A STUDY GUIDE BY CHRISTINE EVELY

http://www.metromagazine.com.au

http://www.theeducationshop.com.au
How To Train Your Dragon

ABOUT THE FILM

How to Train Your Dragon draws upon a range of features from the fantasy genre to create an adventure comedy set in a mythical world inhabited by Vikings and fierce, wild dragons. The film is inspired by Cressida Cowell’s 2003 book of the same name, the first in a series of Hiccup’s adventures.

The film version of How to Train Your Dragon offers opportunities to engage students from early primary years through to lower secondary years in learning activities that explore the following themes and topics:

- identity
- accepting difference
- drawing upon personal skills, attributes and strengths
- rites of passage and coming of age
- Vikings
- myths, legends and dragons.

In addition, this study guide provides an extensive range of information, activities and discussion questions to assist teachers and students in investigating key aspects of the transformation from book to film. Related activities explore the film trailer and draw upon the film to explore aspects of narrative such as characterisation, setting, plot and 3D animation.

To support studies that extend aspects of the film’s plot, the guide provides activities that will assist students to investigate Vikings and dragons.

Teachers are encouraged to select those activities that best relate to the needs and interests of the students in their classes.

Where appropriate, the study guide includes activities that will help teachers to extend thinking and learning for gifted students and those with high potential or a keen interest or particular talent.
BEFORE VIEWING THE FILM

Books and films

- Create a class chart listing films and books known by class members that tell stories about Vikings, dragons and mythical worlds. For example:
  - How to Train Your Dragon by Cressida Cowell
  - Viking Longship (Fly on the Wall) by Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom
  - Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling
  - The Discovery of Dragons by Graeme Base
  - Dragon Quest by Allan Baillie.
- As a class, list the favourite books read by students. Categorise the books into those that have and those that have not been made into a film.
- As a class, share experiences of viewing films based upon books. In each case consider:
  - How closely did the film follow the author’s ideas?
  - Was the film version true to the book? Why or why not?
  - If the film version was different from the book, did this affect your enjoyment of the film?
  - Do you think a film version of a book should closely match the book? Why or why not?
- Ask each student to select a book they have enjoyed that has not been made into a film and to give three reasons why he or she thinks it would (or would not) be great to see a film version.

Reading How to Train Your Dragon by Cressida Cowell

- As a class, read the opening chapter of How to Train Your Dragon by Cressida Cowell.

Have students use a storyboard to show how they would portray one part of this chapter as a scene in a film. Encourage students to think about what they would include in the frame for each shot and to think about using a variety of shot types to express ideas effectively.

Share and compare ideas and celebrate the diversity of interpretations.

- Write your own short review and share with a partner. Do you agree with each other’s opinions? Discuss as a class why people’s opinions about the same book can differ.

Display the reviews on a school library noticeboard or publish in a school newsletter to encourage others to read the book.
Do you think the filming of How to Train Your Dragon in 3D might affect how true the film can remain to the book? Explain your opinions.

- Have some fun engaging with the interactive activities on the website related to Cressida Cowell’s books <http://www.howtotrainyourdragonbooks.com>. Learn how to write Dragonese and discover jokes, games and information about the characters, including different dragons, and information about the author.

- Create two bookmarks with a drawing of your favourite character from the book.

Give one bookmark to a child in another class to encourage them to read the book. Use the other to mark pages as you read another book telling a story about dragons. Review this book and share your opinions of the book with your classmates.

- Tell students they will soon be viewing the film version of How to Train Your Dragon, a new computer-animated adventure comedy by DreamWorks Animation. As a class, discuss:
  - What part of the book are you most looking forward to seeing on the big screen?
  - What two key events in the book do you consider essential to include in the film?
  - What do you think the film’s writer/directors will be likely to leave out?
  - Do you think the film’s writer/directors will interpret the story in a way that is true to the book?
  - Do you think it is important for this film to be true to the book? Why or why not?

- Do you think the filming of How to Train Your Dragon in 3D might affect how true the film can remain to the book? Explain your opinions.

Dragons, Vikings and Adventure are all you need to make a great children’s book and How to Train Your Dragon contains all these factors. Cressida Cowell, the Author of this great book, is not well known but she will be when this book hits the shelves.

Now a bit about the book, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III was to be the next chief of the Hairy Hooligans Tribe but there was one problem. To become a full member of the tribe you must pass an initiation test. Hiccup was not the average Viking kid, he was a bit of an outcast. Hiccup was skinny, short and scared, plus he had to live up to the reputation of his dad which happens to be the current Chief of the Tribe. So Hiccup didn’t have much hope to become a full member of the tribe and if you don’t pass the initiation test you would be exiled from the tribe. Hiccup only had one friend and bullies constantly picking on him were not great motivation boosters. Hiccup conquers his fears and he captures his own dragon but that is only the first part if the test. I don’t want to give away too much, so I will leave the rest of the story for you to read about.

