1. **Blue:** The deepest color, "blue is the most insubstantial color and seldom occurs in the natural world except as a translucency. It is considered empty, or austere, pure, and frosty. It is also the coldest color. Indifferent and unafraid, centered solely upon itself, blue is not of this world: it evokes the idea of eternity, calm, lofty, superhuman, inhuman even" (Chevalier 1982). Many of these symbolic qualities of blue apply well to Bluebeard who is cold with his murderous nature. His blue beard causes people to fear him as an unnatural color for a beard or most things in the natural world. 

2. **Beard:** A beard or hair has many symbolic meanings. First of all, it is often connected with magical powers. It is also considered a sign of invulnerability, like the Bible figure of Samson. In connection with Bluebeard, hair is "the sign of the animal in the human, and all that means in terms of our tradition of associating the beast with the bestial" (Warner 1994). With all of these meanings in mind, Bluebeard’s beard shows that he has great power and is bestial in nature. The fact that the beard is also blue emphasizes his unnatural and magical qualities.

3. **Bluebeard:** The name of this tale and character varies between both "Bluebeard" or "Blue Beard." I am allowing the majority to rule on which version I use and thus using "Bluebeard." This version is a better translation of the French version "La Barbe-bleu" which connects the two words with a hyphen. Personally, I prefer "Bluebeard" since it implies a given name better than the separated "Blue Beard."

4. **Seats:** According to Webster’s Dictionary, a "seat" is a "country mansion" (Webster's 1990). In his translation, Jack Zipes chooses "country estates" instead (Zipes 1989).
5. **Six weeks:** In the time before cars and airplanes, trips to other towns were often expected to last for months between time for traveling and visiting or performing business at the destination.

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6. **Keys:** The keys in this story have many symbolic meanings. First, a key is a symbol of power and/or wealth. Keys are used to lock away what is valuable. A key provides access to goods which are locked away to anyone who possesses it. Often in folktales, a key symbolizes a mystery to be solved "on the road to enlightenment and revelation" (Chevalier 1982). In this context the key represents a mystery to the bride which must be solved. Bluebeard gives her the key to give her access and power in her new home. The privilege is double-edged for he forbids her access to one room conveying his lack of trust in her. Essentially, the key is a trap in this tale, for use of the forbidden key will bring a death sentence. We must also remember that the wife will use the key to open the forbidden chamber and thus she will receive a revelation about the true nature of her husband. Finally, the key is also a phallic symbol which is often emphasized in illustrations as overly sized. The wife is flirting with sexual knowledge and perhaps promiscuity by accepting the key from her husband (Warner 1994).

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7. **Wardrobes:** A wardrobe is a piece of furniture or room in which clothing is usually kept (Webster's 1990).

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8. **Caskets:** A casket is a "small box, usually of some valuable material and fine workmanship, especially for holding letters or jewels" (Webster's 1990).

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9. **Apartments:** An apartment is a room in a palace, an appartement in French (Webster's 1990).

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10. **Closet:** A closet is a "recess built into a room and shut off with a door, or a small room for storing things." As an adjective, the word also means "secret or undisclosed" (Webster's 1990). The irony of Bluebeard's great secret being hid in the "closet" is more apparent to us in modern times with the usage of "closet homosexual." However, this usage was not implied in the original writing or interpretation although such a meaning would add to the possible interpretations of the story.

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11. **Gallery:** Gallery is a long narrow room or corridor (Zipe's choice) often used for exhibiting pictures in stately homes (Webster's 1990).

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12 **My just anger and resentment:** Bettelheim addresses this aspect of the story in his interpretation of the tale. He considers Bluebeard's anger to be just since his wife betrays him, but the extreme nature of his anger is where Bluebeard's fault is found. He states: "The story tells that although a jealous husband may believe a wife deserves to be severely punished—even killed—for this, he is absolutely wrong in such thoughts" (Bettelheim 1975). This translation from Andrew Lang's *The Blue Fairy Book* reflects the Victorian attitude towards infidelity and the resulting anger. Zipes' modern translation uses: "My anger will exceed anything you have ever experienced" (Zipes 1989).

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13 **Looking-glasses:** A looking-glass or mirror has many symbolic meanings of truth and representation of a person's heart, but in this case the mirror is most significant as a symbol of wealth. In the past, mirrors were expensive and a luxury reserved for the wealthy. The fact that Bluebeard owns many with intricate and costly frames that are large enough to give a full reflection of a person from head to toe shows that he is extremely wealthy and thus powerful (Chevalier 1982).

