

TEACHERS' NOTES

Aimed at primary and lower secondary pupils the ideas in this study guide are intended as starting points for a cross-curricular project on the film at Key Stage 2 and individual study at Key Stage 3 (English and Science). The activities seek to complement and extend the pleasure the children will have derived from the visit to the cinema whilst at the same time meeting some of the requirements of the National Curriculum and Scottish Guidelines.

SYNOPSIS

'Dragonheart' is the story of an incredible alliance between a man of honour and a creature of legend - the very last dragon. The film portrays the relationship between a brave and once beneficent knight, Bowen, and his companion, the 15ft high, 43ft long dragon he names Draco. Together they join in an heroic battle to free a country held in an iron grip by a tyrannical king to whom both knight and dragon are connected in fateful ways.

'Dragonheart', directed by Rob Cohen,

Starring: Sean Connery (voice of Draco), Dennis Quaid (Bowen), David Thewlis (Linon)

Certificate: PG. Running Time: 103 mins. UK Release Date: 18th October, 1996.

THE STORY OF THE FILM

'Dragonheart' is set in a very interesting time in history, a time when the Dark Ages are ending and the Mediaeval or Middle Ages are about to begin. The Dark Ages are so called because we know very little about them. This makes them mysterious and magical. A time of myths and legends, of knights, castles and dragons; a time when stories are told by open fires. What the filmmakers are trying to do is to use what little we know about this time to create a world in which an audience will believe dragons could have existed.

The story concerns the last dragon and how he meets the knight sworn to slay him. Together they overcome an evil king and in the process become friends.

LABELLING THE FILM

"It is a fairy tale about good and evil .and the world needs to see this." Julie Christie .Aislinn

"Dragonheart is a fable; a hero's journey with a very unusual set of heroes... It was an adventure comedy, historical drama, special effects break-through." Rob Cohen .Director

"Dragonheart is a tale of the legends." Sean Connery .Draco

The people above are all trying to describe what type of film 'Dragonheart' is and as you can see

they all say different things.

You can normally classify films into a particular genre or type. These would include the following:

- Western - cowboys and Indians
- Science fiction - adventures in space with aliens
- War films - guns, battles and shooting
- Romance love stories
- Horror story - ghosts, monsters
- Comedy - lots of laughs and lots of screaming

Every story needs certain ingredients such as characters, settings and a storyline. These can be used when identifying which genre a film could be classified under. For example if we know that 'Cinderella' is a fairy tale then we would expect the following:

- Settings — We would expect the story to be set in a castle or a palace. There would probably be some scenes set in a forest with a lake included.
- Types of characters - Kings, queens, princes, princesses. Animals like a unicorn, dragon or a frog. There will be an evil character such as a witch or giant.
- Events - Magic spells; challenges to be fought; getting lost; being captured and rescued; marriage and happy endings.

Task

In the chart below, can you write down the ingredients that each film type would have as we have done for a fairy tale? In the end column write down the films that you have seen that would come under this genre.

| Film Type | Setting | Characters | Events | Film Names |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Sci-Fi | | | | |
| Horror | | | | |
| Western | | | | |
| Comedy | | | | |
| Romance | | | | |

Looking at the chart, what type of film would you say 'Dragonheart' is? Does it belong under any one film type or does it belong in more than one?

To help you, can you fill out the ingredients that 'Dragonheart' possesses on the chart below?

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Settings | |
| Characters (good and bad) | |
| Events | |

The genre issue also applies to television programmes and books. Try categorising the programmes and books that you watch and read in the same way.

Do you have a favourite genre?

THE ORIGINS OF DRAGONS

*Half my heart to make you whole
Its strength to purify your weakness."*

Draco, the last of the dragons

Rob Cohen, the director of 'Dragonheart', says that for the film to work the audience have to believe that the dragon really exists. Dragons did not exist but they appear in myths and religions all over the world. There are so many references to them that at one point historians seriously considered whether they could have really existed. The archeological discoveries of unusual giant fossil bones added more evidence to the argument but now **it** is thought that no such beasts ever lived. So from where did the idea come?