The cover of this book will really grab you attention so it won’t be hard to find in stores. The illustrations and the design of the front cover are really appealing and makes you think the book is really old. This book is excellent for kids because it does not drag on like other books which leave the reader bored. After reading this book I think it is right to say that it is GREAT! Since it is short you can read it quickly and after a while you will see it on your shelf then read it again and again and again. I think this book would be great for kids between the ages of 7 to 11. I easily give it 4 stars. *****

Review found at <http://www.librarything.com/work/1642>
As a class discuss: How many dragons are shown? What are the names of the dragons and what do they look like? Based on appearance, what do you think the personality of each dragon might be like?

- View the How to Train Your Dragon film trailer found on the website.

A film trailer is a persuasive text. What is the trailer trying to persuade you to do? Does it give you information about the film? What type of audience do you think would enjoy this film? Is the trailer successful? Why or why not?

After watching the trailer again, discuss:
- Who thinks they will enjoy the film? Why or why not?
- Does it seem similar to any other films you have seen? Which ones?
- Which part of the trailer did you enjoy the most?
- Who do you think will be the main characters? What might be the setting?
- What genre might the film be?
- What might be the key themes or messages of the film?

Analyse the film trailer carefully. Watch it again, and this time pay attention to the way the voiceover, music and written text help to give the viewer information. How have the creators ensured that the trailer persuades as many people as possible to view the film?

**Vikings: myths, facts, fiction and fun**

- Create and display class definitions for:
  - myths
  - facts
  - fiction.

Use print or online dictionaries to clarify the word meanings.

- Challenge students to list all the things they know about Vikings on a large sheet of paper.
- As a class, use the interactive whiteboard to complete this Online Viking Quiz <http://viking.no.master.com/texis/master/search/+/form/Quiz+1.html>.
- Use the interactive whiteboard to begin to investigate the BBC Vikings website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings/> with the class. Begin with the section ‘Who were the Vikings?’

Have students then work in groups to explore sections of interest and report findings back to the class.

- Groups of students could take turns to visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings/launch_vt_viking_farm.shtml> to take a virtual tour of a Viking Age farm.

The site shows a model Viking Age farm, excavated in the 1970s at Ribblehead, Yorkshire. Ribblehead Farm consists of three structures: a main building, used as living quarters; and two smaller buildings, thought to have been a blacksmith’s workshop and a storehouse or kitchen.

Play the panorama to take a virtual tour of the farm. Hold the cursor down to move around; select ‘+’ to zoom in and ‘-’ to zoom out.

- Introduce the game Viking Quest <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings/launch_gms_viking_quest.shtml>, which takes you back to AD 793. Talk about how long ago AD 793 was and create a scaled timeline with the class to show the relationship between the periods AD and BC.

Challenge students to build a ship, cross the seas, loot a monastery and return home to claim the prize in the game.
Vikings used a variety of tools and implements – the technology of the time. Viking shields were important during battles as a means of protection. Warriors could create protective walls standing side by side with their shields overlapping.

• Find out more about the making and use of shields by Vikings. How were the shields decorated? What types of symbols were used?

Imagine you are a young Viking who needs a shield so you can join in battles. Design your ideal shield. Think about size, shape and decoration.

• Investigate the type of clothing worn in the Viking Age. Design and make a Viking hat using newspaper.

• Draw and label two different types of Viking ships, showing size, shape and mode of movement. These websites might help to provide information and ideas:

   http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/programs/vikingdiscoveries/


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• What are runes? Investigate the meaning of the word rune and the origins of runes. Write your name using a runic translator at one of the websites below:
  
  http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/vikings/write.html
  
  http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vikings/runes.html

• Have individuals or pairs of students create a Vikings Quiz for classmates with questions at two or three levels. For example:

  **Level one**
  
  1. What countries did Vikings come from?
  
  2. What was a Viking warship called?
  
  3. What was a Viking merchant ship called?

  **Level two**
  
  1. Which country did King Canute come from?
  
  2. How many oarsmen rowed on a Viking longship?
  
  3. What is a rune stone?

  **Level three**
  
  1. Who was Odin?
  
  2. What was the name of Odin’s horse?
  
  3. What weekday is named after Odin?

• Engage small groups of students in mini-research projects that aim to help them to discover more about Vikings and to build their abilities to devise research questions, locate reliable sources of information and present their findings in interesting ways. Topics could include:
  
  - writing implements and writing
  - everyday tools and technology
  - jobs or occupations engaged, e.g., blacksmith, boat builder
  - food and farming
  - entertainment.

  The following sites might be helpful:
  
  Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga: http://www.mnh.si.edu/vikings/start.html
  
  Includes a map of Viking routes in the Teacher Resource Learning Centre.

