

Drama

MASTERPIECE
a great work of
literature

THE BIRTHMARK

HOW FAR
WOULD YOU
GO TO BE
PERFECT?

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY
BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE
ADAPTED FOR *SCOPE* BY MACK LEWIS
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CHARACTERS

***AYLMER**, a distinguished scientist
***GEORGIANA**, his wife
***JAMES**, the professor's friend
AMINADAB, the professor's assistant
LADY 1
LADY 2

GENTLEMAN 1
GENTLEMAN 2
***STAGE DIRECTION READERS 1, 2, 3, 4**
(SDR1, SDR2, SDR3, SDR4)
Circle the character you will play.
**Starred characters are major roles.*



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

What does this play say about the quest for perfection?

ACT I

SCENE 1

SDR1: The curtain rises on a man standing center stage, staring into the audience. Behind him is an elegant dining room. Guests chat and sip fancy drinks.

JAMES (to audience): Join me, won't you? My friend Aylmer, one of the most brilliant scientists of our day, is having a party to celebrate his engagement.

SDR2: James turns and joins the party.

AYLMER: James, old friend! Welcome!

JAMES: Ah, Aylmer, what an **enlightened** age we live in! Electricity, vaccines, and now you are to be married. What miracles! I can scarcely believe it.

AYLMER: And why is that?

JAMES: A man so dedicated to his work—in love?

AYLMER: Oh, James, when you see her, you will understand. She is so nearly perfect that perhaps only a scientist could fully appreciate her.

JAMES: Aylmer, you old dog. Let us meet her.

AYLMER: Very well. Everyone, your attention, please. Allow me to introduce my fiancée, my dearest Georgiana.

SDR3: A young woman steps into the room.

JAMES (to audience): The guests reacted with oohs and ahs . . . at first.

GENTLEMAN 1: Her many admirers will be heartbroken. Her beauty is perfect.

LADY 1: Except for that birthmark. It's shaped like a tiny human hand.



Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote this story in 1843. We think it's still relevant today. The story reminds us that it's OK to have flaws!

SCENE 2

GENTLEMAN 2: It's as if the tiniest of fairies has impressed its magic upon her cheek.

LADY 2: Don't be silly. It's a mortal flaw.

GENTLEMAN 1: But don't our flaws make us human?

SDR4: The lights go dark.

SDR1: Aylmer, Georgiana, and James sit in a parlor.

JAMES (to audience): A few weeks later, I came back for a visit. When I stepped into the parlor, I found my friend staring oddly at Georgiana.

AYLMER: Georgiana, has it ever occurred to you that your birthmark could be removed?

GEORGIANA: Why, no. It has often been called a charm.

AYLMER: Upon another face it might be charming, but not on yours. No, you are so nearly perfect that this slight defect shocks me.

GEORGIANA: Shocks you? Then why did you marry me? You can't love what shocks you!

SDR2: Georgiana bursts into tears and runs offstage.

JAMES: You hurt her feelings. How hard can it be to ignore such a small thing?

AYLMER: Small thing? It's all I see. But thanks to science, it can be removed.

JAMES (to audience): For the next year, that birthmark was all he thought about. I watched Georgiana's happiness wither away.

SDR3: The stage goes dark. A spotlight reveals Georgiana handing Aylmer a present.

GEORGIANA: Merry Christmas, husband!

SDR4: Aylmer doesn't respond. He just stares at her cheek, his eyes wide in disgust.

GEORGIANA: What is the matter?

AYLMER: How can I be merry? All I see is *that!*

SDR1: The spotlight goes off. Another spotlight appears to reveal Georgiana and Aylmer standing.

GEORGIANA: Happy first anniversary, my darling.

SDR2: Aylmer stares at her birthmark.

AYLMER: It's like a **crimson** stain upon the snow.

SDR3: The spotlight goes off. When it returns, Georgiana is sitting on a chair, drinking a cup of tea.

Aylmer sits next to her, still staring at the mark.

SDR4: The spotlight goes off. When it returns, Aylmer is closer to Georgiana, inspecting the mark.

SDR1: The spotlight goes off again. When it returns, Aylmer is slowly rising from behind a couch where Georgiana is reading. He holds a magnifying glass.