SIGHTINGS

Dragons do not appear in prehistoric cave paintings They were not part of the imagination of Stone Age man. As civilisation developed and people started to travel they came back with stories of strange beasts. Sightings of dragons seemed to fall onto two categories. The first were sightings of large reptiles such as komodo dragons. These were given characteristics they did not in fact have and when the reports were further exaggerated the legends were built. The second sort were cases of mistaken identity

Dragons were lint the only creatures created by mistaken identity. It is now known that the idea of a unicorn was based on sightings of a two—horned antelope whose horns were so straight and uniform that viewed from the side, and from a distance, they looked as though they had one horn

growing out of the middle of their forehead.

A good example of dragon mistaken identity was the case of people seeing tree snakes for the first time. Some of these snakes could be very big. Their huge long bodies could be wrapped several times around a tree trunk and then the snake would travel along a branch before lowering its head into space. From a distance the eye would be confused and accept the tree as part of the creature, a creature which would appear to have a large body and a long thin neck. People who had heard of dragons would accept they were seeing a dragon. What they would not be expecting was a tree snake.

Task for Drama

It is a time in the past with no cameras. Imagine that a small group of you are away from home on a trading expedition and have seen an amazing creature. Decide between you what it looks like, how it moves, what it eats and so on. Set up a scene where your group returns home. Try to convince the rest of your people that the creature exists. Will you exaggerate? You decide it must not be killed but protected how are you going to do that?

RELIGION

Brother Gilbert is the only religious character in *Dragonheart*. He represents an organised religion which is based on Christianity. However, Bowen, the knight, is following a moral based on King Arthur's code of honour and as moral tutor to Einon, it is he who goes with the Queen to see the Dragon.

Snakes, serpents and dragons play a significant role in religion. It is easy to see that symbols and drawings of snakes and serpents could develop into dragons.

In early pagan religions snakes were often used as a symbol of worship. Something which could kill you was often worshipped in the hope that it would leave you alone. Natural forces were often thought of in animal terms. A volcano with its noise and fire could be a sleeping dragon waking and being angry with people.

A dragon can also exist in all the elements. It walks on the earth, it flies in the air, it swims in water, and it breathes fire. In these early religions the dragon could then represent all the elements.

Task

Can you think of scenes in 'Dragonheart' that show the dragon as a creature of earth, air, fire and water? Write dragon acrostics where the key words are the elements. (These are poems. The first letter of each line read vertically spell the words EARTH, AIR, FIRE and WATER.)

In Ancient Greek myths the dragon often guarded something. For example, in 'The Legend of the Golden Fleece' the dragon or serpent lies coiled around the foot of the tree upon whose branches the fleece is hung. The word 'draco' in Greek means either, a dragon, or a serpent so it is difficult to know in certain stories which is appearing.

In Christianity the devil appears as a serpent in the Garden of Eden and as a dragon in The Book of Revelation.

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth...

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels and prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in Heaven.

The Book of Revelation, 12

The Norse word for dragon is 'ormr'. This has come down into the English language as 'orme' or 'worm' in various place names in both England and Scotland. Originally Viking dragons did not have wings and so in their designs they are much closer to snakes and serpents. Dragon symbols were used as decorative motifs on clothing and jewellery and later in architecture in both houses and churches.

REPTILES

The dragon is a monster made up of many different creatures. In fact in different cultures he is represented in various ways, depending on the animals living in those countries.

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>Ancient Egypt</i> | the dragon looks like a crocodile |
| <i>Indian myths</i> | the dragon is part-elephant |
| <i>China</i> | the dragon has the horns of a stag and the scales of a fish |
| <i>The West</i> | the dragon has the shape of a big snake with claws, wings and a scaly skin, breathing fire and smoke |

Task

Take a close look at the picture of Draco. What animals does he remind you of?



You may well have mentioned creatures belonging to the reptile and amphibian families such as iguanas. These animals look like monsters themselves with their slimy knobby skin, large bug eyes and lumbering walks.

Task

Using your library and reference books try and find out about at least one creature from the amphibian group and the reptile group. There are some suggestions and descriptions below to help you.

ABOUT AMPHIBIANS: Amphibians need to be around water to breed although they spend a lot of time on land. There are over 4,000 types of amphibians including frogs, toads and newts. They have bare skin with no hair, feathers or surface scales.

ABOUT REPTILES: Reptiles usually have 4 legs, a bony skeleton and scaly or dry skin. Unlike amphibians they lay their eggs on land. There are 6 main groups of reptiles: lizards, snakes, turtles, wormlizards, crocodiles and alligators. Reptiles live in warmer parts of the world.

| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| American alligator | Komodo dragon | chameleon | frilled lizard |
| leatherhack turtle | common iguana | Burmese python | gecko |
| Brazilian treefrog | golden toad | fire salamander. | |

Try and find out about the following:

- *where they live*
- *how many species there are*
- *what they eat*
- *how they hunt*
- *how large they are*

Draw a picture of your animal showing its colours and skin texture.