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14 **Curiosity:** Curiosity is a common theme in fairy tales and literature. Some critics consider the central theme of this story to be a caution against female curiosity. According to Bettelheim, this story "presents in the most extreme form the motif that as a test of trustworthiness, the female must not inquire into the secrets of the male" (Bettelheim 1975). Although Perrault did not add the subtitle, many later versions of the story have added subtitles such as "The Effects of Female Curiosity" or "The Fatal Effects of Female Curiosity" (Warner 1994). The theme of curiosity's danger is best known in the story of Pandora's box in which all of the evils of the world were released when a box was opened by Pandora or her husband, depending on the version of the story (Murphy 1996). Finally, the classic story of *Cupid and Psyche*, with which many fairy tales share story elements and themes, contains a cautionary theme against curiosity, too. Your can read more about *Cupid and Psyche* on the Other Fairy Tales Similar to Bluebeard page.

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15 **Broken her neck:** In *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter describes the different ways in which each wife was killed by torture. The wife is sentenced to be beheaded in her story as will the wife in the traditional tale (Carter 1979). This phrase provides a nice piece of foreshadowing of what may come to the wife for her disobedience. She almost has her neck "broken" immediately before her indiscretion and once again soon after she commits her transgression. You can read more about *The Bloody Chamber*, on the Bluebeard Themes in Art page.

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16 **Disobedient:** Connected to the curiosity themes, this story warns readers or listeners of the effects of disobedience. The wife will be threatened with death by her husband for her disobedience. She will later repent of her transgression. The positive results of her repentance will be discussed in future notes.

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Temptation: Temptation is related to the curiosity and disobedience themes in the story. For some critics, the tale is a cautionary one against woman’s innate wickedness that leads to the betrayal and ultimate destruction of her husband. This theme is once again present in the story of Pandora’s box. It also alludes to the temptation story in the Garden of Eden in which Eve partakes of the forbidden fruit and thus gains knowledge forbidden by God the Father (Warner 1994). Christine Daee contends that the tale does not warn “against the moral consequences of sex, but of the practical consequences.” In the days when childbearing was a principle cause of death, a husband essentially killed his wife by making her pregnant. In this way, Bluebeard is a story of everyday life (Daee 1998).

Blood: Blood is rich with symbolic meanings. Blood is passion and the medium of life. That is has been so carelessly allowed to collect on the floor shows Bluebeard’s total disrespect for life. Even in ritual sacrifice great care is taken to keep blood from spilling on the ground (Leach 1949). Bluebeard has no such concerns and the murders he has committed have no resemblance to blood sacrifices or any other ritual. The abundance of blood verifies that the bodies within the chamber are of real women who died as their blood was loosed from their bodies. The image is quite horrific.

Stained with blood: Bettelheim believes that the stained key confirms the wife’s sexual infidelity since it is an ancient motif for a terrible sin, usually murder, but of which sexual defloration is another possible meaning. The key represents the male sexual organ which will be stained with blood when the hymen is broken. The blood is permanent since defloration is an irreversible event (Bettelheim 1975). Beyond Bettelheim, the key has undoubtedly become stained from the sin of the wife however extreme a sin it might appear to the reader.

Sand: Sand was a common abrasive cleaner in past centuries. The fact that not even soap or sand will remove the stain confirms that it is permanent. Some cultures use sand for ritual ablution since it “flows like water and burns like fire” (Chevalier 1982).

Magical: The magical key is the only fantastical element of the story, excepting the blue hue of Bluebeard’s hair. Some critics state that the story is not a true fairy tale due to its lack of magical or supernatural elements with the sole exception of the key (Bettelheim 1975).
22 Speedy return: The speedy return of Bluebeard confirms that his trip was a ruse to give him the opportunity to test his wife's faithfulness. Bettelheim thinks that a sexual indiscretion has taken place in Bluebeard's absence (Bettelheim 1975). Undoubtedly the wife has disobeyed her husband, but the extent of her disobedience or betrayal is not apparent beyond the fact that she opened the door to the forbidden room. It is sure that Bluebeard counted on his wife's betrayal and set up the trap to quickly confirm it.

