

# Le Petit Nicolas



**DIRECTED BY:** Laurent Tirard

**CERTIFICATE:** PG

**COUNTRY:** France

**RUNNING TIME:** 92 mins

**YEAR:** 2009

**SUITABLE FOR:** siblings, babies, parents, school, Canada, fairy stories, imagination, French

**KEY WORDS:** upper primary literacy, art and design, MFL (French) and PSHE

## SYNOPSIS

*Le Petit Nicolas* is based on the best-selling books chronicling the adventures of Nicolas, a mischievous French schoolboy. When Nicolas overhears his parents talking about a new arrival, he knows it can only mean one thing: a baby! Convinced they are making plans to abandon him in the forest to make room for his sibling he enlists the help of his fellow classmates to make sure he will survive.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The film is based on a series of books written by Rene Goscinny and illustrated by Jean-Jacques Sempe in the late 1950s.
- The writer, Rene Goscinny wrote *Le Petit Nicolas* in 1959, the same year that he also wrote the first of the *Asterix* cartoon series of books. *Asterix* is a Gallic villager who embarks on various adventures as he resists the Roman occupation of France.
- *Asterix* is fairly well known in the UK, whereas not many people will have heard of *Le Petit Nicolas*.
- *Le Petit Nicolas* is a household name in France. Most children will grow up having read the books.
- The film topped the French box office when it opened in France in 2009.
- The title sequence of the film is inspired by Jean-Jacques Sempe's original cartoon-like drawings for the books.
- The director of the film, Laurent Tirard is the director of the latest *Asterix* movie.



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## *Le Petit Nicolas* cross-curricular project prompts for primary schools

### PSHE

- Nicolas goes through many different emotions in the film – from happiness, to fear, to sadness to happiness again, all because he's scared his parents will stop loving him if they have another baby. Imagine he is your friend. What advice would you give to him about his predicament?

### Art/DT

- The film has a distinctive style – the colours, clothes, furniture, artwork and music is all very 1950s. Research 1950s prints and create a Petit Nicolas moodboard – or do a classroom 'make over' in the style of the film.

### PE

- Nicolas' father wanted to be a sporting champion before he got married. In the style of the film, create a class movie showing the pupils competing in their best sport, or dancing.

### Literacy

- Stories from other cultures. How does this film compare to a British movie about schools? What is the same? What is different? Discuss setting; style; characters; plot.

### Science

- The boys decide to clean Nicolas' house to impress his parents. Unfortunately, their knowledge of materials and their properties is not great, and they choose the wrong actions and cleaning agents to get the job done. Make an instructional video on how to clean a house properly.

### Music

- The musical score is rich and varied. Describe how the music helps to convey the scariness of the forest. Which instruments can you hear? Compose a piece of music that conveys Nicolas' mood when he realises his parents do love him after all.

### MFL

- Create a voiceover for the film's trailer – in French. Describe the France that is depicted on screen. What makes the film 'French'?



## **BEFORE SEEING THE FILM**

### **CONTEXT**

The film tells the story of Nicolas, desperate to change his fate when he believes his mum and dad will abandon him in the forest if they have a new baby. Nicolas and his friends try everything: from magic potions, to peddling a roulette wheel on the street corner in order to raise money for Nicolas' cause. There is a strong element of friendship and support networks – Nicolas is surrounded by his band of boys, all with their own unique personalities, strengths and weaknesses. Children could create their own film poster showing their group of special friends, labeling each one with a word that sums up their personality.

### **FAMILIES**

Whilst Nicolas' parents often argue, they love each other, and they adore their son. Other boys in his group are not so lucky – one of them never sees his dad as he's always working and another feels neglected since the arrival of a new baby. Children could talk about their own experiences of family – and their feelings about working parents; new siblings and school life.

### **AFTER SEEING THE FILM**

- Create a story graph showing the funniest moments – for example when the boys go to the flower shop, or when they visit the doctor.
- The story is narrated by Nicolas, but what if it were told by one of the other boys? Tell the story through the different viewpoints of each character. How would Coltaire (always 'bottom of the class') and Agnan (the 'teacher's pet') describe the story?
- There are two teachers in the school. Become an Inspector and write an account of each teacher's style. Which one would be your preferred teacher and why?!



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## TEACHERS' NOTES

### Shot, pair, share

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

### The frame

Describe what you can see in the shot. Where is the camera placed? Why is it placed in this position? Why not high up? Or low down? Or from far away? Or close-up? What is not shown 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

This is Geoffroy, whose dad earns a lot of money. Geoffroy is almost always at home alone with his butler to look after him and pick him up from school. Which would you prefer? A big house, lots of toys and your own, personal butler, or a dad who is around to play with you and pick you up from school? Write the pros and cons of each scenario.

### 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



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Shot Two



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