

The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society
Creative Arts Challenge for Schools and Colleges in the Bailiwick of Guernsey 2020

Creative Arts Challenge based on Victor Hugo's poem 'L'Epopée du Lion'
'The Epic Story of the Lion'

All Students in years 7-11 and Sixth Form in the Bailiwick of Guernsey are eligible to enter the Victor Hugo in Guernsey Creative Arts Challenge. This challenge may be of particular interest to students of **Art, Drama, English, Classical and Modern Languages**

What is involved?

1. Study the Epic Story of the Lion in English (or French).
2. Attempt to draw, paint, sculpt or describe in words the whole or part of Hugo's epic story of the Lion
3. Attach your entry form stating your name, age, class and school
4. Deliver it to to the Priaulx Library c/o Dinah Bott by 4pm on Wednesday 10 June 2020

The Epic Story of the Lion. Why this poem?

Victor Hugo wrote this epic poem about a lion and included it in his collection, '**L'Art d'être Grand-père**' (1877). The theme of the 2020 Victor Hugo in Guernsey conference is '**Victor Hugo and Childhood**' so the poem has special significance as it is thought that he wrote the poem for his own grandchildren whilst living in Guernsey.

Timothy Adès' published fold-out book contains the full translation of the Lion poem with illustrations by Emily Johns. These will be available to Guernsey Schools and Colleges on request. See below the extract from 'The Big Story of the Lion' told by Timothy Adès.

**'A lion had clamped its jaws around a child,
And carried it, unharmed, into the wild
Forest, where streams and birds'-nests are at home.
He'd seized it as one plucks a summer bloom,
Not really knowing why, nor even torn
The skin, through tender-heartedness or scorn;
Contempt, or loving-kindness, or defiance.
They're serious beasts, and generous, are lions.
The little prince was in a wretched plight:
Raw meat and grass his diet, weak with fright,
He cowered in the cave, half-perishing.
He was the offspring of the local king:
The boy was ten years old, with sweet bright eyes.
The king had just the one child otherwise,
A little baby girl of two; and since
He was quite old, his thoughts were with the prince,
The monster's prey. The country-folk were awed:
A lion more fearsome than their own liege lord!
A hero wandered in. They told the brave
Man what was up; he headed for the cave...**

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Notes for Teachers and Students in Key Stages 3 & 4 and Sixth Form

As background reading to Victor Hugo's lion poem, it might be useful to read **Aesop's fable** of '**Androcles and the Lion**'.

Aesop states the moral of this story : 'Gratitude is the sign of noble souls'.

What do you think this moral means?

What is the role of the lion in this poem?

What lesson was Aesop trying to teach?

How far is this a message for all time?

Just as Hugo would have read the ancient Aesop's fable about 'Androcles and the Lion', he would also have read the fables of **Jean de La Fontaine** (1621 – 1695) who was writing fables some two centuries before. According to Gustave Flaubert, La Fontaine was the only French poet 'to understand and master the texture of the French language before Victor Hugo'.

Students could read any of La Fontaine's fables with a lion in the title and consider these questions:

How is the lion depicted in the fable?

Are there any moral lessons to be drawn? If so what are they?

Do fables and stories written so long ago have any relevance to our society in 21st century?

Sixth Form students may wish to do further reading before or after reading Hugo's '**Epic Story of the Lion**' poem e.g. '**Au Lion d'Androcles**' by **Victor Hugo** in 'La Légende des Siècles' Hetzel, 1859 (p. 51-55) Translation in 'Selected Poems by EH & AM Blackmore, Chicago.

Why do you think Hugo dedicated this poem to the famous lion from the story of 'Androcles and the Lion'?

What do you think is Hugo's message in this poem?

'**Les Lions**' is another Victor Hugo poem found in 'La Légende des Siècles'. This poem attempts to depict the evolution of humanity and was written between 1855 & 1876 years of exile in Guernsey. A translation of this poem can be found in 'Selected Poems H.E. & A.M. Blackmore, Chicago. p. 327.

I hope this background information and reading will provide you with some inspiration to enter the **Victor Hugo in Guernsey Creative Arts Challenge** which is open to all students in the Bailiwick of Guernsey Schools and Colleges.

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