**The Scarlet Pimpernel Preview Packet**

**Please read the information and answer the questions.**

**Book Summary**

*The Scarlet Pimpernel* is a historical fiction novel surrounding the French Revolution. A small, red flower found in England is the symbol of a man, with his league of followers, who spend their days risking their lives to save those who would be killed in France. Various costumes and ruses are used to smuggle the innocent out of France and away from the Guillotine. Students learn about loyalty, chivalry, trust, and relationships. This book is an excellent source of literary elements/author’s craft studies as well. Enjoy!

**Brief Historical Background**

The French Revolution began in 1789 when Louis XVI, the king, called a government meeting to raise taxes. The country was divided into three classes—clergy (church officials), nobles, and everyone else. The “everyone else” portion was very poor and struggling to survive while the nobles and clergy were wealthy and wasting a lot of money and resources. The lower class had been getting more and more angry as time went on. Louis XVI and his family spent a lot of money on building more palaces, having fancy parties and food, etc. On July 14, 1789, crowds of the lower classes took over the Bastille, a prison which was run by the government. This forced the government, including the king, to listen to their demands.

As the Revolution continued, a new government took over France and they became more and more extreme. During what was called the “Reign of Terror,” the new government was obsessed with killing nobles at the guillotine. Over 40,000 people were killed in this way during the Reign of Terror.

**List of Characters**

**FRENCH**

**Comtesse de Tournay de Basserive; Suzanne, her daughter; and Vicomte, her son:** members of a noble family who are forced to flee France in disguise, helped by the Scarlet Pimpernel.

**Chauvelin:** secret agent of the French Republican government trying to discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Chief villain, French agent who has English diplomacy rights, in England looking for the Pimpernel and anyone else who is attempting to rescue French aristocrats.

**Armand St. Just:** a former supporter of the revolution who believes it has gone too far in its attacks against the aristocracy. Marguerite's brother, in cahoots with the Pimpernel. Chauvelin uses Armand to blackmail Marguerite in an attempt to get to the Pimpernel.

**ENGLISH**

**Lord Antony Dewhurst and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes:** English aristocrats who support the work of The Scarlet Pimpernel.

**Sir Percy Blakeney:** the elusive Scarlet Pimpernel. One of the richest, most fashionable men in England, but also has a reputation for being an idiot. Secretly the Scarlet Pimpernel who raids the barricades of France to save condemned French aristocrats from the guillotine.

**Lady Blakeney (Marguerite St. Just):** French woman who believes in the revolutionary cause but not its excesses; married to Sir Percy Blakeney although she does not know his true identity. Discovers her husband's secret identity and we see her husband's heroism through her eyes.

**Themes**

**Loyalty**

Because of the danger involved with the rescue of the condemned, the Scarlet Pimpernel must have men within his league who are trustworthy, loyal, noble, brave, and self-less. These men’s lives are dependent heavily on their friends’ loyalty.

**Guilt vs. Redemption**

What makes a hero? In Orczy's novel, it's a question often motivated by guilt. Lady Blakeney, for instance, knows that her husband hates her because he thinks she condemned the St. Cyrs to die maliciously; thus she is determined to atone for the sin he thinks she's committed. Meanwhile, Percy seems to feel at least some guilt for deceiving his wife about his identity as the Pimpernel, and enough that he cannot reveal his identity even when she confesses her own internal guilt and turmoil over the St. Cyr incident. Marguerite, meanwhile, has to struggle over the guilt that comes with making the choice between saving her brother, Armand, or saving the Scarlet Pimpernel, who she considers "noble and just." When, of course, it is revealed that the Pimpernel is in fact, her husband, Lady Blakeney is left guilty no matter who she chooses to save. The plot machinations, however, save her from making a choice in the end.

**Disguise**

The entire scheme of the plot depends on disguise, as The Scarlet Pimpernel wins not through brawn, but rather through cunning and trickery. It's important to remember that given the political context of the novel, the Pimpernel cannot fight fairly. He will be killed by the guillotine if he is merely arrested. Thus disguise as a way of concealing nobility becomes a crucial theme in the novel -- indeed, the Scarlet Pimpernel takes the disguise of people who would be in the masses, including peasants, old hags, old Jews, etc. in order to save the nobility. He is very much a Robin Hood intent on saving the rich, as bizarre as that sounds.

**The Scarlet Pimpernel**

The flower known as the "the Scarlet Pimpernel" is, according to the narrator, "the name of a humble English wayside flower; but it is also the name chosen to hide the identity of the best and bravest man in all the world." The flower, then, which has become Percy's moniker symbolizes all his best qualities -- his English charm, his humble origins, and his innate humility as a hero that expects no reward for his deeds.

**Vocabulary**

**degenerated**

– declined from the original intention

**guillotine**

– a machine used during the French Revolution to behead people

**faction**

– a group with similar beliefs

**aristocrats**

– people of noble birth

**nom de guerre**

– a fake name used to hide a person’s identity during war

**derived**

– taken from

**intrigue**

– mystery

**elusive**

– hard to catch

**foppish**

– like a man who is very vain and only concerned with fashion

**ardently**

– passionately

**swashbuckling**

– romantic and broad in scope

**Questions**

1. What year did the French Revolution take place? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. During the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, over 40,000 French people were killed at the guillotine.
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ saves condemned French nobles from the guillotine.
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is married to Percy.
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ uses Armand St. Just to blackmail Marguerite.
6. A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is a fake name used to hide someone’s name during war.
7. The Scarlet Pimpernel is one of the most \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ men in England.
8. The entire scheme of the plot depends on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
9. The Scarlet Pimpernel is a flower that symbolizes\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
10. The guillotine is a machine used during the French Revolution to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.