SDR2: The spotlight goes off. Another spotlight appears center stage. James stands in the light.

JAMES (to audience): Through all the times that should have been their happiest, Aylmer thought only of Georgiana's imperfection.

SDR3: The lights go dark.

SCENE 3

SDR4: In the parlor sit James, Georgiana, and Aylmer. Moonlight streams through the window, casting an eerie blue glow on the stage.

GEORGIANA: I give in. Remove this thing you hate.

AYLMER: Aminadab! Prepare Georgiana for surgery.

SDR1: Aylmer's assistant walks onstage. He is short and **brutish**.

AMINADAB: Heh, heh, heh. So be it. But if she were my wife, I'd never part with that birthmark.

AYLMER: But she is not your wife. Now do as I say!

SDR2: Aminadab and Georgiana exit.

Moments later, Aminadab returns, pushing a table with Georgiana on top.

AYLMER: Strap her firmly.

JAMES: Is that really necessary?

SDR3: Aminadab hands Aylmer a small scalpel. Aylmer leans over the table, his back to the audience.

AYLMER: Hmm. It is less **superficial** than I thought. Aminadab, mop up this blood.

AMINADAB: Heh, heh, heh!

AYLMER: This is odd. The mark is in her heart now. We must have it out!

JAMES: Stop it! You're killing her!

SDR4: James lunges forward, but Aminadab stops him.

AMINADAB: Heh, heh, heh!

AYLMER: Here it is at last!

SDR1: Aylmer holds up a still-pulsing heart.

SDR2: The stage goes dark. When the lights come up, we are in Georgiana and Aylmer's bedroom. James stands in the corner, holding the heart.

GEORGIANA: Wake up, husband! You were dreaming!

AYLMER: Oh, Georgiana, it was so horrible.

JAMES (to audience): Aylmer **recounted** every gory detail of the nightmare.

GEORGIANA: Enough, Aylmer, enough! What will it take to rid me of this fatal birthmark? Surely this stain can't go as deep as life itself!

AYLMER: I can correct what nature left imperfect.

GEORGIANA: As long as this mark makes me the object of your disgust, life is a burden. So do it!

SDR3: The curtain falls.



ACT II

SCENE 1

SDR4: The curtains rise on an elegant study. Aylmer sits behind a desk, scribbling notes. James and Georgiana wander in and inspect the mysterious vials that line the shelves.

GEORGIANA: What is this gold-colored liquid?

AYLMER: Be careful, my dear. It is the most precious poison ever **concocted**.

JAMES: Why do you keep such a terrible drug?

AYLMER: Don't mistrust me. A few drops in a basin of water will wash away freckles as easily as one cleanses his hands.

GEORGIANA: Do you intend to use this lotion on me?

AYLMER: Oh, no. Your case demands a deeper remedy. Wait here while I prepare the lab.

SDR1: Aylmer exits. Georgiana sits down. Then she stands. She sits. Stands. Paces.

GEORGIANA: I must see what's taking him so long.

JAMES: You know his rule: No one but he and his assistant may enter that lab without permission.

GEORGIANA: I can bear it no longer!

SDR2: She runs offstage.

JAMES (to audience): If only I could have stopped her; if only I could have stopped *him* . . .

SDR3: James shakes his head. The lights fade out.



The character of James does not appear in the original story. We invented him! What do you think his purpose is in the play?

me, my formula cannot fail. Watch what it does to this plant.

SDR3: Aylmer pours a few drops from a vial onto the rose.

AYLMER: See how the marks disappear?

GEORGIANA: I needed no proof.

SDR4: Georgiana lies down on a small couch. She drinks the liquid and falls asleep.

JAMES (to audience): Aylmer watched her with the investigative eye of a scientist.

AMINADAB: The mark grows faint.

AYLMER: It's nearly gone!

AMINADAB: Heh, heh, heh!

JAMES: She's waking up.

AMINADAB: Heh, heh, heh!

AYLMER: Aminadab, show her the mirror.

SDR1: Georgiana gazes into the mirror, smiling faintly.

GEORGIANA: My poor Aylmer.

