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COMPANY



# SHREK

THE  
MUSICAL

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# Synopsis

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## Act One

Opening like a storybook, our musical adventure begins with a large ogre named Shrek narrating the story of his seventh birthday. As he narrates, the storybook comes to life, and we see Shrek's parents telling the seven-year old version of himself that it is time for him to venture out into the world on his own. As he does, his parents' warning that everyone will hate him because of his hideous looks proves to be true, and he is forced to live alone, embittered and angry in a swamp. Before our eyes, Shrek grows up, the adult ogre now stepping into the story that he was previously narrating ("Big Bright Beautiful World"). His lonely solitude is interrupted one day, however, when all of the Fairytale Creatures of the land show up to his swamp, banished there by Lord Farquaad ("Story of My Life"). Not at all pleased to have his home invaded and encouraged by the Fairytale Creatures, Shrek decides to travel to see Lord Farquaad in order to regain the privacy of his swamp ("The Goodbye Song"). Along the way, he rescues a talkative Donkey from Farquaad's guards and, after much begging on the Donkey's part ("Don't Let Me Go"), Shrek reluctantly allows him to tag along.

Meanwhile, in Duloc, we are introduced to Lord Farquaad, a tiny terror who is torturing Gingy the Gingerbread Man into revealing the whereabouts of a princess that he wishes to marry so that he may finally be a true king. Gingy claims that Princess Fiona is locked in a nearby tower, cut off by lava and a dragon. Lord Farquaad decides to have a festival to draw the name of a Duloc citizen that will have to fetch Princess Fiona for him. As the crowd gathers ("Welcome to Duloc / What's Up, Duloc?"), Shrek and Donkey arrive; Lord Farquaad demands that, in return for the deed to the swamp, Shrek must find and bring back Princess Fiona.

While Shrek and Donkey set off, the lights come up on seven-year old Fiona, stuck in her castle and dreaming that she will one day be rescued by one a prince ("True Love's First Kiss"). As she grows into a teenager, and then into a headstrong woman, she never loses her faith in her fairy tales ("I Know It's Today"). As Shrek and Donkey continue on their journey, Shrek becomes increasingly annoyed with Donkey's constant chattering ("Travel Song"). Somehow, though, deep down, a friendship has begun to form. After crossing the lava-bridge and then arriving at the castle, Shrek sets off

alone to rescue Fiona while Donkey encounters a ferocious female Dragon ("Forever"). When Shrek reaches Fiona, she tries and fails to get him to play out the romantic scenarios found in her storybooks and, at last, he is forced to drag her off. Reunited with Donkey, they must then escape an angry Dragon. Fiona is thrilled to finally have her rescuer fighting for her ("This Is How a Dream Comes True"). Shrek traps the Dragon, and the trio makes it to safety, where Fiona is appalled to find that Shrek is an ogre and not Prince Charming. Shrek explains that he is merely her champion; instead, she is to wed Lord Farquaad. As the sun begins to set, Fiona becomes apprehensive, insisting that they rest and that she spend the night alone. Donkey and Shrek stay awake and, as Shrek finally opens up to his new friend for the first time, we see Fiona transformed into an ogress, alone in the moonlight ("Who I'd Be").

## Act Two

The next day, Princess Fiona rises and, excited that it is her wedding day, dances around, singing ("Morning Person"). When she inquires about her groom-to-be, Shrek and Donkey let the "short" jokes fly, and Shrek begins to mock her childhood circumstances. Each thinking his/her own childhood is worse, the two begin a contest of one-upmanship that culminates in a battle of disgusting bodily noises ("I Think I Got You Beat"). Through this, their pasts are revealed to one another, and a friendship is kindled.

Meanwhile, back in Duloc, Lord Farquaad plans his wedding, and he reveals his own sordid heritage ("The Ballad of Farquaad"). As Shrek and Fiona's newfound camaraderie grows into love, Donkey insists, with the help of the Three Blind Mice, that Shrek should tell Fiona how he feels ("Make a Move"). Before he can, though, the sun begins to set, and Fiona once again rushes away to bed. Refusing to give up on the thought, Donkey goes to the barn where Fiona has retreated, only to discover that she turns into an ogress at night due to a curse placed on her as a child by a witch. She tells Donkey that only a kiss from her true love will return her to love's true form. Alone, Shrek tries to summon the courage to express his feelings ("When Words Fail") and, when he finally goes to tell Fiona, he overhears the end of her conversation with Donkey, completely mistaking her description of herself as an ugly beast for a reference to him. Hurt, he storms off.

# Synopsis (cont'd)

The next day, transformed back into her human form, Fiona decides to tell Shrek about her curse ("Morning Person – Reprise"). When Fiona tries to explain, however, Shrek rebuffs her. Farquaad and his army approach to claim Fiona, who, now upset herself, not only agrees to the marriage, but also insists that it take place before sunset. Donkey tries to appeal to Shrek, but Shrek rejects him, angry that Donkey would talk about him with Fiona behind his back, and declares he will return to his swamp, alone ("Build a Wall").

