

# BLACK BEAUTY



The book "Black Beauty" by Anna Sewell was first published in 1877. When it appeared it helped to persuade many people to treat animals better. As well as being a popular story, it also carried a message which had an effect on people.

The new film version of 'Black Beauty' has used the novel as the basis for its story. At first glance, making a film from a novel does not seem a very difficult task. Surely it can only be a matter of transferring a story from the written page to the screen!

## READING FILMS AND BOOKS

- How many films or television programmes have you seen which have been adapted from books? Write down their names.
- Did you read the book first or did seeing the film make you want to read the book afterwards? - Were those films a disappointment or a surprising success?

Although novels and films are media that entertain us, we approach them in

different ways. What are the differences between reading a story in a book and 'reading' a story from a film? For example, how do we get our information about character from a book and how do we get this information from a film? How long does it take us, on average, to read a book compared to watching a film? List as many differences as you can think of.

## READING BETWEEN THE LINES

When writers write stories, they deal with much more than what happens. By analysing a passage from a novel in a particular way, you can find out something about the way the story is written and the choices the writer has made in creating that story.

This is useful if you want to adapt the text to another medium, for example, film. It will help you to decide what choices a director might make in transforming the narrative into words and pictures.

On page two there is a passage from "Black Beauty". You need one copy between two people. Read the passage aloud and do the following:

1. Underline the action, the things which people do.
2. In the left hand margin, write down what you learn beyond the action. This might be what you learn about the characters, the setting, the atmosphere, previous events and so on. 3 In the right hand margin, write down anything you notice about the way the story is written.

Use the following questions for guidance:

- Who is telling the story?
- Does the story change pace - slow down or speed up?
- In what ways do you learn about the characters?

## BLACK BEAUTY

### Extract from chapter 32

There was one man, I thought, if he would buy me, I should be happy. He was not a gentleman, nor yet one of the loud flashy sort that called themselves so. He was rather a small man, but well made, and quick in all his motions. I knew in a moment, by the way he handled me, that he was used to horses; he spoke gently, and his grey eye had a kindly, cheery look in it. It may seem strange to say - but it is true all the same - that the clean fresh smell there was about him made me take to him; no smell of old beer and tobacco, which I hated, but a fresh smell as if he had come out of a hay-loft. He offered twenty-three pounds for me; but that was refused, and he walked away. I looked after him, but he was gone, and a very hardlooking, loud-voiced man came; I was dreadfully afraid he would have me; but he walked off. One or two more came who did not mean business. Then the hard-faced man came back again and offered twenty-three pounds. A very close bargain was being driven; for my salesman began to think he should not get all he asked, and must come down; but just then the grey-eyed man came back again. I could not help reaching out my head towards him. He stroked my face kindly.

'Well, old chap,' he said, 'I think we should suit each other. I'll give twenty-four for him.'

'Say twenty-five and you shall have him.'

'Twenty-four ten,' said my friend in a very decided tone, 'and not another sixpence - yes or no?'

'Done,' said the salesman, 'and you may depend upon it there's a monstrous deal of quality in that horse, and if you want him for cab work, he's a bargain.'

## FROM WORDS TO PICTURES

Now that you have seen how a writer has written a story and given us ideas, you can now try to adapt a book into a film.

You are going to have to film the passage above. Before you start, think about where the action is taking place. Where are you going to set the scene?

The next thing to think about is the order of the things which will happen. What are you going to show first? What will this be followed by? Once you have thought about the different events you need to think about how you will film them. What kinds of shots will you use for each event?

Different types of shots give different ideas. Before you start your adaptation, collect some photographs from magazines and newspapers. Look at the photographs and try to work out how close you think the camera was to the person! people! or things which are in the photograph. How does the closeness of the camera affect the way that we understand what is going on in the photograph? What effect does this have on the way we understand what we are looking at? There are different types of shot that you can use close ups, long shots, medium shots. Look again at your photographs. Can you sort them into these three types of shots?

Now look again at the events you have listed. Which are the important moments where you might want to show something in detail (use a close up)? Where do you need to show lots of things all at once (use a long shot)? You will now draw a storyboard for the passage. Below are some of the choices which you will have to make.

### CHOICES WITHIN A SHOT

TYPE OF SHOT  
CU Close up  
MS medium shot  
LS long shot

LIGHTING & COLOUR

CAMERA ANGLE  
High angle  
Low angle  
Neutral angle



## THE STORY TELLER

The story of the film is told by Black Beauty himself. How do we know that it is Black Beauty who is telling the story? How is this way of telling the story different from the ways in which most films tell their story?

From the ways in which Black Beauty tells the story, what do you find out about him? What does he think about his different owners? What does he think about the different types of work that he has to do? How does he learn to carry out the different tasks he is asked to do?

Because the story is told by the horse, how does this help us understand about the way in which animals are poorly treated?

## THE HUMANS

Black Beauty has a very wide range of owners and people who look after him. Think back to all of his owners. Below are some pictures of some of his owners. Who are they?



Try to divide them up into different types of people. Who are the kind owners? Who are the cruel owners? What other sorts of owners does he have? Try to write a description of each of his owners. Which parts of the film give us information about the different owners?



