



Audrey Hepburn

Chris Rice



About Audrey Hepburn

Audrey Hepburn was born in Belgium in 1929 into an aristocratic family, but her father left the family when she was six years old. As a child during the war, Audrey experienced hardship and poverty. One of her brothers was taken to a labor camp, and an uncle and cousin were executed. She once said her family had to eat tulip bulbs.

She was determined to become a dancer. Then, through a lucky chance she was spotted by a London musical producer, and her career began as a famous and successful actress, covering nearly forty years.

But at the end of the sixties, after her divorce from her actor-director husband, Mel Ferrer, she chose to leave the film world and live mostly in Switzerland. Despite being hailed as a great actress, Audrey stopped acting full-time, returning to movie-making only occasionally. Perhaps, in 1959, when she fell from her horse while pregnant in Mexico and lost the longed-for child for the second time, the true cost of a glamorous film star's life became clear. She had desperately wanted a happy family life—unlike her own childhood experiences—but her relationships with men seemed to be spoiled by the career she had chosen.

In her last years, she worked as a “goodwill ambassador” for the United Nations’ UNICEF charity, traveling extensively in Africa and Latin America. She visited Ethiopia during the drought to call attention to the plight of starving children.

In spite of her success, there was much sadness in her life. Her two marriages did not last and several pregnancies ended with her losing her baby. In later life, she turned her back on the world of movies and acting and worked instead with deprived children in some of the poorer

countries of the world. She died from cancer at the age of 64 in Switzerland. She was much mourned by the movie world, as well as by her many fans the world over.

Fact File

Born in 1929. Died in 1993.

Real name: Edda van Heemstra Hepburn-Ruston

Best films: *My Fair Lady* (1964), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Charade* (1963), *Nun's Story*, *The* (1959), *Sabrina* (1954)

Worst films: *Green Mansions* (1959), *Paris—When It Sizzles* (1964), *Bloodline* (1979)

Off Screen: United Nations Children's Fund Special Ambassador 1988–1993

What people said about her:

“A slender, elfin and wistful beauty, alternately regal and childlike.” (a film critic)

“You looked around and suddenly there was this dazzling creature looking like a wild-eyed doe prancing in the forest. Everybody on the set was in love within five minutes.” (Billy Wilder, film director)

What she said about herself:

“I never thought I'd land in pictures with a face like mine.”

“I was asked to act when I couldn't act. I was asked to sing ‘Funny Face’ when I couldn't sing and dance with Fred Astaire when I couldn't dance—and do all kinds of things I wasn't prepared for. Then I tried like mad to cope with it.”

Summary

Chapter 1: After her father left her mother, Audrey was unhappy at school in England. During the war she lived in Holland, and life was hard for her.

Chapter 2: Audrey worked hard at being a ballet dancer, but was not able to go very far. She got work in films. Her boyfriend James wanted to get married, but she wanted to wait until her career was established.

Chapter 3: Her first famous film was *Gigi*, and it was a great success. Then she played in *Roman Holiday*.

Chapter 4: Audrey met her future husband, Mel Ferrer.

Chapter 5: Audrey won prizes for her acting, both in films and in the theater.



Audrey Hepburn

Chapter 6: Audrey married Mel Ferrer, but sadly lost her first baby. She acted with her husband, and with Fred Astaire, the famous dancer, then took a year's break.

Chapter 7: Some of her films were successful, but others were not. Audrey gave birth to a baby boy, Sean.

Chapter 8: Audrey took the risk of playing a “bad girl” role in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* which was a great success at the box office.

Chapter 9: Audrey had ups and downs in her career, and problems in her marriage.

Chapter 10: Audrey played the lead in the musical *My Fair Lady*. This film was a great hit, though Audrey did not receive an Oscar for her role.

Chapter 11: Her marriage went better for a while, but when she became pregnant and lost the baby, the strain on the relationship was too much, and she and her husband split up.

Chapter 12: Audrey married a second time and had another baby boy. She only made one movie in eleven years. She then left her husband, because he was seen with other women.

Chapter 13: Audrey spent her last years working for charity, and died of cancer at the age of sixty four.

Background and themes

A different kind of star: Audiences and film directors loved Audrey because she was slender, graceful and elegant and she maintained this image of regal serenity throughout her long career. She was quite unlike some of the actresses of the time, who were seen as “sex goddesses”.

Audrey Hepburn had an elf-like quality, and a suggestion of playfulness and high spirits. She was the daughter of a wealthy banker and a Dutch baroness, and Americans were attracted by the fact that she was born into the European aristocracy. She was cosmopolitan and seemed like a real European princess. She was clearly an ideal choice for the reluctant princess she played in her first big film *Roman Holiday*.

A fairy tale: Her career had fairy tale beginnings. Though she trained as a dancer and worked as a model, she was “spotted”, first by a London producer, and then by the well-known French writer, Colette. During her film career she worked with some of the most famous names in the industry: directors such as William Wyler, Billy Wilder

and George Cukor, and actors such as Gregory Peck (*Roman Holiday*), Gary Cooper (*Love in the Afternoon*), Cary Grant (*Charade*) and Rex Harrison (*My Fair Lady*). She won several Oscar nominations (though only one award) and numerous other awards for her acting.