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23 Repentance: The first religious allusion in the story, this fairy tale also imparts the message that repentance and forgiveness are dynamic terms. The wife is disobedient, but she repents of her sin (out of fear, perhaps, but the emotion is called repentance all the same). Next she receives mercy, although not from her husband who dies for his inability to forgive her for her transgressions.

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24 Rock: The metaphor comparing Blue Beard's heart to a rock is a simple allusion to his impenetrable and unforgiving nature. Ironical comparison also exists with the reference to repentance in the previous lines. Jehovah is called the "Rock of Israel" but he is also capable of forgiveness while Bluebeard is not (Chevalier 1982). The metaphor ultimately shows that Bluebeard is worthy of destruction in his pride and immalleable nature while the wife is capable of repentance and mercy.

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25 Prayers: The religious themes in the story cannot be overlooked. The wife has transgressed her husband's orders and repented. Her husband has refused to accept her repentance, but apparently her God does for she is spared the death sentence her unmerciful husband has placed upon her. The prayers are also a common way of making peace before death such as in the Last Rites. The wife does not know if she will be spared, so she prays. We cannot be sure how much she depends on her prayers since she uses the alloted time to seek help from her brothers.

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26 Anne: Anne has a name as does Bluebeard, but the wife does not. Anne is the only character to have a name which is not descriptive of her role (wife) or physical appearance (Bluebeard). The greatest significance of the name is the possible allusion to Saint Anne and/or Anne of Austria, Queen of France, mother of Louis XIV. Queen Anne's devotion to Saint Anne, the legendary mother of the Virgin Mary, gave rise to the cult of Saint Anne in the 1600s. Saint Anne was popular and known as a miracle worker among the French. She was declared a patron saint to Brittany as a result and was thus a well-known figure to its inhabitants (Warner 1994).

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27. "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?": This refrain is alluded to in literature on occasion. The line and its variations is the most often quoted line from the fairy tale. Also note the gender bias in the story since the wife does not expect her sister to save her from Bluebeard and may not have informed her sister of the danger she is in. The wife relies on her brothers to arrive and bring about her rescue in time to spare her life.

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28. Sabre: The sabre is an interesting element in this translation. (Zipes uses "cutlass" in his translation.) Either weapon leads to the frequent portrayal of Bluebeard as a Turk or other stereotypical "infidel" to explain his terrible behavior. Bluebeard often wears turbans in illustrations, although not in the Dore illustrations seen here, to enhance the image (Warner 1994).

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29. Alas! no: The pattern of three often appears in fairy tales. This is Anne's third answer which should be different to fulfill the pattern. The answer is different, but it does not bring relief with a positive reply. More suspense is built instead by having only sheep appear which have no potential capability of rescuing the wife from her fearsome husband.

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30. Dragoon: A dragoon is a "mounted infantryman armed with a carbine which is a short, light rifle" (Webster's 1990). However, this soldier also wields a sword to kill Bluebeard.

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31. Musketeer: A musketeer is a soldier armed with a musket which was a portable firearm used by infantrymen during the 16th through 19th centuries (Webster's 1990). This soldier, like his brother, wields a sword to kill Bluebeard.

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32. Heirs: The fact that Bluebeard has no heirs except his surviving wife suggests that he was incapable of allowing those near him to live long. It also makes it possible for his wife to inherit the estate, since ownership of property was rare and discouraged through primogeniture (estate to the firstborn son) and entailment. These practices were meant to keep wealth, especially lands, within the family and to keep property from leaving the family through marriage (Pool 1993). In the end, the wife inherits the entire property and is thus able to live happily ever after.

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Loved her a long while: Perrault and many of his female contemporaries who wrote fairy tales championed women's issues, such as arranged and/or loveless marriages. The fact that Anne is able to marry a man who has loved her a long time implies they were unable to marry due to poor fortune. Now that her sister has money, Anne and her lover are able to marry for love, a rare and appealing idea at the time this story was first recorded. The situation of Anne's marriage emphasizes the happy ending as well as the ideology of Perrault (Zipes 1989). The fact that Anne had a previous lover also suggests why she was not attracted to Bluebeard as her sister was.

Buy captains commissions: Buying military commissions was a common practice in past centuries. The price of commissions tended to be high and insured that the wealthy and powerful remained in control of the military. "The purchase system meant that an officer literally had an investment in his regiment. When he left the service the only way he could make some money, especially in prepension days, was to sell the commission to someone else" (Pool 1993).