MAKING MONSTERS

“He’s Sean Connery, essentially, as an 18 foot-high, 43 foot-long dragon” Rob Cohen, director

Draco is probably the most complicated computer model that has ever been built for a film. The team responsible for the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park - Phil Tippett, the designer, and Industrial Light and Magic, the visual effects company - were brought in to create Draco in ‘Dragonheart’.

Sean Connery’s lines were recorded first – without him ever seeing the dragon or the actors in the film. Models of the dragon were then created by Tippett’s team - using pictures of Chinese dragons and of Sean Connery. These were used by the filmmakers to see how Draco would move in different situations. One of these models was broken up and scanned into the computer as a wire-frame model as part of the computer-generated imagery used by ILM. This was gradually built up into a coloured and textured form and brought to life.

The dragon was built into the scenes after filming took place so that when we see the actors talking to Draco, they cannot actually see the dragon but a tennis ball on a pole, used so they know where to look.

Many of the creatures associated with myths are, like dragons, a mixture of different animals. The Unicorn is a mixture of a horse/antelope with a twisted horn, the griffin is a mixture of a lion and an eagle. Now it is your turn to create your own fantastical creature!

Task

This is an activity carried out by the whole class. You will each need a large piece of drawing paper Fold this across into four pieces so the folding marks look as follows:

| |
|----------|
| A |
| B |
| C |
| D |

On the first part of the paper, part A, you will each draw a creature's head. This could be a creature you know like a camel or it could be a creature that you have made up. When you have finished fold the piece of paper over so that you can only see a tiny part of the creature's neck. You will now all pass on your paper to the next person.

With your new piece of paper, part B, you will draw a creature's body. Again this could be a creature you know or one you have made up. You may want to draw some arms for the creature. When finished, fold the piece over so that the next person can only see a little bit of the end of the body so that they can join it up to their piece. Again pass on your paper

On part C draw a creature's hips and legs all the way down to the ankles. Fold the paper over and pass it on.

On part D draw the creature's feet . these could be big or small, be webbed or hoofed, you can even include toes... the choice is yours.

You have now finished your monsters. Unfold the paper and feast your eyes on the creatures you have created!

To finish, think about the type of colours you will need and colour in the creature in front of you. If you feel any additions are needed, for instance, background scenery, fire coming out of nostrils, etc. then add these now.

THE MYTH BEHIND THE MONSTER

WHAT ARE MYTHS?

Myths and legends are powerful stories from many years ago which every country and culture seems to have. The themes in these stories always include the fight between good and evil and contain a moral code or rules. Characters can be gods, goddesses, animals and humans with special powers. These stories have survived through the years. Before the printed word, story tellers let the tales be known and songs or ballads were written about the deeds of the characters in the tales.

Task

Can you find out about any of the myths and legends shown below? Write these out on the computer as you find out about them.

- *David and Goliath*
- *Beowulf and Grendel*
- *St. George and the Dragon*
- *Hercules and his Deeds*
- *Jason and the Golden Fleece*
- *The Norse Tale of Siegfried*
- *The Lambton Worm (Crusades)*
- *The Loch Ness Monster*

Task

Take a look at the creature that you have created and think about the tale behind him just like the old myths that you have read and the tale of Draco. Think about the following:

- *Where does your creature come from?*
- *Is it a good or bad creature or a bit of both?*
- *What does your creature feed upon?*
- *Has your creature a mission?*

- *How can your creature travel around? Can it fly or swim?*
- *Has your creature any special powers? Is it tremendously strong, can it change shape, breathe fire?*

BROTHER GILBERT

Below are the first lines we hear spoken by the character Brother Gilbert as he rides along on his donkey Merlin.

*Oh, Avalon
 For you I quest each day
 The resting p/ace of Arthur
 And the Old Code of his way
 And when I find those holy stones
 I'll pray, I'll pray, I'll pray
 Oh, Avalon, bright Avalon,
 Think me not a fool
 My quest is not for vanity
 My quest is spiritual... spiritual*

Brother Gilbert of Glockenspur, the travelling monk, is also the local storyteller and poet. Monks, like Gilbert, would travel around the country on pilgrimages journeying to places where heroic and religious deeds were carried out: Gilbert is on a pilgrimage to Avalon, the place where King Arthur is buried. It would be through people like Gilbert that the myths and tales of long ago were written down, using scrolls and a quill, and so can still be told today. Below is his first attempt at writing a tale about Bowen, the last of the dragonslayers — as you can see he has trouble with some of the rhyming words.

