



## SYNOPSIS

Pan's Labyrinth unfolds through the eyes of Ofelia, a dreamy little girl who is uprooted to a rural military outpost in Fascist-ruled Spain commanded by her new stepfather, the Captain. Powerless and lonely in a place of unfathomable cruelty, Ofelia lives out her own dark fable as she confronts monsters both otherworldly and human.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this resource is to provide an introduction to the key aspects of the film, such as narrative tradition and structure. Questions and activities raised here may be useful for GCSE, AS/A2, and Highers students. Teachers of Art & Design, Film, English and Media, as well as Spanish will also find this resource useful.

## MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FAIRY TALES

The narrative brings together lots of elements from different forms; these are interconnected to produce the world that Ofelia inhabits. She is the meeting point for a great many influences. Imagine that you are her age (11). What kinds of stories would you have read or been told? Make a list.



When thinking about Ofelia it is important to remember the time in which she belongs. There was no television, PlayStation, etc. Ofelia's love of books is essential to the narrative, as it has provided her with the basis of the reality that we see through her eyes.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- + How is Ofelia's love of books conveyed in the film?
- + How is the relationship between Ofelia and Captain Vidal established?  
(Think about her body language)

## CONTROL AND COMFORT

Storytelling or fantasy is something that provides Ofelia with a sense of control as we see she is able to participate and achieve goals. This stands in sharp contrast to her other reality where she is told what to do.



### KEY QUESTIONS

- + Over which aspects of your life do you have control?
- + What do you look for to give you comfort when you are stressed?

## MYTHS AND LEGACY

Although the specific fairy tales may be different, there is universal desire to understand and explain the world through myths and stories. Even though as individuals we might not know the whole story, by looking at a few phrases in everyday use we can see that references to figures from myths and legends remain in everyday language:



- + a Herculean task
- + he was a Colossus
- + a great Behemoth of a building
- + the Midas touch
- + a Pyrrhic victory
- + the sword of Damocles was hanging over her
- + being a Robin Hood character
- + opening a Pandora's box
- + having an Achilles heel

The structure of the world that Ofelia inhabits is a familiar one: she meets characters that set her tasks that she must complete. These conventions are commonplace in the stories referred to above.

Using the table below make a list of the character types.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

PAN'S LABYRINTH EXAMPLE	ARCHETYPE	EQUIVALENTS FROM OTHER STORIES
The Faun	Guide	
	Helper	
	Trickster	
	Villain	
	Hero	

These characters, as the previous exercise shows, are familiar to us as an audience; you may well have been able to put more than one example in the 'Equivalents' box. This has an impact on our expectations of the narrative, as the structure is so familiar.

Look at the box below and think about the narrative in this particular case as well as other examples of this kind of storytelling.

## NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

NARRATIVE ELEMENT	PAN'S LABYRINTH	OTHER EXAMPLE, E.G. ANOTHER FAIRY TALE
Equilibrium	Ofelia arrives at the estate	
Disequilibrium		
Complications	What task(s) must she complete?	

When we get to the ending, how does this compare with your expectations? Were you surprised?

Research one of the following fairy tales:

- + Hansel and Gretel
- + Rapunzel
- + Cinderella

You will need to research the original version (the first known written version) and consider how the story has been re-told. Has the ending or any other element of the story been changed? Perhaps you are more familiar with a slightly different version? How do you know this version? Was it through a cartoon or film version, a book or did someone tell you? What do you think this tells us about audience taste?

## MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Creating the appropriate set and designing costumes, models and props are all an essential part of the story on film. In Pan's Labyrinth this is particularly important as it helps the audience to believe in the world that we are seeing. There are a great many areas that would have required an agreed look; this would mean that the various elements of the art department were involved with working with the director to generate a consistent look for this world. For example, during the opening of the film we see Ofelia notice a stone. Think about what it looks like. How/where are elements of its design repeated throughout the film?



If you were working on the film as part of a team that develops the scenery or costumes or other elements of the 'look', can you imagine the kinds of stages that you would need to go through to develop a creature such as the 'Pale Man' (the creature its eyes on a plate)?

### TASK

+ Look at the official site: [www.panslabyrinth.com/](http://www.panslabyrinth.com/). Under the section 'downloads' you are able to find the screenplay. Using this, pick a sequence and interpret your chosen section of the screenplay from your own perspective. How would you imagine the scene? What would it look like? (You may also find it useful to look at del Toro's sketchbook on the site.)

## GUILLERMO DEL TORO

A common theme in Guillermo del Toro films is the inclusion of fantasy and a sense that reality isn't quite as straightforward as it might seem.

In Pan's Labyrinth we usually share the point of view of Ofelia and by extension we can see all that she sees. The strange world of the Faun and his tasks, which is real for her, is essential to the narrative as it provides Ofelia with motivation for her actions and moves the story along in a particular way.

Both Ofelia and Carlos (in *The Devil's Backbone*, a film also by del Toro) are able to see things that are either real, or very real to them. The difference between the two remains ambiguous, and largely unimportant to the narrative.

Another element that links del Toro's films is the manifestation of evil in the story. Captain Vidal's marriage to Ofelia's mother means that her life will be very different; his relationship with Ofelia is very similar to the 'wicked stepmother' character to be found in *Cinderella* and other fairy tales. In *The Devil's Backbone*, evil comes in the shape of Fascism, as the Spanish Civil War provides the backdrop, and a specific context for the actions of Mercedes and the Dr Ferreiro and those that are fighting against Franco.

### KEY QUESTIONS

Stories (passed down through generations by word of mouth, in books or on film) are society's way of making sense of our world and establishing the difference between right and wrong / good and evil.

- + Do you agree with this statement?
- + How do the films of Guillermo del Toro fit in with this idea?





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