

S T U D Y   G U I D E

**F I L M**  
EDUCATION



FINDING  
NEVERLAND

# FINDING NEVERLAND

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## GLOSSARY

**Genre** – the type of film, book or play.

Examples of different genres could be: romance, thriller, horror, comedy etc.

**Bildungsroman** – a growing up tale of which *The Catcher in the Rye* by JD Salinger is an example.

**Symbolism** – images that are used to represent broad concepts (hearts symbolising love etc.)

**Metaphor** – a figure of speech in which something is described in terms of something else.

**Framing** – a means of locating something in a frame, either physically or metaphorically.

**Tag-line** – a catchy sentence that encapsulates a film, so that audiences recognise the film from it.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barrie, JM: *Peter Pan* (Oxford: OUP, 1999)

Birkin, Andrew: *JM Barrie and the Lost Boys* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1979)

Ormond, Leonee: *JM Barrie* (Scottish Academic Press: Edinburgh, 1987)

Jack, RDS: *The Road to Neverland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991)

## FILM SYNOPSIS

*Finding Neverland* explores the relationship between JM Barrie (played by Johnny Depp) and the fatherless Llewelyn Davies family that led to the creation of children's favourite Peter Pan.

Set in London in 1904 the film begins with the meeting of Barrie and the Llewelyn Davies family in Kensington Gardens which marks the beginning of their imaginative friendship. Still bereaved from the loss of their father, the boys take refuge in the imaginative world that Barrie helps them create through play. As his relationship with the boys and their mother Sylvia (Kate Winslet) becomes increasingly important to him, his marriage to Mary (Radha Mitchell) is sidelined.

Taking inspiration from the imaginary play of the boys, Barrie imagines a place where children do not have to grow up and, with the support of an American producer (Dustin Hoffman), creates Peter Pan for the London stage.

Dealing with issues of death, creativity and belief *Finding Neverland* is an uplifting and inspirational tale for all ages.

## TEACHERS' NOTES

*Finding Neverland* is suitable for Key Stages 2/3/4 and 5 as an English/Media and Theatre Studies (AS Level) text. Tasks are Key Stage specific, although they are adaptable across the curriculum. The Key Stage 4 tasks are designed to be incorporated into a Scheme of Work leading to the writing of the Media Coursework essay (AQA GCSE English, Specification A), for which a number of suggested essay titles are given. The suggested KS4 Drama activities could form the basis of the required Speaking and Listening assessments (individual extended contribution; group interaction; drama-focused activity, e.g. explaining, analysing, imagining). AS/A2 level tasks are aimed at Drama/Theatre Studies and Media. This film could be studied in conjunction with the original play version of Peter Pan (OUP, 1999).

# FINDING NEVERLAND

## GENRE

**Genre** is a means of classifying films, books and plays; for example the genre of *Dracula* would be horror. Other types of genres include science fiction, romance and thrillers etc.

### TASK

#### KS3/4 English/Media

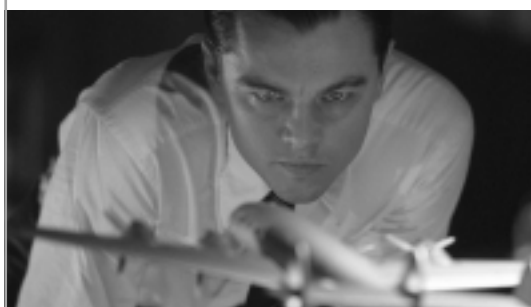
Look at the poster for the film (on the cover of this guide) and read the synopsis. In groups discuss what genre you think this film is. List the reasons for your category (perhaps you have more than one). How does the poster suggest what the film is about? (Compare it with a poster of a film in the same or a different genre. Are there genre-specific characteristics?)

### TASK

#### KS3/4 English/Media

Compare the *Finding Neverland* trailer with another historical biopic *The Aviator* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 2004). This is a film about Howard Hughes, an enormously rich tycoon during the first half of the twentieth century. Watch both trailers (available at [www.miramax.com](http://www.miramax.com)): how do they differ from each other? What impression does each trailer make? Is one more effective than the other? Why?

Both films are 'biopics' (films that tell the story of someone's life). Do you think that one is likely to be more true to life than the other?



### TASK

#### KS3/4 English/Media

Watch the *Finding Neverland* trailer at [www.miramax.com/findingneverland/index.html](http://www.miramax.com/findingneverland/index.html). How does the commentary match the pace of the visual images used? What kind of language is used to sell the film to the audience?