The Ballad of Bowen

*Into the mouth of death he strode
 Into the gringy gloom
 Into the pit of fear unknown
 Perhaps to court his doom*

*The sword against the fang and claw
 The flame against the shield
 Blah, Blah, b/ah, which one would win
 Blah, blah field*

*Shield, wield
Whose flesh from bones be peeled... Oh no
... Whose fate would soon be sealed*

Task

Using your library and research books, find poems and pieces of writing from mediaeval times using the style of /writing shown on this page. Now create your own poetic ballad as Brother Gilbert has done. Perhaps you would like to rewrite his 'Ballad Of Bowen' or you would like to write a poem about another scene from the film.

THE LEGEND OF KING ARTHUR THE SON OF UTHUR PENDRAGON

A knight is sworn to valour;

His heart knows only virtue.

His blade defends the helpless.

His might upholds the weak.

There are as many legends about King Arthur as there are about Robin Hood. He and his knights are supposed to have killed many dragons and he is supposed to have worn the design of a dragon on his shield and helmet. He is one of the great heroes of myth and the dragon symbol on his armour represents honour and wisdom.

Why is the dragon here not a symbol of evil and on what are these legends based?

When the Romans left a country they put a person in charge of the defence of the country. It is possible that the person responsible for organising the resistance to the Anglo—Saxon invasion was called Arthur. He would have been given a banner to carry into war from the Roman legions and their banner was a dragon. He was very courageous and therefore many stories and legends built up around him. He was also given some legends which were passed on to later heroes such as St. George.

At this time armies flew pennants, a small flag which caught the wind, and allowed other members of the army on your side to see where you were. Arthur's were in the shape of a red dragon. As his army was gradually beaten back into \Vales this flag became a symbol of the Celts and eventually the symbol of Wales.

In the legends of King Arthur his knights follow a code of conduct and loyalty This idea of following a code of honour forms part of the story of 'Dragonheart'.

Inside the table's circle

Under the sacred sword.

A knight must vow to follow

The code that is unending,

Unending as the table

- A ring by honour bound

THE OLD CODE IN 'DRAGONHEART'

Oaths and codes form a major part of the lives of knights and heroes in medieval stories. They are sacred and have a mystical or magical quality. They tell the knights how they should treat each other.

Task

Devise a code of conduct for one part of the school day. It might be in the playground, or inside the building. Remember it is not a set of rules imposed on one group of people by another group but something in which everyone has their say, so that in that time or place everyone can enjoy their own freedom and be treated with respect by others.

'DRAGONHEART' AS A QUEST

What makes 'Dragonheart' part of the Viking tradition of stories is that the knight is on a quest. He has vowed to kill all the dragons because he blames one of them for changing the character of Einon by giving him half of a bad heart. He does not travel the land but happens to meet the dragons he is trying to find and kills them.

In the tradition of storytelling this idea of questing does not happen until the era of knights and sacred vows. A knight accepted a challenge. By meeting that challenge he was attempting to improve his character. It is a battle against evil which the knight has decided to start. He is like Beowulf who sets out, after resting for many years, to fight a dragon.

In Greek stories the hero was a powerless person who was like a chess piece being moved around by the Gods of Olympus and having to cope with what they meet on the way. Odysseus meets monsters and disasters but what he is actually trying to do is go home. Bowen has no home. He will not rest until he has killed all the dragons.

THE SYMBOL OF THE SWORD

"My blade was not made for your father's slaughter." - Bowen

Swords are important in the stories of many cultures. Because they have to be made from metal

which is heated in a fire and then beaten into shape, they are often a symbol of someone being tested by life and by overcoming the problem, becoming a better person than they were before.

Swords are also a symbol of power, truth and right in both religion and myth. People are knighted by being touched on each shoulder with a sword. Therefore if a sword is broken or lost it is a sign of loss of power or even a sign that good or truth is temporarily being beaten by evil.

