



TEACHERS' NOTES CURRICULUM LINKS

This study guide suggests a cross-curricular scheme of work based on the film 'Casper' for pupils aged 10-12. The learning activities primarily seek to complement and extend the pleasure the children will have derived from seeing the film whilst at the same time meeting some of the requirements of the National Curriculum. The following list will give a guideline to the subjects covered in the various sections of the guide.

SUBJECT	SECTIONS OF GUIDE
English, Media Studies and P.S.E.	The Beginning of the Film, Telling a Story, Friendship, Kat and Casper, Happy Endings, What Sort of Film is 'Casper'? and Humour and Horror
Mathematics and Art	The Design of the Film
Design and Technology	The Inventions
History	Casper's Memories

SYNOPSIS

Who says there are no such things as ghosts? The citizens of Friendship, Maine, have long suspected that the abandoned and desolate Whipstaff Manor is haunted.

Then, one day, two new visitors show up on the doorstep of the drafty old mansion: Kat Harvey and her eccentric dad, Dr. James Harvey, a self-styled "ghost therapist". Whipstaff's scheming owner, Carrigan Crittenden, has hired Dr. Harvey to exorcise the house's live-in apparitions - a friendly but lonely young ghost named Casper and his three incorrigibly odious uncles, Stretch, Stinkie and Fatso .. so that she can get her hands on the macabre manor's fabled treasure.

Unfortunately for Dr. Harvey, the spectral uncles, who lead dysfunctional afterlives, will not tolerate “fleshies” in their house. What’s more, the Ghostly Trio have their own methods of getting rid of unwanted visitors -and a certifiably twisted sense of humour.

‘Casper’, dir. Brad Silberling, UIP, 1995.
Running time: 1 hour 40 mins. Certificate: ‘PG’.

INTRODUCTION

Casper is a film about a friendly ghost that combines humour with horror; fun with real feelings about relationships. The aim of this guide is to look at how the film puts its message across in a highly original and entertaining way and why it will appeal to a wide audience.

THE BEGINNING OF THE FILM

In the first scene of the film we meet the Steubing Twins as they arrive at Whipstaff Manor. They have come to this creepy old place armed with a Polaroid camera so that they can take a photograph to prove to their friends at school that they are not chicken.

During the opening titles, we see, in the developing photo, their terror as they realise that it is a ghost (Casper) who has taken the camera from Nicky.

This scene has little to do with what happens in the rest of the story, and introduces us to the twins who are very minor characters in the film. So why is it there?

- What do we learn about Casper from this scene?
- Why is Casper introduced right at the beginning and not the other main characters, e.g. Kat?
- What do we learn about Whipstaff Manor?

Task 1

Write an alternative introductory scene for the film. Which characters would you use?
What setting would you choose?

Task 2

The section introduces the idea of a dare. The boys are dared to enter the haunted house and have to prove that they have been there. As the film progresses it is the courage of Dr. Harvey, Kat and Casper which helps to defeat the villains. Describe a dare of which you know or a courageous daring event.

TELLING A STORY

One of the interesting elements of the film is how the story is built up from the different viewpoints of the main characters. This means that the audience has the total picture but the individual groups of characters only know their own section.

The opening sequences of the film are a good example of this:

- We see Casper from the point of view of the twins being dared to take the photograph.
- We see Carrigan inherit the house and find out about the treasure.
- Casper sees the television report on Dr. Harvey.
- Casper informs Carrigan about Dr. Harvey by turning on her television.
- Dr. Harvey travels to the house.

Task 3

Think about how these sections are put together and the effect this has on an audience. Why is it such a good way of telling a story? What does it tell us about what will happen in the rest of the story?

FRIENDSHIP

One of the main themes of the film is friendship. Think about different types of friendship, e.g. friends at school, friends in a club or society, friends in the family, friends in the neighbourhood, friends at work, friends you meet on holiday.

Task 4

All the main characters in the film want to be liked and have a friend. Think about these statements and consider why they want a friend and how they go about finding one.

- Casper sits on the lighthouse every night.
- Kat has been to nine schools in the past two years.
- Dr. Harvey is trying to make contact with his wife, Amelia.
- Carrigan has everything she's ever wanted.
- Amber wants everyone to go to her house for the Halloween party.
- The uncles want to stop being a trio and become a quartet.
- Vic asks Kat to go to the Hallowe'en dance with him.

How do they treat their friends once they have found them?

Imagine the characters are writing a letter to a possible pen-pal. What would they say about themselves and what would they like to see in a prospective correspondent?

KAT AND CASPER

Casper falls for Kat in a big way and contrives to get her to Whipstaff Manor. Once she is there he is desperate to please her and to defend her.

On her first day at school in Friendship Kat meets Amber, who has “the biggest attitude in the 7th grade”. She is pushy, influential, big-headed, spiteful and puts others down to make herself seem more important.

What does she do to Kat and how does Casper try to help?

Kat rejects Casper's help, saying, “Look, Casper. It's fine. I'm used to it ...it's like a food chain and I'm at the bottom. You don't have to make it worse.”

What do you think Kat means when she says that? How is Casper making it worse?

Task 5

Make a list of situations that have made you feel really embarrassed. Compare them with those of your classmates. What kind of situation seems to cause you all most embarrassment?

You could collect a class anthology of 'Most Embarrassing Moments'.