AYLMER: Poor? No, richest, happiest! You are perfect!

GEORGIANA: My poor Aylmer, you aimed so high.

You've rejected the best the earth could offer.

JAMES (to audience): It was then I noticed the rose.

AMINADAB: It's withering.

GEORGIANA: Dear Aylmer, I am dying.

JAMES (to audience): That mark was the bond between body and soul. As the birthmark faded from her cheek, her last breath faded into the air.

SDR2: The lights go dark.

SCENE 2

SDR4: The lights come up on a messy laboratory.

SDR1: At center stage Aylmer and Aminadab stare at a rose on a table. Georgiana bursts in, followed by James.

GEORGIANA: Look how pale he is, James. So absorbed in his work.

SDR2: Noticing Georgiana, Aylmer rushes toward her.

AYLMER: Why are you here? Do you not trust me?

GEORGIANA: No, Aylmer, you mistrust me. You did not tell me how worried you are about this experiment.

AYLMER: To spare you the grief of knowing its danger.

GEORGIANA: Danger? There is only one danger—that this horrible thing shall be left upon my cheek! Remove it, or we shall both go mad!

AYLMER: Very well then. Unless science has deceived

SCENE 3

SDR3: We see again the elegant dining room from Act I. This time, though, the guests are dressed in black.

SDR4: Aylmer stares at a painting of Georgiana. In the painting, she has the birthmark.

LADY 1: She was such a lovely thing.

LADY 2: Aylmer never knew how lucky he was.

GENTLEMAN 2: Had he been wiser, he wouldn't have thrown away his happiness.

SDR1: James walks to Aylmer's side.

JAMES (to audience): What **folly** it is to worry about life's little imperfections. What folly, what folly, what folly . . .

SDR2: The curtain falls. ●

PROFILE

The Fight for Real Beauty

How one teen took on a major national magazine—and won.

“I feel fat.” “I hate my hair.” “I wish I were taller.” Julia Bluhm, 14, was sick of hearing comments like these. Many girls she knew seemed to worry obsessively about their appearance—their weight, skin, hair, even the shape of their faces.

So Julia decided to do something about it. Her target? *Seventeen*, a popular girls’ magazine. “I look at the pictures, and they just don’t look like girls I see walking down the street,” the eighth-grader from Maine told *The New York Times*.

Of course they don’t. Magazines use programs like Photoshop to remove zits, add shine to hair, bulk up muscles, and slim waistlines. Sometimes the touch-ups are minor. But not always. Often, girls are made to look like Barbie dolls and boys like GI Joe.

Julia fears that these impossible standards of

beauty make teens feel terrible about their own appearances. After all, even the models aren’t as perfect as they look in print!

So Julia launched an online petition asking *Seventeen* to put at least one unaltered photo in each issue. “I want to see regular girls that look like me in a magazine that’s supposed to be for me,” she wrote.

Days later, her petition had thousands of signatures. Julia and



Julia Bluhm, crusader against Photoshop

her mom traveled to New York City and joined a demonstration in front of *Seventeen*’s offices. Then they were invited to meet with *Seventeen*’s editor-in-chief, Ann Shoket.

A few months later, Shoket announced that the staff of *Seventeen* had signed a “Body Peace Treaty.” They pledged to “never change girls’ body or face shapes” and only use photos of “real girls and models who are healthy.” In addition, they promised to be more open about the ways in which images are changed before publication.

Julia’s fight against teen self-hate is far from over, but for now it seems she’s winning—and she’s thrilled: “This is a huge victory,” she wrote in a message on her petition page. “I’m so unbelievably happy.”

— Justin O’Neill

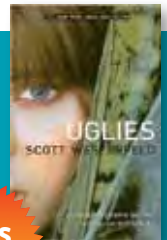


The Power of Photoshop: Look how much this girl was altered!

CONTEST

Write About Perfection

In Act I, Scene I, a character says that our flaws are what make us human. What do you think he means? According to *The Birthmark* and “The Fight for Real Beauty,” is it wise to try to become flawless? Support your answer with evidence from both texts. Send it to **PERFECTION CONTEST**. Five winners will get Scott Westerfeld’s *Uglies*. See page 2 for details.



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