Now have a go at writing your own trailer commentary. Watch it again with the sound turned to mute: what are the key images used? Things to include in your commentary:

- A summary of the main elements of the story
- Who is starring in the film
- A **tag-line** for the film
- Use persuasive language that 'sells' the film: remember that a trailer is an advert for a film
- The soundtrack and any music that you want to include

### TASK

#### KS5 Media

The Peter Pan fan website ([www.peterpanfan.com](http://www.peterpanfan.com)) classifies *Finding Neverland* as 'Biographical, British, Drama and Historical.' How useful is this kind of classification? Why is it important for a film to have a genre?

## EXTENSION TASK

What is the target audience for the film? Explain your decision. In groups imagine that you are on the board of the company whose job it is to distribute the film. Decide on a marketing plan and present to the class via a PowerPoint presentation (useful statistical information about the film can be obtained from [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)).

# FINDING NEVERLAND

## BIOGRAPHY

*Finding Neverland* is a film 'inspired by true events'. This means that, although based in fact, it is not entirely historically accurate. Here is a table of some of the differences between the events in Barrie's life that led up to the creation of Peter Pan and how they are portrayed in the film:



'Just a dog? With a wee bit of imagination I can see Porthos the Bear.'

FACT	FICTION
1897 Barrie meets the Llewelyn Davies family (there were five boys altogether)	Early 1904 meets four boys and their mother
1904 First stage production of Peter Pan	The boys' father is already dead
1907 Arthur Llewelyn Davies (father of boys) dies	1904 Mary leaves Barrie
1909 James and Mary divorce	1904 Sylvia dies
1910 Sylvia Llewelyn Davies dies	

The main changes that the scriptwriter has made are to condense the time-frame of the events of Barrie's life. From meeting the family for the first time in 1897 to Sylvia's death in 1910, in reality, took thirteen years, whereas the film suggests that these events all take place in 1904, culminating with the stage performance of Peter Pan just after Christmas. This reduction in time is a common dramatic device where a play or film is based on fact.



## TASK

### KS5 English/Drama

Take some of the facts of Barrie's life and improvise a scene around them. Now write them up as either a stage script or a television script. Remember to give instructions for the actors, cameras, lighting etc. via the stage directions. (Technical information is available online from: [www.mediaed.org.uk](http://www.mediaed.org.uk).)

## TASK

### KS4 English/Media

Discuss the reasons why a writer might want to change certain facts. One reason for altering historical events would be to make the story more dramatically interesting.

How important is historical accuracy when making a film about someone's life? When does deviation from real events become unacceptable?

## THE LEGACY OF PETER PAN

'I suppose I always know that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together... That is all he is, the spark I got from you.'<sup>1</sup>

Peter Pan is one of the most famous children's stories and the story of the boy 'who would not grow up' has enduring appeal for both adults and children.

### TASK

#### KS3/4 English/Media

Brainstorm everything you know about the story. Write down the key elements of the story. What do you think makes it such an enduring tale?

Look at the structure of the story. Now compare to the structure of the film *Finding Neverland*. How closely do they follow each other?

One of the possible reasons that Peter Pan has become such an icon is the **symbolism** that such a story contains (consider the fame of other literary characters such as Dracula, Frankenstein, Romeo and Juliet, who have come to represent more than just their original characters).

### TASK

#### KS4/5 English/Media/ Theatre Studies

Look at the following list of symbols taken from Peter Pan. Discuss what they might symbolise (the first one has been suggested for you):

- Peter Pan – youth, innocence
- Captain Hook –
- The crocodile and its ticking clock –
- Neverland –
- Flying –
- Believing in fairies –

Now try the same exercise for *Finding Neverland*: what symbols can you find in the film? What do you think they represent?



**'If you believe in fairies, clap your hands!'**<sup>2</sup>

In one of the park scenes Barrie tells Peter Llewelyn Davies that he can get to Neverland any time he likes, just by believing.

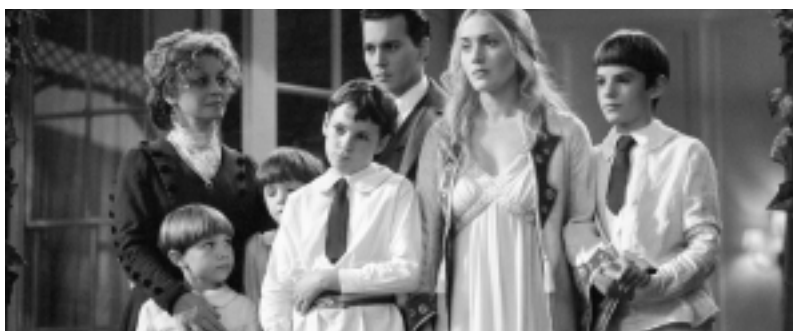


Barrie himself could be seen as a Peter Pan figure – a man who refused to grow up and spent much of his time in a childish fantasy land. In his creation of Peter Pan he allowed the adult world access to a place they had not been since childhood. But what is Neverland? In the play it is described as a place where lost children go and in his stage notes Barrie says 'you have often half seen it before... In the daytime you think the Never Land is only make-believe, and so it is to the likes of you, but this is the Never Land come true.' Neverland can be seen, therefore, as a **metaphor** of the spirit of the imagination.