## BLACK BEAUTY - READ ALL ABOUT IT

When the book of "Black Beauty" first appeared, it helped people to realise how badly some animals were treated.

Write down all of the scenes we are shown in the film where people are cruel to animals or do not think about their welfare. When you have completed this you should then complete the following task

Imagine that you are a reporter for a newspaper and have found out about the story of Black Beauty and how he was treated. You have to create the front page of a newspaper where the main story is about Black Beauty and the things which have happened to him.

Think of a good headline for your piece of writing. What information will you put into your article? You should use at least one of the photographs from this study guide as an illustration for your front page.

## BLACK BEAUTY - THEN AND NOW

The picture of Britain that we are shown in the film "Black Beauty" is very different to the one in which we live now. Having seen the film, write down a list of all the things which were different about life then - the ways in which people lived, what they wore, how people travelled.

To help you get started, look at the picture below which is taken from the film. Circle all of the things in the picture which show how life was different to the way it is now.

When a film maker sets a film in the past they have to find out as much detail as they can about the time when the film is set. They have to make sure that the film looks 'right'.



## BEING A DETECTIVE

You have looked at how life was different at the time when 'Black Beauty' is set. But when was that? You will need to think back to the film and think of what clues you are given.

One obvious clue that we can give you is that the book "Black Beauty" was published in 1877 so it is probably set before this date. But what other clues can you find? You see a train. What does it look like? Look in a history book about the Victorians to see when this type of train was running.

Other clues that you could follow up are the costumes and other types of transport. What dates could you come up with for the setting of the film by following the clues?

Imagine that you are in charge of designing the film of "Black Beauty". You have to make the scenes look right. Below is a piece of the script of the film. Look at the various characters and places that are to be found in the piece. Your job is to design the setting and also the costumes for the scene. You will need to research what people wore and how they lived in order for your designs to be right.

### BLACK BEAUTY - Extract from script

EXT. AVENUE APPROACHING CAB STAND. DAY. Tomorrow brings London traffic at its heaviest. Pedestrians dart across the avenue. Other horses swing their carriages dangerously close to Jerry's cab. Beauty, the braids still in his main and tail, veers away nervously, but Jerry guides him back with a light, expert hand. Jerry talks to Beauty - constant croonings reminiscent of Farmer Grey.

JERRY BARKER (in a gentle sing-song)

Easy, son. Turn your ear - I'm right here .... No fears...

You listen; I'll steer... Clickety-clack, Jack.

BLACK BEAUTY'S VOICE

I could hardly stand the hurry and the chaos and the crowds.

If it hadn't been for Jerry's voice, I don't know what I would have done.

Jerry drives Beauty up to the CAB STAND Cab drivers and their horses and sturdy cabs are lined up side by side waiting for fares. The other CABBIES look up at Jerry's approach.

FIRST CABBY

Halloo! Have you got a good one, Jerry?

SECOND CABBY (mumbles)

Bah! He's too black! Be good for a funeral ....

Jerry takes his place in the line-up, talking Beauty through the process.

THIRD CABBY (laughs)

Plaits in his mane and tail?

What? Driving in a parade this afternoon, Jerry?

The other cabbies laugh.

When you have all completed your research you could make a wall display showing all of your designs.

## A SENSE OF PLACE

When we read a story, the places where the action takes place are very important to the ways in which we understand what is happening.

Think of all of the major locations where "Black Beauty" takes place. How is Black Beauty treated in each of these places? What are the people like who live there? Try to fill in the chart below. We have given you some ideas to start you off.

Place	Farmer	Description	Who lives there?	What are they like?	How is Black Beauty treated
Grey's Farm					
Birtwick Park					

## MERRYLEGS' STORY

At the opening of the story when Black Beauty is at Squire Gordon's he makes two friends Ginger and Merrylegs. You have talked about the people and what they are like. Can you describe the characters of the three horses?



As well as finding out what happens to Black Beauty, we also, towards the end of the film, meet his friend Ginger again. In the novel by Anna Sewell we never find out what happens to Merrylegs. The film gives us one possible answer. You might have your own idea of what happened to Merrylegs. Try to add a new section to the story where Black Beauty meets Merrylegs again. What sort of life do you think Merrylegs would have had after he had been sold?



You can choose how to write Merrylegs story. You could write it as a play or as a story. You could even try to think how you would film the story.



## THREADS IN A PIECE OF STRING

When we watch a film, we are aware of all of the different parts of a story - the different scenes and how they relate to each other. At the beginning of any story, we are shown various moments and ideas which reappear later on in the story. These ideas are like threads in a piece of string they all come together to weave into the story. What are the various threads that we are shown in the opening minutes of "Black Beauty"?

In the chart below we have given you some of the threads. How do they reappear in the story? How do they set up what happens later in the story? For each thread, think of other moments from later on in the film where the ideas reappear.

You should try to think of some more threads - ideas of things that we see in the opening of the film which reappear again later on.

When you have all completed your threads, you should try to make a wall chart which shows how all of the scenes in the film are tied together. Before you start your wall chart you should look at all of the scenes that you have used in your threads. Are there any scenes from the film that you have missed out? If there are then think what new thread that could be tied to.

THREAD ONE This is a story about trusting and losing trust		
THREAD TWO My mother urged me to do my best		
THREAD THREE A horse's life is not all play		