• Challenge each group of students to create a word-find worksheet or a crossword using words related to their mini-research project to share with classmates.

• Visit <http://www.viking.no/e/problems/ematteb.htm> to engage in some Viking maths.

  Challenge students to make up their own maths problems for one another to solve.
AFTER VIEWING THE FILM

Plot and setting

• Ask each student to draw what he or she remembers from the opening scene of the film version of How to Train Your Dragon. Prompt students’ memories by asking the class:
  - What did you see and hear that helped to set the scene?
  - How did the opening scene help you to predict what the film might be about, who the characters might be and what they might be like?
  - What mood or atmosphere was created in the opening scene?

• Discuss the questions and activities on Worksheet 1 related to the film’s setting. Then ask students to complete the sheet individually and share their responses.

• Seat students in a circle facing one another and have them share their favourite parts of the first dragon battle. Encourage use of descriptive language.

• Ask students to compare the film with the book. Were the film’s settings, characters and events as they imagined they would be? What surprised them about the film? Why? What did they enjoy most about the film? What did they enjoy most about the book?

How do books and films each tell their stories? Why might a film version of a story be different from an original book? Consider how words are used to stimulate a reader’s imagination in a book versus use of the multimodal elements of a film, including moving images, dialogue, music, sound effects and printed text.

• Teach students to use a legend and a key, then have them work with a partner to create a map showing where they think the key features of the Isle of Berk, such as Stoick’s house, are located in the film.

Extending thinking and learning

• Find out how Cressida Cowell, the author of the book How to Train Your Dragon, was inspired to create the settings or worlds that are inhabited by Vikings and dragons.

Think of a special place in your life and create a rough sketch map to show how it could be used as a setting in a film. What would the title of the film be? Who would be the main characters and what would be a couple of the key events in the film?
Characterisation

• Have students use Worksheet 2 to create a pen portrait (a short description) for each character in the film. For example:

Hiccup: a gangling, accident-prone Viking teenage boy.

Gobber: peg-legged, one-armed hulk of a blacksmith.

Encourage students to use rich, descriptive language that creates word pictures.

Alternatively, create pen portraits as a class.

• Create a large class concept map that shows relationships between the film’s characters.

Use one- and two-way arrows to link characters. On each arrow write words or phrases that explain or describe the relationship between the characters.

Thinking about Toothless: a character study

In Cressida Cowell’s book, Toothless is very small for a dragon. In the film, Toothless is a Night Fury – an enormous, rare dragon.

• Explain why Toothless might have been changed so much in the film. You might consider how the use of 3D to tell the story might have affected character design, and also the need for Hiccup and Astrid to ride the dragon as part of the story.

• Think about and describe the look on the face of Toothless when you first meet him and later in the film.

When How to Train Your Dragon co-writer/co-director Chris Sanders was asked at a press conference whether there was a little bit of Stitch from the Disney film Lilo and Stitch (2002) in Toothless, he responded, ‘I think there’s a little bit of him in his DNA just because of the way that he behaves sometimes.’

• Find out why a reporter would ask Sanders about Stitch, a character from another film?

Sanders explained that the process for developing Toothless was very different from his involvement in developing Stitch. With Toothless, artists were given responsibility for design, but were given clear briefs about what Toothless needed to be able to do in the film to move the story forward.

Sanders indicated that Simon Otto, one of the lead animators and lead designers, and Takao Noguchi, who actually built Toothless in the computer, had a huge hand in the way the dragon looked. However, the look was developed around Sanders’ key requirements, including the need for Toothless to:

- go from being an aloof, frightening creature to one that’s warm and surprising
- be terrifying to Vikings who are normally fearless
- have a tough, pliable-looking design.

• Ask students to explain how the jet-black colour of Toothless was used to contribute to the Vikings’ fear of this dragon. Consider how Toothless disappears into the night sky, almost like a ghost.

• Compare Toothless’ blunt, short front end, wide head and beautiful broad wings with the physical characteristics of a hawk. In what ways are they similar?

• Do you think Toothless has a fast, hawk-like look? Would you describe him as scary? Do you think he is also cute?

Toothless has two sets of wings. When they’re both open they make a bit of a delta wing. He also has a long, trailing tail.

• Do you think the tail of Toothless resembles the tail of a swallow or a hawk? If so, in what way? If not, what does it look like?

• Why might the filmmakers have given Toothless a dual tail? Consider how this enables them to remove half of it as part of the story.

Dean DeBlois, fellow co-writer/co-director, added to Sanders’ explanation about the look of Toothless. He noted that Toothless has a bit of salamander in him, but because there are several reptilian-looking dragons in the movie already his look is more mammalian, with the character design inspired by a
Discuss varied meanings that could be attached to a name like Hiccup.