In 'The Lord of the Rings' by Tolkien a sword is restored to its rightful owner who is a lost king. In Beowulf, the hero breaks his sword in the battle with the dragon. In 'The Legend of King Arthur' the rightful king can be found only when the sword, Excalibur, is pulled from the stone and when the king dies his sword is thrown back into the magic lake.

STAR GAZING

"Long ago, when man was young and the dragon already old, the wisest of our race took pity on man. He gathered together all the dragons, making them vow to watch over man always. And at the moment of his death, the night became alive with those stars.

And thus was born the dragons' heaven. But when we die, not all dragons are admitted to this shining place. No, we have to earn it. And if we don't, our spirit disappears as if we never were."

- Draco, the last of the dragons

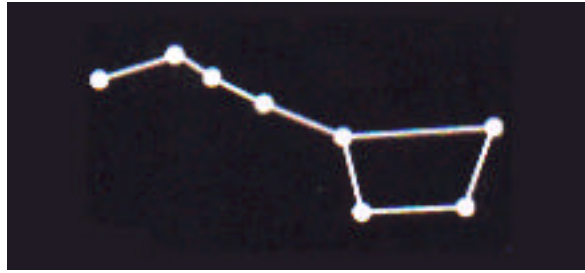
Bowen names the dragon 'Draco' after the constellation of stars in the sky. According to Draco, the stars in the shape of a dragon are actually the souls of former dragons who have helped out mankind and so earned their place in dragon heaven.

The study of space and astronomy goes back throughout history further than any other science. For thousands of years people have watched the skies and tried to explain what they have seen. The stars that we can see are collected together by gravity in an enormous group made up of over 100 billion stars, called the Milky Way Galaxy. Just as there are many stars in our galaxy, there are billions of galaxies in the universe, each containing billions of stars.

Since these early times, people have spotted patterns in groups of stars which we call constellations. Constellations have been used by astronomers as a sort of road map as they provide easily recognisable shapes in the sky. For this reason they have been used by sailors to note their way. Eighty-eight of these patterns have been named after mythical figures and animals such as Draco. Some of these are described below:

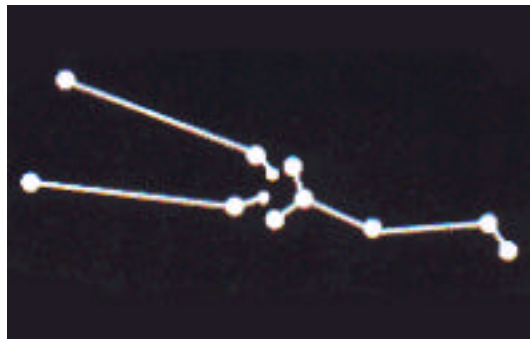
DRACO (The Dragon): Draco can be seen from the northern hemisphere around the north celestial pole. The celestial pole represents a doorway between time and eternity which is being guarded by the dragon.

URSA MAJOR (The Great Bear or The Plough): Seven of the brightest stars in our galaxy make up this constellation making them easy to spot.



You can use this shape to find Polaris or The North Star. Follow the stars on the handle of the plough further up and you should see The North Star. This is used by travelers to find north.

TAURUS (The Bull): This shape makes up the head of a charging bull. The eye of the bull is a red star.



ORION (The Hunter): Below Taurus, you will see Orion, club in one hand and a sword raised in the other. Three bright stars make up his belt making him easy to find in the night sky.

Task

Take a look at the night sky and all the different stars around. You will notice that they are not all of the same brightness. Watch out for the different constellations that are shown above. Can you spot any others in the night sky? Try and find out about them in reference books. Can you make out any other shapes from the stars? Draw a rough sketch of your shape, give it a name and write your own mythical tale about it.

BOOK LIST

Dragonheart - Movie Storybook by Leslie McGuire (Mammoth, 1996) £3.99

The Making Of Dragonheart by Jody Duncan (Hamlyn, 1996) £9.99

Dragonheart novelisation by Charles Edward Pogue (Mandarin, 1996) £5.99

Beowulf by Charles Keeping and Kevin Crossley-Holland (Oxford, 1996) £3.99

Dragons: Truth, Myth & Legend by David Passes (David Bennett Books, 1993) £12.95

Dragon Poems by John Foster and Korky Paul (Oxford, 1995) £2.99

The Box of Stars by Catherine Tennant (Chatto & Windus, 1993) £14.99

Mythical Beasts edited by John Cherry (British Museum Press, 1995) £18.99