



April 2017

CRAZE OF THE MONTH: BEAUTY AND THE BEAST



Why is *Beauty and the Beast* so popular right now?

After what felt like months of adverts and trailers, Disney's liveaction remake of *Beauty and the Beast* finally opened in cinemas across the UK on 17 March. It stars Emma Watson (Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* movies) as Belle alongside Dan Stevens (Matthew Crawley in *Downton Abbey*) as the Beast. It is a remake of the 1991 Disney animated film, which itself is based on an 18th century French fairytale.

The film has broken box office records around the world since opening and has been receiving positive reviews from audiences and critics alike. Chances are many of your pupils and their families will be seeing it over the Easter break – if they haven't already.

How can *Beauty and the Beast* be used for literacy teaching?

We know that tapping into children's interests is a great way of engaging them in learning. Our research shows that children who enjoy writing very much are seven times more likely to write above the level expected for their age compared with children and young people who do not enjoy writing at all. Similarly, children and young people who write outside school daily are five times more likely to be writing above the expected level for their age compared with young people who never write outside school¹.

Our Craze of the Month taps into children's and young people's interests to improve outcomes in literacy. The activities featured here relate to the English Programmes of Study from the National Curriculum in England²:

Spoken language

Pupils should be taught to:

- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions
- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings
- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others

Writing – composition

Pupils should be taught to:

- develop positive attitudes towards and stamina for writing by:
 - writing narratives about personal experiences and those of others (real and fictional)
 - writing about real events
 - writing for different purposes

1 Clark, C. (2016). **Children's and Young People's Writing in 2015**. Findings from the National Literacy Trust's annual survey. London: National Literacy Trust

2 DfE (2013). The National Curriculum in England. Key Stage 1 and 2 framework document.



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Using *Beauty and the Beast* in the classroom

Beauty and the Beast offers some great opportunities for cross-curricular learning with particularly strong links to drama and media studies. Here we'll focus on how it could be used to promote literacy. The activities start with simpler ones designed for KS1/2 students and progress to ones more suitable for KS3/4.

Character description

Twinkl and **TES resources** both have some nice starter activities including word searches and activity sheets. Ask pupils to produce character descriptions for Belle, the Beast and other key roles. They could sketch their chosen character(s) and write some words or sentences to describe how they look and their personality. This activity could be done based on the book or Disney animated film if pupils haven't seen the current live-action film.

Tale as old as time...

The original *Beauty and the Beast* film, and the remake, contain some of Disney's most famous songs. Listening to some of these together as a class is a great way to introduce pupils to the story. You could get hold of the lyrics to one of the songs and ask students to complete a cloze gap activity by listening again and filling in missing words. You can find the official music video on **YouTube**.

Film critic

Another obvious place to start would be to ask pupils to write a review of the film. What did they like/dislike about it? Which actors/actresses did they think gave the best performances and who was their favourite character? Pupils who have seen the original animated version could be asked to compare the two – how has the recent version been updated for the modern age? Pupils who haven't seen it could write a review of another film or write about what makes them want/not want to watch *Beauty and the Beast*.

Belle's diary

Ask pupils to imagine how Belle might feel at key points in the story, such as when she takes her father's place in the castle or when the Beast saves her from the wolves. Challenge pupils to write a diary entry for Belle after one of these key scenes where she reveals more about her feelings and what motivated her actions. This could also be done for other characters such as the Beast, Belle's father Maurice or Gaston.

Casting

The film attracted much attention before its release due to the casting of many of the characters, particularly Emma Watson as Belle. It also sees well-known and respected actors such as Ian McKellan and Emma Thompson in relatively small roles (Cogsworth and Mrs Potts respectively). If pupils were responsible for casting who would they have play specific roles and why?

A modern fairytale

The 1991 original Disney animated version of the film was based on an 18th century French fairytale, *La Belle et la Bête*. Critics have noted that the 2017 remake has been updated somewhat for modern audiences with the character of Belle feistier and more independent than the earlier version. Ask students to think of traditional fairytales and imagine them in a modern time period or setting. How might the storyline or characters differ in the 21st century? Have students write their story and share it with the class.

Other themes to explore

The film has also attracted attention for the different themes it touches on. These could be explored in more detail with older pupils and link well to the PSHE curriculum. See, for example, this article from **The Huffington Post** on how Disney made the film more feminist, or this one from the BBC's **Newsbeat** website about Disney featuring its first gay character in the film.



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Further reading

Fans of *Beauty and the Beast* might like to try some of these books, with a slightly different take on the traditional fairytale!

- *The Rescue Princesses* series by Paula Harrison
- *Revolting Rhymes* by Roald Dahl
- *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* by Elena Favilli
- *Don't Kiss the Frog!: Princess Stories with Attitude* by Fiona Waters
- *Ladder to the Moon* by Maya Soetoro-Ng. Illustrated by Yuyi Morales
- *Ninja Red Riding Hood* by Corey Rosen Schwartz. Illustrated by Dan Santat
- *Fairy Tale Comics* by Chris Duffy

By Gemma Niebieszczanski

Network and Competitions Manager

The **National Literacy Trust Network** supports schools to develop outstanding literacy provision by providing practitioners with tools, resources and inspiration. **Join now.**

This academic year the Network is concentrating on creative, engaging and practical ways to develop and enhance parental and community engagement in school. Explore the resources **Our Books** and **Our Stories** for ideas and activities.

Teachers and parents who have a different take on a traditional fairytale could consider entering our **Short Story Prize**. We're asking unpublished authors to capture children's imaginations with a short story that gives a well-known fairytale a modern twist.



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