Consider how you might feel if you had a name like this? What suggestions can you make that might help Hiccup to cope with a name like this and to cope with or respond to teasing related to his name.

Have each student find out how his or her own names were selected and by whom. Ask students to investigate the meanings of their names.

In the early part of the film Hiccup is frequently teased and laughed at by others in his age group. He also endures a ‘walk of shame’. How do you think Hiccup felt at this time?

List key incidents that show how other kids in the film treated Hiccup. Why do you think he was treated in this way? How do you think such treatment would make him feel?

How do you think these incidents affected Hiccup’s sense of identity and self-esteem?

Work in small groups to role-play and share with the class some ways that Hiccup could respond to or deal with unfair treatment by his peers.

Create an illustrated class book showing individual students’ ideas about strategies Hiccup could use to deal with his feelings about his treatment by other kids.

Hiccup is told by another character to stop trying so hard to be someone he’s not.

• Do you think it is possible to change who you are? Why or why not? Should a person try to be someone they are not? Give
examples to back up your ideas.

• The film is also about being true to yourself.

Jonah Hill, the actor who voices Snotlout, thinks that one of the key messages in the film is that it’s OK to question what you hope to achieve, especially if you have been told by others your whole life that you have to be something in particular. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Discuss as a class: Who might be influential people in children’s lives in helping them to develop personal goals? Should young people strive to achieve goals set by other people? Why or why not?

• In the film version of How to Train Your Dragon there is a focus on the relationship between a father (Stoick) and his son (Hiccup). Eventually the father must learn to accept that his son is different from what he had pictured or hoped his son would be.

What would you like your parents or carers to be most proud of about your life?

• Have students complete Worksheet 4 to help them to consider what conflicts or problems Hiccup faces during the film version of How to Train Your Dragon. Share and discuss students’ responses as a class.

Fears

The film How to Train Your Dragon has many themes and messages; one is about addressing fear.

• Create a list of Hiccup’s fears. For example:
  - fear of dragons
  - fear of failure
  - fear of letting his father down
  - fears related to having a girlfriend.

• What are some of the greatest fears that have affected your life?

Create a class graffiti wall using large sheets of butcher paper. On it encourage students to list or draw their fears.

From time to time, select one of the fears from the graffiti wall to discuss as a class. Students may choose to identify themselves as having the fear or the fear may be discussed with anonymity. Consider:
  - how the fear might have arisen
  - whether the fear is warranted
  - the effect the fear might have on a person
  - strategies to reduce fearfulness
  - people who might help you to overcome a fear.

Rites of passage

Many societies have rites of passage. Some are recognised formally while others are marked quite informally. Generally, a rite of passage indicates that a change has occurred in a person’s social status. Often a ceremony or a party is part of a rite of passage. An example is having a party at age eighteen or twenty-one to mark adulthood. Some schools have graduation ceremonies at the end of primary and secondary school.

• What rite of passage was Hiccup initially keen to be part of along with his teenage Viking peers?

Ask students to explain why they think Hiccup was initially determined to be part of the dragon battle at the beginning of the film. How did he think it might change his life? What role did he think he might play in the battle?

• Discuss and list some rites of passage that occur in the lives of students’ families – for example, naming ceremony, baptism, confirmation, bar or bat mitzvah, marriage, formal or debutante ball, graduation, funeral.

• Explore students’ ideas about how Hiccup’s desire to be part of the battle is similar to real-life situations for young people in relation to ‘fitting in’. Students might share examples of times where they have found it difficult to fit in among their peers. How does it feel to be considered different?

Friend or foe?

At one point during dragon-fighting training, trainer Gobber (voiced by Craig Ferguson) tells the teenage Vikings, ‘A dragon will always, always, go for the kill.’

• Discuss as a class:
  - Why do you think the adult Vikings believed this to be true?
  - What was the goal Hiccup had in relation to Toothless at first?

• Work with a partner to create a storyboard that shows Hiccup finding the Night Fury dragon. What actually happens when they meet?

Describe what took place as Hiccup and Toothless change from not trusting one another, or even being enemies, to becoming friends.

• Discuss: Why do you think Hiccup was the first Viking to approach Toothless without aggression? Why, when Hiccup’s dad finally agrees to let Hiccup train to fight dragons, does he not want to do it?

• What is a friend? As a class list qualities that make someone a really good friend.

Create a friendship ladder. List the
becomes more intense, things appear closer to you.

Some viewers feel that in the shots showing Hiccup’s first test flight, when he’s flying up over the island, it really feels like you’re on the back of the dragon with Hiccup, especially as he dives towards the water and makes narrow turns and is falling from the dragon. All of this is heightened by 3D.

- Imagine you are responsible for designing a thrill ride based on Hiccup and Astrid’s flight on the back of Toothless.

