



JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH

Teacher Notes for Key Stage 1 & 2



THE FILM

James and the Giant Peach is a part-live-action, part-stop-animated feature film based on the book by Roald Dahl. The storyline is faithful to the original novel: James lives an unhappy life with his two nasty aunts until he crawls inside an enormous peach that has been growing at the bottom of the garden. Once inside, he meets a menagerie of creepy crawlies. The peach is detached from the tree and rolls off on a magical adventure, eventually ending

up in New York City. The film is set in the late 1940s.

James and the Giant Peach was the first big-screen adaptation to be greenlit by Roald Dahl's family. The director, Henry Selick, and producer, Tim Burton, had worked together previously on *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and had already established an instantly-recognisable animation style. The film is pitched at a younger audience than *Nightmare* but still embodies the macabre elements of their earlier films (and, indeed, the style of Roald Dahl). Feature-length stop-animated films were (and still are) rare, as it's not as cheap or quick as either cell-animation or CGI. However, the stop-motion puppets, or "armatures", lend the film a texture which distinguishes it from the smooth images achieved through computers.

This film could be used in conjunction with The Iron Giant, Brad Bird's adaptation of Ted Hughes' The Iron Man. This teacher resource packs details some short activities to accompany the film as well as links to the national curriculum for Key Stages 1 and 2.

BEFORE THE SCREENING

Here are some questions and points for children to consider before the screening:

- James and the Giant Peach is partly a stop-motion animation. Do you know what stop motion is?*
- Can you think of any other stop-motion films that you have seen?
- James makes friends with many scary-looking bugs. Do you think it matters how your friends look? Even if they have eight legs?!

*Stop-motion is a term used to describe animation that is created by only shooting one or two frames at a time, moving the objects in-between. The finished film looks recreates smooth motion. Stop-motion is often created using plasticine (for example *Wallace and Gromit*) – this is sometimes called 'claymation'. Stop-motion can be made using any materials, though. Other forms of animation include cell-animation (pictures drawn onto cells) and CGI (computer-generated-images). More often than not, stop-motion is used to make fiction films, particularly fantasy.



AFTER THE SCREENING

Here are some discussion points to consider immediately after watching the film:

- What did you like or not like about the film. Why?
- Why do you think this film was made?
- What does the film teach us?
- Does the film show us things that are real or make-believe?
- If bugs could talk, what do you think they would say?
- Have you read *James and the Giant Peach*? In what way is the film different from the book?
- The film is animated using models. In what way is this film different to other films which are not animated?

CURRICULUM LINKS

James and the Giant Peach is a stunning retelling of a fantastic book. With so many colourful characters the movie is a fantastic springboard for creative activities from across the curriculum. In particular the film lends itself to artistic subjects such as art, drama and literacy, but can also be used to look at science and geography.

Art and Design:

KS1: Plasticine bugs

Discuss the bugs from *James and the Giant Peach* and how they are made. Using a selection of coloured plasticine, the children can make their favourite bug, taking into consideration shape, colour and size.

KS2: Moving bugs

Follow the instructions above for 'plasticine bugs'. Set up a camera on a tripod and make sure it satays in the same place. Start with the bug at one side of the picture and take a photo. Bit by bit move the bug forward, taking a photo at each stage, until it reaches the other side. Print a copy of every photo and hold them together using a bulldog clip. Flick the photos and it will look like the bug is moving across the picture! Hint: the more photos you take, the more effective the illusion of movement will be.

To crossover with ICT schools equipped with the 'I Can Animate' software can use it to create a short stop-motion film using the bugs.

Literacy:

Year 2 Narrative – Unit 3: Different stories by the same author

Use *James and the Giant Peach* as part of a wider investigation into the author Roald Dahl.

1. Gather information and research into Roald Dahl, including classroom displays and group readings of a selection of his work.
2. Discuss the characters with the class and explore their differences using groups discussion sessions and drama activities (see below for idea for drama improvisations).
3. Work in groups to evaluate the style of Roald Dahl and respond in writing. For example, children read different stories by Dahl in a group, followed by a 'My Favourite Character' worksheet.
4. Children have to create a new story using their favourite character.

Primary framework for literacy objectives: Year 2, Term 3: T4, T5, T10

Year 3 Narrative – Unit 5: Dialogue and plays

First choose an extract from *James and the Giant Peach* (the film) which includes several of the different characters. An unofficial transcript of the movie can be accessed free here:

http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/j/james-and-the-giant-peach-script.html

Children should perform dramatised readings of the scripts, using their knowledge of the film to inform their characterisation. Compare it with an equivalent extract from the book – is the dialogue the same? Are the characters any different? Children should then write their own short dialogue using the same characters.

Primary framework for literacy objectives: Year 3, Term 1: T5, T15, T4

The above are just examples. The story of *James and the Giant Peach* and other works by Roald Dahl can be used as inspiration for most aspects of the primary literacy framework.