Elsewhere, while the Fairytale Creatures, evicted from the swamp, head for their new home, they decide they've had it with Farquaad's discriminatory treatment ("Freak Flag"). With a newfound confidence, they decide to return to Duloc and take on Lord Farquaad. Back at the swamp, Donkey and Shrek argue until Shrek is convinced that Donkey and Fiona weren't talking about him. Each one forgives the other, and Donkey convinces Shrek that Fiona cares about him. They rush to Duloc, and Shrek is able to stop the wedding just in the nick of time. He finally finds the words to express his feelings, declaring his love to and for Fiona ("Big Bright Beautiful World – Reprise"). Caught between love and her desire to break the curse, Fiona tries to escape the event, but the exiled Fairytale Creatures storm the wedding and protest their banishment. Amidst the protests, the sun sets, turning Fiona back into an ogress in front of everyone. Farquaad is disgusted but insists the marriage is already binding, claiming he will lock Fiona in a tower and continue to rule as Duloc's true King. Shrek whistles for the Dragon that they met earlier, and she swoops in, destroying Farquaad in one fiery breath. Finally free of Farquaad, Shrek and Fiona admit their love for one another and share a kiss. Fiona's curse is broken, and she takes her true form: an ogress. At first, she is ashamed of her looks, but Shrek declares that she is still beautiful. Shrek and Fiona begin a new life together as everyone celebrates what makes them special ("This Is Our Story"). They all live happily ever after ("I'm a Believer").



**Brian D'Arcy James as Shrek**  
**Original Broadway Cast**

After cutting his teeth in musicals like *Carousel* and *Titanic*, Brian d'Arcy James got the Broadway seal of approval in 2002, when his turn in *Sweet Smell of Success* earned him a Tony Award nomination.

Since then, the 40-year-old, Michigan-born actor has proved himself much more than just a song-and-dance man. He appeared off-Broadway in the quirky musical *Next to Normal* before tackling the title role in the eagerly awaited *Shrek the Musical* on Broadway in 2008.

Skilled with accents and transforming himself physically, James underwent his most extreme makeover ever as the titular green ogre.

Adapted from Broadway.com interview

► <https://www.broadway.com/buzz/145917/interview-brian-darcy-james-of-shrek/>

# SHREK!



## Shrek: The Book?

The children's picture book *Shrek!* was published in January of 1990. The story focuses on Shrek, a young ogre who leaves his home (his parents "kicked him goodbye") to see the world. Along the way, he meets various characters including a witch, a knight, a donkey, and a dragon, and falls in love with the princess of his dreams – someone as ugly and repulsive as he is. The name "Shrek" comes from the German word "Schreck," which means fear or fright.

The book was well-received for its enchanting sense of humor. It takes the ideas of beauty and ugliness and switches them around. The Kirkus Review called it a "reexamination of the reverse world of monsterdom." Even though it was well-received, the book would probably not be as wellknown if it weren't for the movies that it inspired.



One day Shrek's parents hissed things over and decided it was about time their little darling was out in the world doing his share of damage. So they kicked him goodbye and Shrek left the black hole in which he'd been hatched.



## Biography of William Steig (1907-2003)

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William Steig was a cartoonist, illustrator and author of award-winning books for children, including *Shrek!*.

He was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1907, New York to Polish-Jewish immigrants from Austria. His father, Joseph Steig, was a house painter, and his mother, Laura Ebel Steig, was a seamstress. They both encouraged their children to explore the arts.

Steig attended City College of New York and the National Academy of Design. He started contributing illustrations to *The New Yorker* magazine in 1930. He published his first children's book, *Roland the Minstrel Pig*, in 1968. In 1970, Steig received the Caldecott Medal for *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. He wrote other children's books, for which he received Caldecott and Newbery Honors, and numerous other awards. He wrote and illustrated *Shrek!* in 1990.

His other children's books include *Dominic; The Real Thief; The Amazing Bone*, a Caldecott Honor Book; *Amos & Boris*, a National Book Award finalist; and *Abel's Island* and *Doctor De Soto*, both Newbery Honor Books. In addition, Steig also published thirteen collections of drawings for adults.

He died in Boston in 2003 at the age of 95. William Steig was considered a cartoon satirist and social moralist. He used many of his drawings to comment on the injustices of the class system.

"My father was a socialist – an advanced thinker—and he felt that business was degrading, but he didn't want his children to be laborers. We were all encouraged to go into music or art . . . If I'd had it my way, I'd have been a professional athlete, a sailor, a beachcomber, or some other form of hobo . . . anything but a rich man . . . I feel this way: I have a position—a point of view. But I don't have to think about it to express it. I can write about anything and my point of view will come out. So when I am at work my conscious intention is to tell a story to the reader. All this other stuff takes place automatically." - William Steig (as quoted in *Investigating Shrek: Power, Identity and Ideology*, by Aurélie Lacassagne, Tim Nieguth, and François Dépelteau.)