Use grid paper or a suitable software program to create your own movie ride. Begin by drawing a plan of your ride, to scale. Think about the ages and sizes of people who might wish to enjoy your ride, what the ride will do and the safety features it will include.

Create a physical model of your ride and display for your classmates to see.

Use 3D software such as Kahootz to create a world for your ride – then show your friends and family what it would be like to have a go on it.

Design an advertising poster that will persuade people to have a go on your ride.

- As a class, discuss how the filmmakers have used 3D to help to immerse viewers in the fantasy and make them part of the adventure.

Director DeBlois has explained that the filmmakers didn’t want to be encumbered by the need for the film to be 3D. He believes it found its way into the film quite naturally.

Discuss as a class: Do you agree that the 3D aspects of the film seem quite natural or did they seem like a gimmick that distracted you from the story and the messages in the film?

- Make a paper dragon that is an optical illusion. Visit <http://www.grand-illusions.com/opticalillusions/dragon_illusion>, print a PDF of the dragon and try the illusion for yourself.

The directors are keen for viewers to understand how the use of 3D to create How to Train Your Dragon offered the filmmakers the depth and dimension they needed to create the illusion of a believable world that involved flying dragons.

They are proud of the way that head of layout on the film, Gil Zimmerman, has been attentive to detail, enabling amazing camera work to help reflect the emotion of a scene. For example, as action or the emotion of a scene becomes more intense, things appear closer to you.

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- Explain why animation is the best way to tell this story – not live action!

How to Train Your Dragon is a 3D film.

Why animation? Why 3D?

DeBlois has described working on the film How to Train Your Dragon as being like a kid in a candy store because you not only get to mix with people who are very talented, but you also have access to advanced technology enabling the creation of all kinds of incredible looks, textures and special effects, as well as the ability to move the camera with great flexibility. For DeBlois it seems like there are no limitations, except for maybe time and money – which, he notes, do eventually run out. He says the work was very exciting, since anything you can conceive, you can create.

- Think about your relationship with one of your friends. How high up the ladder of friendship can you climb? Explain why.

What would be three things you could do to strengthen your friendship with your friend?

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Sanders explains how two cameras placed about eight or nine centimetres apart create 3D with the same sort of scale that our eyes have, because that's about the distance apart of the average human's eyes.

Sanders goes on to explain that if you take the two cameras and pull them farther apart, it makes you feel that what you are looking at is miniaturised. This can be really effective if you want the viewers to feel that they are suddenly more powerful, and the thing they are looking at is more diminutive. Alternatively you can do the opposite – you can push the cameras closer together so the thing you are looking at appears to be a lot larger.

- Investigate how human eyes work. Draw a diagram and label it to explain what you learn about human eyes and sight.

Sanders and DeBlois have both grown up with a love for drawing and writing stories, and both love traditional hand-drawn animation. They recall sitting and drawing and writing stories as children. They see their work now as a great pay-off for a passion that began early on in their lives. While DeBlois is excited by having a whole range of new tools, including 3D, to add to his animation toolbox, he is quick to point out that regardless of the technology, good storytelling is always the same.

- As a class, list qualities that make a good story – for example, believable characters, funny incidents, powerful events, dramatic tension.

Many advances in animation technology have been drawn upon in creating the film version of How to Train Your Dragon. However, Sanders and DeBlois note that viewers may not notice all of these advances immediately. One example is the work of the modellers in creating the detail in Stoick's beard. Hair is traditionally difficult, so the matted look of the beard and the movement of characters' hair that has been achieved in the film is quite a breakthrough.

The directors draw attention to the believable detailed look of Stoick's fur cape, likening it to buffalo fur. They feel the textures achieved with elements such as hair, fire and fabric take the cartoon element out of the mix and replace it with images that viewers will genuinely believe. They also believe the look of the characters has continued to improve, with the capturing of more muscles and more sophisticated facial expressions. They are also excited by what has been done with special effects, such as the interactions between smoke and fire.

Sanders and DeBlois are convinced that advances such as these mean that a viewer feels like he or she could step into the world.

- Do the technological advances used in creating How to Train Your Dragon help to transport you into the Viking world? Or is the story the part that draws you into the world? Give some examples from the film to help explain what helped to transport you into the Viking world.

Director Sanders is proud of the way in which the animation team was able to create such believable characters and actions in How to Train Your Dragon. He shares some of the techniques that have been used in the film, for example, when contact needs to occur between characters and objects in a computer generated (CG) world. This involves an immense amount of work because computers are able to tell what is solid and what isn't solid. To achieve believable movements and contact between characters and objects, something called rigging is required – this is the invisible part of the character which the animators grab onto and move the characters around with; it is similar to human muscles. Sanders notes that it that takes a huge amount of time to create the rigging inside the characters.

