

# Brave



Directed by: Mark Andrews, Brenda Chapman, Steve Purcell

Certificate: PG

Running time: 100 mins

Year: 2012

Key words: fate, fairy tale, curse, epic mystical, highlands, bear, bow, Celts, fable, stone circle, destiny, warriors, aspiring, impetuous, rugged, mythical, freedom, Kingdom

Suitable for: primary literacy, geography (Scottish landscapes), history (tenth century AD Britain), personal, social and health education.

These study notes are designed for use with pupils aged 7–11 and feature a range of cross-curricular activities linked to the film.

## SYNOPSIS

Merida is the young, feisty female protagonist of the film *Brave*. As well as being the princess of her clan, she is an expert archer. Brave, feisty and red headed, Merida doesn't want to accept her fate of being married off to a 'suitable' clansman from another tribe. She craves freedom and shuns the world of etiquette and manners that her mother represents.

After a row with her mum, she rides off into the forest, furious. She comes across the 'wisps' – strange, glowing fairy-like creatures found in the forest, which lead her further into the dense, dark woods, to a witch's house. When the witch offers her a way out of her predicament, Merida jumps at the chance to change her fate. Without thinking about the consequences, she bargains with the witch, creates chaos and unleashes an ancient curse that changes her mum into a fifteen-foot bear.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- It took six years to make *Brave*
- *Brave* is Pixar's first historical fairy tale
- The film's main character, Merida, is Pixar's first female lead
- The animators immersed themselves in Scottish countryside, accents (and midges!) to get a feel for what it would have been like to be a Scottish highlander
- Merida's hair is wild and wispy to show how different she is to her mum. Her mum, Elinor, has tightly bound hair to show how controlled she is. Merida's crazy flyaway hair is the opposite – and so is her personality
- Merida's hair itself is made up of 1500 different hand-placed computer generated curls. Her hair is made up of layers – each layer has different colours, lengths and curliness
- Merida's Clydesdale horse, Angus, also has amazing hair. He has a tail, a mane, fetlocks (around his hooves), belly fur and chin fur – all of which has to be made to move when he is galloping along
- Three art directors worked on the movie: the Art Director, the Sets Art Director and the Shader Art Director. These artists worked as a team before any filming began to come up with the look and feel of the film. They start by sketching, and then try black and white drawings, then they move onto watercolours and other paints. As well as giving the film its beautiful look, these drawings also help the story to take shape.

## Topic (History/Geography)

- The film is set in Scotland, 10th Century AD. Use the film as context for the following strands in the history curriculum:
  - how British society was shaped and affected by the movement and settlement of Vikings
  - heroic poems and sagas
  - government; religion; patterns of settlement; farming; social structure; trade; everyday life; significant dates and roles of individuals
- Historical interpretation
  - pictures, films, reconstructions, museum displays, fictional and non-fictional accounts. How these interpretations reflect the circumstances in which they are made, the use of available evidence and the intentions of those who made them
  - compare aspects of daily life in the past with own
  - use evidence to recreate the story of a place or individual of local historical interest
- People, place and environment
  - explore landscapes of the local area
  - describe ways in which land has been used

## Art/DT

- *Brave* has a 'darker' feel than other Pixar animated features, such as *Toy Story*. Create *Brave* forest pictures using muted colours and rich tones. Alternatively, create a picture of a scene from *Brave* in the style of *Toy Story*, and a scene from *Toy Story* in the style of *Brave*.

## PSHE

- 'Falling out with your grown-ups' circle time

## Numeracy

- Properties of circles: bulls-eye; trajectories; aiming straight. How can maths help Merida improve her archery skills?

## Brave cross-curricular project prompts for primary schools

## Literacy

- Create a 'Brave'-style mythical tale. Use the Pixar model of story creation (the pitch; the text treatment; the storyboard; the voice talent; the look and feel; the models; the sets; the shading; the lighting and the final rendering).

## Music

- Bagpipes and drums. Traditional Scottish folk music

## Science

- Forest flora and fauna: how plants survive.
- Wisps: fact or fiction? Could they be glow-worms or fireflies? Devise an experiment to work it out

## MFL

- One of Merida's suitors has such a broad Scottish accent, that even his own family can't understand what he's saying. Invent a communication system for this man: Scottish sign language or subtitles

## BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

### CONTEXT

#### Myths, legends and fairy tales

The story of *Brave* is inspired by the fairy tales told by the Brothers Grimm. Discuss the components of a typical mythical tale. For instance:

- **characters:** princes, princesses, kings, queens, knights, monsters, creatures, wizards, witches
  - **setting:** castles, deep, dark forests, a witch's cottage or cave, spectacular landscapes, magical lakes
  - **themes:** magical spells, killing a beast or a monster, humans being turned into animals, people in disguise, a battle, a journey, good versus evil
- Collect fairy tale myths and start collecting more typical characters, settings and themes – maybe on a working wall display.
  - Examine the synopsis for *Brave* and highlight any words that give us clues about the story in terms of character, setting and theme.

### Families

Merida is the princess daughter of a very important king and queen. Their clan is one of four in the part of Scotland in which they live. 'Clan' is a Scottish word meaning family. Merida has three cheeky brothers (triplets) who create havoc in the castle. Merida loves her parents, but she clashes with her mother, who wants her to follow in her footsteps by marrying a king from a different clan and becoming a queen. Merida can't imagine anything worse. She defies her mother by trying to change her own fate – and in so doing causes a deep rift between them.

Children could draw family trees of their own 'clans', showing the extended family. Under each family member drawing, children should write an adjective that best describes that person: e.g. brave, caring, strong, adventurous etc.

## AFTER SEEING THE FILM

- In PE, choreograph a dance that shows the key elements of the story: Merida riding through the forest; stone circles; willow the wisps; humans turning into bears; the hunt; mother/daughter love
- Make bows and arrows from sticks and string. Have an archery contest
- Create a compendium of 'favourite moments from *Brave*' using screen grabs from the trailer

## TEACHERS' NOTES

### SHOT, PAIR, SHARE

Explore and analyse the two images on the next page as a way of critically evaluating the film.

### DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

#### The frame

Describe what you can see in the shot

#### Colour / light

How is the scene lit? Are there contrasts between light and shadow? Why is it lit this way? What are the key colours in the scene? Do any colours stand out more than any others? Why? What does this tell us about the mood of the scene and the character?

#### Mise en scène

This means, 'everything in the frame', or the way information is communicated through a single shot. Describe the props, furniture, body language and facial expressions. Look at the details of the shot. Describe how each detail gives us information about the character and the scene's place in the film's narrative.

## METHODOLOGY

### SHOT

Discuss each shot as a class. Ask for pupils' initial reactions: what does each shot tell us about the film?

### PAIR

Ask the children to annotate one or both of the shots in pairs, focusing on framing, colour and light or mise en scène (or all three).

### SHARE

Each pair should then share one or two key observations about the shot.

## 15-MINUTE WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

### Shot one

Merida is following a line of Willow-o'-the-Wisps in the forest. Why is the camera so far away to show this? Why are there tree trunks in the foreground?

In *Brave*, the wisps take Merida to a witch's house. If you discovered some wisps, where would they take you? Write about your experiences.

### Shot two

Write a thought bubble for each character in the shot showing what's going on in their minds.

Written by Julie Green

Shot One



Shot Two