### TASK

#### KS4 English/Media

Look at Sylvia's final scene in *Finding Neverland* where she 'sees' the Neverland in her own garden. What do you think the director is trying to imply with this scene?



<sup>1</sup>Barrie to the Llewelyn Davies boys in 'A Dedication', the preface to Peter Pan (Oxford: OUP, 1999) p75. <sup>2</sup>Peter Pan (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p137 <sup>3</sup>ibid., p105

# FINDING NEVERLAND

## THEMES

'To die will be an awfully big adventure.'<sup>4</sup>

### TASK

#### KS4 English/Media

Brainstorm the major themes of the film, making a spidergram of your ideas (remember to use evidence from the film to support your points).

### TASK

#### KS4 English/Media

(Teachers' Notes: these essay titles are suggested for the Media coursework essay for AQA GCSE English En3 Writing, under the triplet 'analyse, review, comment').

Watch the film in its entirety and write an essay on one of the following:

- 'The majority read novels not to think, but to keep themselves from thinking.'<sup>5</sup> JM Barrie helps the boys deal with the death of their father by escaping from reality into a fantasy land. How is this portrayed visually in the film?



- In one scene Barrie tells Sylvia how, to help his mother deal with the death of his brother when he was thirteen, he pretended to be him. How does the film show history repeating itself?
- In the play *Peter Pan*, Peter is shown looking into the window of the nursery from outside. This portrays him as an outsider. In *Finding Neverland* a similar **framing** technique is used when Barrie first sees the Llewelyn Davies family, through a cut out section of his newspaper. In what sense is Barrie an outsider? How is this shown in the film?
- Although *Peter Pan* is a tale of a boy who would not grow up, *Finding Neverland* can be seen as a **bildungsroman**. Which of the characters develops the most over the course of the film?



# FINDING NEVERLAND

## ADAPTATION



2004 marks the centenary of the first performance of Peter Pan, although the character first appeared in a series of chapters in the 1902 novel 'The Little White Bird'. The play was written in 1903-4 although it was continually revised during rehearsals, notably from the actors themselves, who suggested changes to Barrie. Barrie continued to make changes to the play and in addition wrote the novels Peter and Wendy (1906) and Peter Pan (1911). The final play version is the 1928 edition and Peter Pan continues to be performed at the theatre today. There have been several animated versions, including a Disney version (1956) and Return to Neverland (2001) and, most recently, a live-action film by Universal Studios (2003).

*Finding Neverland* is based on a play by Alan Knee, but there has been a BBC television series also about the relationship between Barrie and the Llewelyn Davies family written by Andrew Birkin called *The Lost Boys* (1978).

The metaphor of make-believe is extensive in Peter Pan, as John tells his mother: 'We are doing an act; we are playing at being you and father.'<sup>6</sup> Pretend games even take place in Neverland itself (the Lost Boys pretend to eat dinner, p 127).

### TASK

#### KS5 Drama/Theatre Studies

How does the film use the symbol of a play within a play to explore the nature of the theatre as a place of the imagination?

### TASK

#### KS5 Drama/Theatre Studies

The various versions of Peter Pan have changed the ending: read Barrie's *When Wendy Grew Up: An Afterthought*. How does this epilogue change our perception of the play? Does the ending of the lift shed any light on how we should interpret Peter Pan?

The staging of Peter Pan was notoriously difficult, involving a cast of 50, four of whom should appear to possess the ability to fly, a dog, a crocodile and a fairy and various mermaids. Closely examine some of the stage directions of the play; how would they affect a performance of Peter Pan? (For example, at the beginning of Act 1, Barrie writes 'All the characters, whether grown-ups or babes, must wear a child's outlook on life as their only important adornment...')

A good motto for all would be "The little less, and how much it is."<sup>8</sup> How intrusive/helpful is this kind of instruction for an actor?

'The gallery boys won't stand it.'<sup>7</sup>



<sup>6</sup>Peter Pan (Oxford: OUP 1999), p89 <sup>7</sup>JM Barrie and the Lost Boys by Andrew Birkin (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1979) p112 <sup>8</sup>Peter Pan (Oxford: OUP 1999), p88