If a character puffs up his muscles, or he drops his eyebrows and you get a little slight deformation in the sides of his eyes, these are the types of movements that make the character believable. However, you can't get the rigging to do everything, because it will become so 'heavy' that you can't move the character. So you have to make really smart choices when you start a film.

When planning a character for example, you need to think about questions like: What is this character going to do? Is he going to swim, is he going to fly? If he's going to swim, you do certain things. If he's going fly, you do certain things.
Sanders recalls a moment towards the end of *How to Train Your Dragon* when Stoick jumps into the water.

*This is not the budget's favourite thing for you to do. Interaction with water is a huge, huge, huge deal. But it's something that Bill Damaschke [head of creative at DreamWorks Animation] asked for, actually, and we loved that he asked for it, because we'd been avoiding the water quite a bit up to that point. But he said, 'You know, we've got to up the ante a bit at the end of this film,' and when we started talking about ways to do that, we said, 'He could go into the water,' and Bill said, 'Do it'. So that sequence in part is a pretty detailed sequence and not cheap, but what it gives you is huge.*

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**Book to screen**

Initially the film version of *How to Train Your Dragon* was intended to be a faithful adaptation of Cressida Cowell's book. When Sanders and DeBlois were brought on to the film, they added a fresh perspective to the material that helped the film to become a big fantasy adventure while meeting the mandate to 'retain the world, make the most of it and the dragons and Vikings, keep the name, keep the characters' without feeling 'beholden to the actual plot of the book'.

The filmmakers had a fundamental choice to make.

They could stick to the world of the book in which Vikings and dragons co-exist in relative harmony, and then the story would be about a runt Viking raising a runt dragon to do tricks that no other young Viking's dragons could do, which they thought felt small.

Alternatively, they could make a film about Vikings and dragons who are mortal enemies in a war, and it could become the story of the first Viking to cross that divide and change the world forever.

The filmmakers thought this second idea felt bigger and had so many more possibilities they could explore. They decided the young Viking could have a double life: by day he is being trained to fight and kill the very thing that he is nursing and befriending by night. For the filmmakers, this had so much more texture to it and was the kind of movie they would immediately respond to. And this is something they would always do – try to make a movie they would want to see.

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**Do you agree?**

DeBlois comments that character designer Nicolas Marlet provided a rich, amazing and large variety of drawings of dragons. DeBlois is pleased that *The Book of Dragons* in the movie alludes to a larger world, as this will allow the filmmakers to continue to explore more of Marlet's dragons, along with the large universe of different islands and different cultures of dragons and nests, if there are sequels.

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**Do you think the filmmakers manage to create a film that has an epic, worthy storyline?** Define the words ‘epic’ and ‘worthy’, and then explain whether you think this goal was met.

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**What advances in animation technology would you like to see developed in the near future?**

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**What can you remember from when Stoick went into the water? Did you notice how clever the animation was at this point or were you too involved in the story?**

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**Work in small groups to list features of the animation in this film that help to make both characters and the created world seem believable.**

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**Imagine the dragons breathed water or another liquid instead of fire. How would this change the look and personality of a dragon?**

---

In the world created in Cressida Cowell's book, there are many dragons. Cressida Cowell says that it was a lot of fun to write the books. 'That's why I've written eight in the series.' DeBlois was excited by the world created by Cressida Cowell as it gave the filmmakers the opportunity to create dragons with different personalities, a variety of traits and diverse types of fire. He thinks this helped to create a film that is vibrant and full of colour and texture.

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**List some of the storylines you think could be incorporated into sequels to *How to Train Your Dragon*.**

DeBlois was also excited by thinking about all the different dragons' fire that could be created.

*I thought the Gronkle is clearly like it's a lava, it's like rocks and fire make this lava fire, but then the Nadder has probably almost like an acetylene fire because it's so hot, or magnesium fire, actually.*

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**What can you remember from when Stoick went into the water? Did you notice how clever the animation was at this point or were you too involved in the story?**

---

**Work in small groups to list features of the animation in this film that help to make both characters and the created world seem believable.**

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**What advances in animation technology would you like to see developed in the near future?**

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---

**Work in small groups to list features of the animation in this film that help to make both characters and the created world seem believable.**

---

**What advances in animation technology would you like to see developed in the near future?**
father had a boat. He was very bad with the boat. He'd go out in storms. He didn't know what he was doing. He would catch fish, food to eat. We lived how people lived in Viking times, which was a very extraordinary experience, a wonderful experience for a child.

And so that was the inspiration for the Isle of Berk and for Hiccup. And it was the inspiration for the dragons as well, because it was a wild and wonderful place and we would fish. When you would fish you would pick up these extraordinary creatures from the bottom of the ocean. I remember picking up these enormous, giant prawn-like creatures. Nobody knew what they were and we ate them anyway. I don't know, I guess we were hungry. But I found that fascinating, that there were things in the ocean that adults didn't even know what they were – and I started thinking: What if dragons really existed? And that was the jumping off point for the story. I think it's great to ask yourself a question: what if dragons really existed? What would they look like? How would they be? What would they eat? So that was how it started.