The cost of fame: Audrey found that the pressure of a film career was difficult to combine with a happy family life. She was often away from home, and perhaps this contributed to the failure of her marriages. The pressure of film-making also was part of the reason she lost two babies when she was pregnant.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask your students to look at the book cover and discuss it. Guide them with the following questions.

What do you think of the woman's style?

What period do you think the photo comes from? The thirties? The sixties? The nineties?

What is there which is “modern” about the style of the woman?

What is there which is more old-fashioned?

Chapters 1–2

After reading

- Discuss:** Ask your students to look at the photo of Audrey and her mother, and to discuss it in pairs. Guide them with the following questions and instructions.

How old is Audrey in this photograph?

Does she look like her mother?

Do you think she is beautiful?

What kind of personality does she seem to have—happy? sad? cruel?

Use a dictionary to find other adjectives which describe her.

- Role play:** Audrey at school
Ask your students to work in pairs. One of them will play the role of Audrey, the other one that of Audrey's mother. Audrey is at school in England, but is not happy. She talks to her mother about what life is like at school. Her mother is sympathetic.
- Write:** Have students write a letter from Audrey when she is at school in England. Give your students these instructions: *You are Audrey, and you are at school in England. Write a letter to a friend in Belgium talking about your life in England, and about your dreams. You can invent stories for your letter.*
- Write:** Give the students these instructions: *You are Audrey. You are in the South of France making the movie Monte Carlo Baby. Write a postcard to your boyfriend James Hanson. Talk about the film, the weather, and your meeting with Colette.*



Audrey Hepburn

- 6 Discuss and research:** Ask your students to discuss the photo on page 5. Guide them with the following questions.

Do you know where exactly in Rome the two people are?

Are they old friends or new friends?

With the help of a dictionary, describe the clothes they are wearing.

Ask your students to find some information about Gregory Peck on the internet and explain it to the class.

Chapters 3–4

- 7 Role play:** Audrey and her boyfriend
Ask your students to work in pairs. One of them will play the role of Audrey, the other of James Hanson. James tries to persuade Audrey to marry him and live a different life. Audrey explains why, after having played in the movie *Roman Holiday*, she does not want to do this. He is very sad and she consoles him.

Chapters 5–6

Before reading

- 8 Discuss and predict:** Ask your students to discuss what will happen next in the story. Guide them with the following questions. *Audrey wants to make more films. Will she find it easy to find a good husband? What kind of man do you think she will marry? Will they be happy together? What kind of problems will they have in their marriage?*

After reading

- 9 Write:** Ask your students to look at the photograph on page 9. Ask them to work in pairs and imagine and write a dialogue between the two people in the photograph. Then ask the students to act out the dialogue for the whole class. Repeat the exercise for the photo on page 10.

Chapters 7–8

Before reading

- 10 Discuss and predict:** Ask your students to discuss what might happen next. Guide them with the following questions.
Audrey played a princess in Roman Holiday. What parts do you think she will play next?
What prizes can she win for her work?
How will her life change when she has a baby?

After reading

- 11 Write:** Ask your students to imagine they are journalists. Guide them with the following instructions. *You are going to interview Audrey Hepburn. She has just made the movie Breakfast at Tiffany's. Work in pairs and write questions about her childhood, about her movies, and about her personal life.* After the exercise, ask the class to choose the ten most interesting questions.

- 12 Role play:** Ask your students to work in pairs. One of them is Audrey, the other is a journalist. Ask them to role play an interview based on the ten questions written in the previous exercise.

Chapters 9–11

After reading

- 13 Role play:** Put your students into pairs. Give them the following instructions.
Work in pairs. Audrey and her friend Givenchy are having dinner. Audrey is making the film Paris—When It Sizzles. Student A: You are Audrey. Tell Givenchy about all your problems. Talk about these things: your dog, your husband, William Holden, your films. Student B: You are Givenchy. Be helpful.

Chapter 12

Before reading

- 14 Discuss and predict:** Ask your students to discuss what might happen next. Guide them with the following questions.
Will Audrey marry a second time? If she does, what kind of person will she marry? Will she find the same problems as in her first marriage?
How will Audrey spend her time after she stops making films?
- 15 Make the description right:** This is a description of the photograph on page 20. Some parts of it are wrong. Read the description to your students and ask them to identify what is wrong, and to make it right.
In the photograph you can see a man and a woman behind a tree. The man has a moustache, long hair but no beard. Around his hand he is wearing something unusual. He is dressed in very expensive clothes. The name of the actor is Gregory Peck. His right arm is around Audrey. She is frowning and looking sad. In front of them is a woman with a hat on her head.

Chapter 13

After reading

- 16 Write:** Ask your students to work in pairs. Give them the following instructions. *You are journalists. You have heard that Audrey Hepburn has just died. Write a short article of around ten or twelve sentences for your newspaper. Tell your readers that she is dead, and say a few more things about her. Choose one of the photographs in the book for your article.*
After the exercise, ask some students to read their article to the class.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.