THE DESIGN OF THE FILM

Casper is a very strikingly designed film. It combines the naturalistic settings of the town and the countryside with the colour and invention of Whipstaff Manor with its secret vaults and colourful hallways.

Task 6

Take a piece of squared paper and make up some patterns based on circles and spirals and colour them with strong contrasting colours. Try some designs based on squares and rectangles. Why do you think the designer chose to base the designs on the spirals? What do spirals do to your eyes? You might want to consider the look of the ghosts?

CASPER'S MEMORIES

When Kat is exploring the attic she discovers the toy room which has remained untouched for a hundred years. She pushes open a door and finds herself in a circular room with tall windows all around. Dusty shafts of light peer through the dirty windows bringing an eerie glow to the piles of covered boxes inside.

Only when Casper finds Kat there, in the midst of all his forgotten treasures, do the memories of his childhood and his father begin to return.

Task 7

Imagine that you are an old person going back to visit the house you lived in as a child, in which the attic has been locked up and untouched since you left at the age of 11 or 12 years. Describe the room and the things that you find there. What memories are triggered by what you find? How do they make you feel now?

You could display your writing on a wall picture of a dusty old attic, showing all the toys and treasures stored there. Think about how you could recreate the silent, undisturbed atmosphere of cobwebs and dust.

THE INVENTIONS

In a dusty yellowing newspaper that Kat finds on the floor of the attic, she notices the headline, “PROMINENT INVENTOR, J. T. MCFADDEN DECLARED LEGALLY INSANE.” Then she reads on, “McFadden claimed that he was haunted by the ghost of his dead son and that he had invented a machine to bring him back to life ..

When Casper takes Kat down to the basement of Whipstaff Manor she finds out for herself what Casper’s father’s inventions can do! She narrowly misses being shaved by the “Up and at ‘em” machine as she passes through the tunnel to the underground lab.

And in the underground lab is the incredible Lazarus (why is it called that?), a machine, which Casper’s father invented to bring Casper back to life.

Wacky inventions provide a rich source of comic situations. Do you remember ‘Chitty, Chitry, Bang, Bang’? Heironymous Potts invents a car that can fly and wonderful musical boxes.

The British cartoonist and illustrator, W. Heath Robinson, is famous for the wonderful designs of inventions that he drew for publication in humorous magazines in the early part of this century. Today these drawings are still popular for posters and greetings cards.

Recently, in a highly successful short animated film ‘The Wrong Trousers’ by Nick Park, the automation of the Wallace household with incredible inventions leads to the redundancy of Gromit, the dog, and the arrival of the penguin which causes all the trouble.

Task 8

After seeing Casper and taking a look at these other sources of ideas, you are ready to become inventors yourselves. Think of something you hate doing (like tidying your bedroom, walking to school, cleaning out the rabbit’s hutch) and invent a machine to do it for you. The secret to this kind of inventing is to think creatively, rather than scientifically.

Make a big poster of your design plans and make a presentation to your class to explain how it works.

HAPPY ENDINGS

Casper finally stands up to his uncles and insists that the remaining cellular integrator is used to bring Kat's father back to life. It is a noble deed because it means that Casper has lost his only chance of becoming human again.

At the beginning of the film:

- Kat wanted to stay in one place so she could make some friends.
- Dr. Harvey wanted to find the ghost of his wife and deal with their 'unfinished business'.
- Carrigan and Dibs wanted to get rich.
- Amber wanted to be the most admired girl in the 7th grade and was prepared to do anything to achieve it.
- The uncles were quite content with their lives, terrorising 'fleshies' and bullying Casper.
- Amelia (Kat's mother) is dead and there is no evidence that her ghost still haunts this world, although Dr. Harvey is sure he will find her.

Task 9

So what has happened to all these characters by the end of the film? What have they achieved?

Write down the answers to these questions for the characters listed here.

Casper
The Uncles
Kat
Dr. Harvey
Carrigan and Dibs
Amelia
Amber

Would you say that the film had a happy ending for some or all of the characters? What about the audience? Was it a satisfactory ending for them/you?

Starting from the point where Dr. Harvey is brought back to life by the Lazarus, what alternative ways can you think of to end the story. Your ending could be happier, sadder, more plausible, even outrageous!

WHAT SORT OF FILM IS 'CASPER'?

We can often describe a film by comparing it to other films with similar plots, characters, endings and so on. Groups of similar films we can say are of the same 'genre'. However, sometimes a film is a mixture of different styles and ideas.

Task 10

Look at the chart below and put the following statements into the correct boxes.

- Casper is a ghost story.
- Casper dances with Kat at the party.
- Dibs sets his thumb bandage alight.
- Carrigan tries to kill Dibs.
- People are too frightened to go to the house.
- Dr. Harvey turns into different people.
- There are some violent deaths in 'Casper'.
- One of the characters is an angel.
- A priest has to visit the house.
- The uncles sing "It's my party and I'll die if I want to
- The Lazarus machine brings people back from the dead.
- Dr. Harvey is trying to contact his dead wife.

HORROR

COMEDY

LOVE STORY

HUMOUR AND HORROR

As a mixture of different styles Casper is very successful. When you take an existing idea or image from another film to make a joke we call that parody.

Task 11

Can you give some examples from Casper? Can you think of what problems there might be with this kind of humour?

Task 12

Casper is a film which will appeal to all age groups. Which parts of the film do you consider would be for:

- a) Children
- b) Adults
- c) Everyone

How would you advertise the film? Would you change the emphasis of your advertising for the different age groups?