When Cressida Cowell was asked by the filmmakers about how she felt about the changes from the pages of her books to the film version of How to Train Your Dragon, she explained that she doesn't judge a movie by how faithful it is to the book, rather she judges whether it's a good movie or not.

One of the most interesting things about Cressida Cowell's books is that they are based somewhat on her life. She says:

'I'm the source material. It sounds very unlikely if you've seen the movie, because it's about Vikings and dragons, but in fact the story is very autobiographical. It stemmed from experiences in my childhood. Actually, that sounds a bit crazy if you look at me. But I spent a great deal of time as a child on an uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland. An island so small that when you stood at the top of it you could see sea all around you. It was completely deserted – no houses, no shops, no telly, no nothing. When I was a tiny baby we would be dropped at the island by a local fisherman. No mobile phones, no way of contacting the outside world and even as a small child I thought they were completely crazy – what if someone broke a leg or something like that?

My parents had a house on the island and we would stay there for the whole summer – for a month. My father had a boat. He was very bad with the boat. He'd go out in storms. He didn't know what he was doing. He would catch fish, food to eat. We lived how people lived in Viking times, which was a very extraordinary experience, a wonderful experience for a child.

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How to Train Your Dragon she said:

I’m a great fan of movies – and I happen to be someone that right from the beginning was very clear in my head that this is your movie – that the books were my territory, and this was movie territory. I am not a movie maker. And as a writer, I absolutely do not want somebody jumping up and down in the background saying, ‘But no, this isn’t how I see your books.’ I would find that very hampering to my creativity if somebody was jumping up and down saying you have to write your books this way. So that was how I viewed it. Obviously I felt that the studio really got the books right from the beginning and were interested in it for the reasons that I thought were very important: the emotional story between Hiccup and his father and things like that, but I was very clear that I wanted you guys [Sanders and DeBlois] to go through your creative process.

It’s not as easy as I’m making it sound because these are my babies, these are my books, I love them, but I tried to be informed and to give my opinion but I was open to you guys making something creatively … that you wanted to do … So I was open to the idea, yeah. So it wasn’t as difficult as it might have been for some authors.

About the soundtrack

Sanders explains the importance of the role of the soundtrack:

One of the things we worked very hard to do on this film, which we learned on the last film, is not to get in the way of music. Music is magic, it really is. And one of the things we learned from Alan Silvestri – we were having trouble with a certain moment from Lilo and Stitch that we just couldn’t make it play. And we kept struggling with it, and eventually we decided not to put it on screen because it was either too heavy handed or it was just awkward. And when he looked at our movie he said, ‘Hey where’s that moment where this character is shifted from bad to good?’ and we said, ‘Oh we didn’t really put that on screen.’ And he said, ‘Put it on screen, and I’ll do it.’

And it was this really huge moment for us as it taught us a lot about not getting in the way of music and letting music do its job. So music doesn’t just sweeten things, it can do some of the heaviest lifting in the movie – when a character changes or when he makes a decision, it can put you ahead of something so that when it happens it’s glorious, or it can just reinforce something or it can do it all by itself. So we worked very, very hard when we were writing this movie to clear out dialogue in as many places as we could so that music would have a place to really do its job.

• There are many moments during the film when the soundtrack is integral to the story being told and to the film’s messages. Explain how the dramatic music during the flight scenes adds to the viewing experience.

Myths, legends and dragons

Dragons are legendary creatures that typically have serpentine or reptilian features. Along with heroes, dragons have appeared in myths and legends in almost every culture around the world.

Myths generally tell ancient tales often about religion, gods and goddesses and the origins or workings of the universe. Legends relate more to real events and people of the past but the tales have often been exaggerated or distorted to reflect the values and attitudes of the people of that time.

Mythical creatures like dragons may symbolise danger, bring luck or represent hopes or fears.

• Use the interactive whiteboard to visit <http://www.dragnix.net/Artistic_Section/Poetry>. As a class, read some of the dragon poetry on the site such as ‘My Dream’, ‘On Wings of Flame’, ‘Shadow’, ‘Spirit of the Dragon’, ‘Moon Dragon’ and ‘Sentinel’.

• Sketch and then colour one of the dragons from How to Train Your Dragon. Based on your drawing, brainstorm descriptive words about the appearance and personality of the dragon.

• Make some mix-and-match dragon books to share with younger students. To make these, divide the pages of a blank booklet into thirds and cut across the pages. Use the blank
top third to draw dragon heads, the middle section to draw dragon bodies and the bottom third to draw dragon legs and tails. Younger children can have fun creating new and strange-looking dragons by mixing and matching the drawings.