# Ogres and shape-shifters

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An ogre, or ogress, is a large and hideous human-like creature, often found in fairy tales. They are usually portrayed as somewhat unintelligent and clumsy. Sometimes, they are depicted as preying on human victims. The word is derived from the Latin word 'orca,' which means 'demon.' Traditionally, ogres have often been pictured as tall, round creatures with colored skin and a lot of hair. Ogres represent something that is peculiar and different, and in literature, folklore, and art, they may reflect the desire to embrace those who are different. In modern cultures, the image of the ogre has become less threatening.

Familiar stories that feature ogres include "Puss in Boots", "Hop o' My Thumb", "Bluebeard" and the Old English epic poem "Beowulf", which includes an ogre named Grendel. Other fantastical characters are very ogre-like, such as the Giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk," the one-eyed Cyclops of Greek Mythology, the Beast in "Beauty and the Beast," and the 'oni' ('OH-nee') of Japanese folklore.

Shape-Shifters are characters that can change their form, either intentionally or by some outside force, and they are common in mythology and fantasy literature. In *Shrek the Musical*, Fiona transforms into a hideous ogress at sundown. There is a scientific term called "lunar effect" that refers to the idea that the cycle of the moon affects animal behavior. Of course, there are nocturnal and diurnal animals – animals that function primarily at night or primarily during the day.

People's awareness of these natural phenomena could be the initial source for the idea of characters that transform at night or 12 when exposed to the moon. A werewolf, also known as a 'lycanthrope' (LIE-can-thrope), is a human with the power to shift his shape into a wolf, or a wolf-like person. Werewolves date back to the ancient Romans. Scottish, Irish and Icelandic folklore feature selkies, who are women that transform into seals and vice-versa. Sometimes the shape-shifting is a result of a spell or charm, and only happens once, but sometimes it is a basic character trait.



An illustration of Beowulf's Grendel by J. R. Skelton from the 1908 *Stories of Beowulf*.

Grendel is described as "Very terrible to look upon."

The word for the transformation of a human being into an animal or conversely of an animal into human form is called "therianthropy" (teh-ree-ANN-throw-pee). Shapeshifters are common in familiar stories, such as "The Little Mermaid," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Princess and the Frog," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

# Continue the Conversation

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- 1. In fairytales an ogre, or ogress, is a large and shocking human-like creature. They are usually portrayed as somewhat unintelligent and clumsy. Ogres represent something that is peculiar and different, and in literature, folklore, and art, they may reflect the desire to embrace those who are different.**

Q: Who is your favorite character from any Fairytale and does that character fit the description of an ogre/ogress?

Q: Have you ever made a snap decision or judgement about someone based on how they look and later found out they were very different than you initially thought? How did that make you feel?

- 2. At the beginning of the musical Shrek is very angry and wants to be alone. Then he meets new friends and falls in love. He's still grouchy but we see his heart warm and that he does want companionship.**

Q: Have you ever just wanted to be left alone?

Q: If Shrek never met Fiona, Donkey, or any other fairy tale creatures, do you think Shrek would have stayed angry and content in his isolation?

- 3. Shrek and Fiona feel sorry for themselves. They talk about how hard their lives have been. When Fiona tells Shrek her story, he feels the need to top hers by telling his own. This kind of behavior has an element of power in it. One person gains power over the other by saying, "Oh, your life may be hard, but mine is much harder."**

Q: Why do people do this?

Q: What do they hope to gain from it?



# Continue the Conversation

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**4.** The character Farquaad is a bully. He uses his power to enforce conformity on the Kingdom of Duloc and he abuses his power by attempting to eliminate any form of uniqueness.

Q: Have you witnessed this kind of bullying in your life?

Q: When you see this kind of behavior happening in your community, or state, or country, how can you make change?

**5.** Like what happens the Fairytale Creatures in Shrek, people can be driven from their homes for a variety of reasons. Today, thousands of refugees, victims of war and political strife, find themselves living under the worst conditions.

Q: Why do you think this happens?

Q: What can you do to help these people in your town, our country, or around the world?

**6.** Shrek and Fiona have dreams. They sing about them in “Who I’d Be.” But Shrek sees himself as an ugly ogre; Fiona is trapped in her lonely tower and every night turns into an ogress. They both say their dreams will never come true. “That’s how it would be, in a big bright beautiful world. But not for me.” The way we look, or think of ourselves, can have a great impact on how we live and what we achieve. The trick is to realize that acceptance and success comes from who we are, not how we appear to others.

Q: What other books, movies or plays are you familiar with that show a character who has dreams they think they cannot attain because of the way they look? How does that storyline compare to Shrek?