Drama and PE:

KS1: The children move around the room. When prompted, they must alter their movements to how different bugs would move. In stages, the children have to add different elements: the way it moves, whether it moves close to the ground or on stretched legs, the noise it makes etc.

KS2: Once organised into groups, each member of the class has to create a bug character, including how it moves and the personality of their bug (grumpy, pleasant etc). The group must then imagine they are living together in a back garden and improvise a scene using their bugs as characters.

CINELITERACY

Cineliteracy is the understanding of the moving image – what it is and how it works as a visual text. Like studying books for literacy, cineliteracy involves ‘reading’ (watching) the moving image text, identifying the key features and exploring their effects. Cineliteracy is an extremely effective educational tool as nearly all children are familiar with the medium of film and are comfortable with ‘reading’ moving images. Films already stimulate children to think creatively, and with guidance they can help children to talk and write creatively too.

Key concepts and ideas

As with written texts, films are a medium for storytelling and as such many of the concepts and vocabulary for textual analysis apply to visual, oral and written narratives: structure, character, themes, genre and settings. Because of this, films can be used in relation to the primary framework for literacy.

Moving image texts can be used by primary educators to help reach targets in reading and writing by focusing on:

- Descriptive writing
- Openings and endings
- Story settings
- How settings influence events and characters
- Distinguishing between first and third person accounts
- Using expressive and figurative language



Activities focusing on cineliteracy help children explore and understand the relationship between image and sound and how they create meaning. Cineliteracy requires that children develop their film language in order to identify, define and discuss the features of film.

Key concepts in film language that shape how we analyse and understand a text can be broken down into the following elements:

COLOUR CAMERA CHARACTER COMPOSITION STORY SOUND SETTING



CINELITERACY AND JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH

James and the Giant Peach is an example of stop-motion animation (or “claymation”) fiction and fantasy. Its genre makes it more appropriate for addressing certain areas of cineliteracy. The filmmakers spent years painstakingly animating each scene, which means it is a good starting-point for considering production and post-production in filmmaking as well as the finished narrative.

Stop-motion animation

Some of the film uses live-action, but the bulk of it is animation. In particular, the stop-motion creatures help to convey the more fantastical elements of the story – especially the all-singing, all-dancing giant bugs. “Claymation” is a popular form of animation and Henry Selick is famous for it. The artists begin by designing models for the different characters which can be bent into shape, but can also keep still when left alone (this is often achieved using wire skeletons under the clay). The filmmakers can then shot one or two frames at a time, changing the model slightly in-between each frame to create the illusion of continuous movement.

This film would be impossible to make without some form of animation, as the story is full of unrealistic characters and situations. Consider the following elements in the film, and how they affect our understanding of the story:

- **The Characters** – The characters of the bugs have been created through facial expressions and props. How do they play on common perceptions of real-life insects? Eg. The ladybird is ladylike, the spider is creepy.
- **The Settings** – How does the inside of the giant peach look? What colours are used? Would you like to be inside it?
- **The Songs** – Compare and contrast the different songs and how they affect the atmosphere of any given scene. Some are upbeat and happy, whereas others are sad and slow. Are there any other films which use songs to convey a certain mood?



LINKS

If you want more information and ideas about how to use *James and the Giant Peach* in your classroom, you might find these links useful:

- Film Education website, including resources about film and literacy and animation:
<http://www.filmeducation.org/>
- The official Roald Dahl website:
<http://www.roalddahl.com/>
- Make Movies, a useful resource for any teacher wishing to introduce animation into the classroom:
<http://www.makemovies.co.uk/>
- I Can Animate, filmmaking software developed specifically for stop-motion animation:
<http://www.kudlian.net/products/icananimate/>

FILMOGRAPHY

Other films to consider watching in relation to *James and the Giant Peach*

Other stop-motion movies by Henry Selick:

The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) cert: PG

Coraline (2009) cert: PG

Other stop-motion feature films:

Alice by Jan Švankmajer (1988) cert: PG

The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb by the Bolex Brothers (1993) cert: 12

Chicken Run by Aardman Animation (2000) cert: U

Wallace and Gromit: Curse of the Wererabbit by Aardman Animations (2005) cert: U

Other animated literary adaptations:

Alice in Wonderland (1951) cert: U

Peter Pan (1953) cert: U

Animal Farm (1954) cert: U

The Jungle Book (1967) cert: U

Charlotte's Web (1973) cert: U

The Iron Giant (1999) cert: U

Other Roald Dahl adaptations:

Danny the Champion of the World (TV movie, 1989) cert: U

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971) cert: U

Matilda (1996) cert: U

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005) cert: PG

Fantastic Mr. Fox (to be released 2009/2010) cert: TBA