

The Times BFI 53rd London Film Festival 2009 Education Events



Learning Resource: Astro Boy

Dir David Bowers | USA-Hong Kong-Japan 2009 | 95min

Synopsis

Toby is a little boy who lives in Metro City, a futuristic city in the sky. He loves technology and everything to do with his dad's job as a scientist. One amazing day, Toby changes from being a boy to a boy-robot, powered by positive 'blue' energy which gives him super strength, super speed, x-ray vision and the ability to fly! Exciting as his new powers are, Toby – now 'Astro Boy' – finds himself lonely: he's not all human or all robot, and the 'blue' energy is making him the target of evil men who want to take it to use for their own purposes. Looking for a place to call 'home', Astro Boy leaves Metro City and heads down to earth where he meets some colourful characters and learns not only to accept who he is, but to use his powers for good to help people and robots alike.

The filmmakers

Director: David Bowers

Writer of the comic series: Osamu Tezuka

Screenwriters: David Bowers, Timothy Harris

Voice cast: Freddie Highmore, Kristen Bell, Nicolas Cage, Eugene Levy, Donald Sutherland

The director David Bowers was born in Stockport. He started to study animation at West Surrey College of Art and Design in Farnham but left after his first year to work on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1998) and TV shows including *Danger Mouse* and *Count Duckula*. Later David moved to the US to work for DreamWorks, as a story artist on *The Prince of Egypt* and *The Road to El Dorado*, then a 6-week contract to work with Aardman as a storyboard artist for *Chicken Run* became 14 months and has led to David's work as story artist, writer and animator, since then being split between projects including *Shark Tale* and *Wallace & Gromit in The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*. His first job as director was on Aardman's *Flushed Away* (2006).

David Bowers said of the original story of Astro Boy, “Astro Boy is a timeless story in the tradition of Pinocchio or Oliver Twist. It’s very Dickensian, but at the same time, it’s very modern. He is a child created to replace the son that a father has lost. The father comes to realise that the boy can’t truly replace his lost son. The boy, who thought he was a real kid, finds out he’s a robot, and from there his life just goes crazy.”

When David was researching the story, he found out that the original creator of Astro Boy, famous Japanese comic book writer Osamu Tezuka, was highly influenced by the Walt Disney films of the 1940s and 1950s: “Thinking back to films I’ve loved and that have really influenced me over the years, I realised that the first movie I saw in a theatre was Pinocchio. My father took me to see it and it had an enormous impact. It was easy to see where Astro Boy came from. There are all sorts of similarities with Pinocchio—plus [Tezuka] improved it with giant fighting robots!”

Before the screening

- Astro Boy first appeared in 1951 as a character in Tezuka’s legendary manga (a Japanese comic book) and was instantly popular. In 1963, he was first animated in a Japanese TV series, followed by further TV series and video games though to the mid-2000s which mean that over 40 countries know and love the little robot boy. What more can you find out about the original Astro Boy comic book character and his creator, Osamu Tezuka?
- Can you think of any other films and TV programmes that feature robots? Collect images of the robots or draw them yourself and describe their characters. Do robots often have similar characteristics in films and TV? Think about Star Wars, Toy Story, Power Rangers, Dr Who...
- Much of the story of the film is about Astro Boy’s wish to have a home and friends/family. Look at the quote from David Bowers, above. What can you find out about Pinocchio and his search to find a home? Use the information to compare to Astro Boy after you see the film.
- Using the information about Astro Boy’s powers from the synopsis above, think about what ways he might be able to use the powers to help his friends, whether human or robot. How could he help them if they were lost, or needed something special, or had an accident?

After the screening

- Write a review of the film. Make sure to include a synopsis, what you like about the film (with examples), anything you didn’t like (with examples and reasons) and any other films it reminded you of. You could also draw a scene from the film to illustrate your review. You can even submit your review to Film Education’s Young Film Critic of the Year award: www.youngfilmcritic.org
- Go back to your list of the characteristics of robots in film and TV. How does Astro Boy compare to these?
Describe his character.
Now create your own story including Astro Boy, perhaps using a setting which is familiar like your school or the area where you live.
- Inspired by the film and by the manga style of animation, create your own comic book of your own Astro Boy story or part of the story from the film.

Further viewing

Pinocchio (Dir Hamilton Luske, Ben Sharpsteen | USA 1940)

A puppet boy must prove himself worthy of being a real human boy.

The Incredibles (Dir Brad Bird | USA 2004)

A family of superheroes living quietly in the suburbs are forced into action to save the world.

Links

Official film website – www.astroboy-themovie.com

English language website for Tezuka fans – www.tezukainenglish.com