks? (Use complete sentences.)

Interpret the connotative effect of the following words. List three interpretations in the space provided. (You should know the denotation of the word before you can interpret connotation.)

2. Road-show carnival

3. tinsel

4. What does Awardstown refer to?

IMAGERY Appeals to sensory experiences.

5. Identify 3 examples of vivid imagery in the article. List the phrases below.

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-
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DETAIL Details are facts. They differ from images in that they don't have a strong sensory appeal.

6. What is one type of factual detail that the author chooses to include?

7. What is one type of factual detail that she chooses to exclude?

8. What does the inclusion or omission of these details imply?

LANGUAGE This refers to the *entire body of words* used in a text, not simply isolated bits of diction. For example, an invitation to a wedding might use formal language, while a biology text would use scientific and clinical language.

9. What is your *overall* impression of the language the author uses? Does it reflect education? Knowledge of a particular subject? A particular profession? Intelligence? Is it plain? Ornate? Simple? Clear? Figurative?

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

10. What are the sentences like? Are they simple with one or two clauses? Do they have multiple phrases? Are they choppy? Flowing? Sinuous like a snake? Comment on sentence length/structure.