Students could be encouraged to try to use prefixes on the top third, suffixes on the bottom third and meaningful letter patterns in the middle third to create nonsensical names for the dragons. The letters creating the names need to be written downwards on the right hand side of the drawings.

- Have a look at <http://www.kidcyber.com.au/topics/dragons.htm>, then work with a few friends to create a wiki describing dragons from the film version of How to Train Your Dragon.

Dragons: fact, fiction or folklore?

- Do scaly dragons still exist? Did they ever exist? What do you think?

Find out how well you know your mythic creatures with this map challenge. List the creatures you consider to be dragons.

http://www.amnh.org/ology/features/mythicmap/

Visit <http://www.strangescience.net/stdino2.htm> and look at the illustrations in the annotated compendium of illustrations of dinosaurs and dragons from centuries-old science books. The site highlights misidentifications scientists made as they studied the natural world.

What are three things you discover about dragons?

- Design your own dragon.
  - What are its physical characteristics?
  - How does it move?
  - Where does it live? Describe its habitat.
  - What does it eat? How is its body adapted for this type of food?
  - What are its natural enemies?
  - Give it a name and describe its personality.

- Create your own dragon taming instructions for the dragon you designed. Write the instructions on parchment. Parchment is easy and fun to make. However, children will need adult assistance. You need an oven, white sheets of paper, malt vinegar, some salt and instant coffee or coffee grounds.

1. Preheat the oven to 170 degrees Celsius.
2. Place one or two sheets of paper onto a clean, dry baking tray.
3. Gently wet the surface of the paper with a wet sponge.
4. Sprinkle a little instant coffee or coffee grounds onto the paper. Gently smear it to create a few brown patches.
5. Smear some malt vinegar onto the paper to create some different effects.
6. Drop a few pinches of salt on to the paper to create more interesting effects.
7. Place the paper into the preheated oven for about ten minutes. Do not leave the oven and paper unattended. When the paper dries and browns, use oven gloves to remove the tray from the oven. Let the paper cool before handling it.
8. An adult might also help you to burn the edges of the paper using a lit match.

Dragons: fact, fiction or folklore?

- Do scaly dragons still exist? Did they ever exist? What do you think?

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http://www.amnh.org/ology/features/mythicmap/
Extending thinking and learning

The dragon in Chinese culture

The Chinese dragon is not a terrifying monster. Rather, it is a positive, benevolent force that embodies good fortune, wisdom and strength. It is also associated with long life and prosperity.

- Find out what forces of nature are also linked with the dragon in Chinese culture.

- Investigate the role of a lion dance and describe the dragon that is part of this type of dance.

The dragon in Western culture

In Western culture, the dragon is represented as more terrifying, breathing fire and lashing their tails about. So many people view them as fearful creatures.

- Visit the library to locate some books that tell stories of dragons from across a variety of cultures. Share the stories with the class.


Find out more by engaging with the information provided, web quests and the activities on the following websites:

- Dragons: Real or Imagined? Discovering Dragons in Ancient Cultures
  http://imet.csus.edu/imet1/speed/dragonquest

- Visit <http://www.amnh.org/ology/?channel=mythiccreatures/funfacts.php>

A project involving exploration of Internet sites with information about dragons and the civilisations they evolved from, creation of a timeline, a debate and a presentation of your knowledge about dragons and ancient civilisations.

- Mythic Creatures at the American Museum of Natural History
  http://www.amnh.org/ology/?channel=mythiccreatures

A richer look at mythical creatures, some fun facts about dragons and lists of books telling dragon tales.

- The White Hat Guide to Australian Myths and Legends

A rich source of diverse Australian myths and information about how they came to be told.
Worksheet 1. Setting

Name:

What is setting? Write a response using the words ‘time’ and ‘place’.

Draw the place in which the film version of How to Train Your Dragon is set.

Write words to describe the Viking and dragon world, or the setting of the film.

In what time period is the film set?

How do you know?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiccup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoick the Vast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoark the Haggard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burnthair the Broad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ack</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phlegma the Fierce</td>
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<td>Gobber</td>
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<td>Astrid</td>
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<td>Snotlout</td>
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<td>Deadly Nadder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gronkle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hideous Zippleback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monstrous Nightmare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Fury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worksheet 3. Characterisation

Name:

Name of the character:

What does the character look like? Write words and phrases to describe it, and draw and label the character.

How does the character act or behave?

How do other characters react to this character? Give examples.
Worksheet 4. Conflict or problem

Name:

Act or problem faced by the main character?

Why does this conflict or problem occur?

What are some ways the conflict could be resolved or the problem solved?

How is the conflict resolved or problem solved?

What happens after it is resolved?

How is the main character affected by the resolution of the conflict or the solving of the problem?
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