

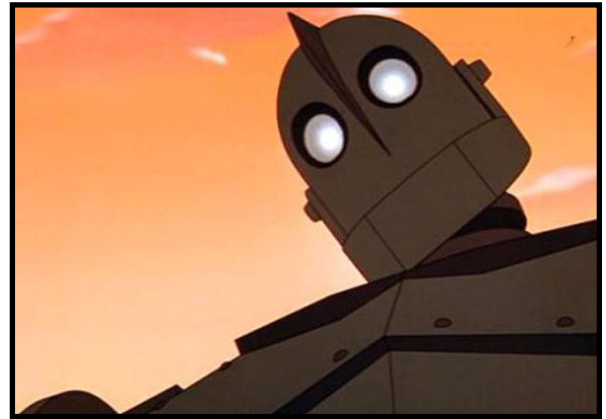


THE IRON GIANT

Teacher Notes for Key Stage 1 & 2

THE FILM

The Iron Giant is a 2-d cell-animated film, based on the story of *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes. The basic storyline remains the same in both the book and film: a young boy uncovers the existence of a gigantic robot who has an insatiable appetite for metal! At first the giant is shunned by the local community for destroying their cars and telegraph poles, but Hogarth recognizes that the giant doesn't mean any harm. Together, these two unlikely allies defeat a nasty government official who wants the Iron Giant destroyed.



The film transports the setting of the story from the England of Hughes' vision to 1950s Maine. The New England setting adds dimensions to the story. It's set at the height of the Cold War, which draws parallels between the worries of the locals about the safety of the Iron Giant and the general paranoia that beset America at the time. Artistically, the film makes use of Maine's characteristic autumnal colours. The impressive stature of the Iron Giant is emphasized by the placement of the character against a vivid blue or orange sky.

Despite the drastic change of setting, the film does retain many of the key themes and morals of the book. Hughes' book is often seen as an eco-fairytale which tells of the importance of tolerance. In fact, by the end of the book the Iron Man fulfils an important role for the planet, eating all the disused scrap metal. At its heart, however, both film and book depict a friendship which saves Hogarth from loneliness. The film shows that Hogarth comes from a single-parent background and the relationship between boy, mother and supernatural friend is reminiscent of Steven Spielberg's *ET*.

This film could be used in conjunction with Henry Selick's adaptation of Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach. This teacher resource pack 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:

- *The Iron Giant* is a science-fiction film. Do you know what science-fiction is?
- Can you think of any other science-fiction films that you have seen?
- The Giant eats cars which aren't being used anymore. Have you thrown away anything recently which could be reused?

Science-fiction (often shortened to sci-fi) is a term used to describe films which imagine the impact of science on society. Science-fiction films are often set in space or imaginary places in the future,

although unusually *The Iron Giant* is set in the past. Sci-fi is therefore 'made-up' or 'fantasy', but the made-up elements are often used to make a moral point about the way we live now.

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?
- Is the Iron Giant a good or a bad character? Why?
- The film is animated. In what way is this film different to other films which are not animated?

CURRICULUM LINKS

The Iron Giant is a marvelous film boasting state-of-the-art animation and as such provides a beautiful and thought-provoking beginning for activities across the curriculum. In particular the film lends itself to citizenship, geography and literacy, but can also be used to look at drama, PE and art.

Citizenship and Geography:

KS1: Becoming litter-pickers

Discuss proper disposal of waste and recycling. Go into the playground and pick up as much litter as you can. Afterwards identify which pieces of rubbish could be recycled.

KS2: Becoming and promoting litter-pickers

Follow the instructions above for 'becoming litter-pickers'. Discuss the negative effect rubbish has on the environment then the positive effect being tidy has on the environment. Design and create posters and displays promoting being tidy and recycling.

To crossover with ICT children can create a database tally of the rubbish they find.

KS1 & 2: What can be recycled?

Using flashcards of different bits of litter (cans, apples etc) children have to identify the following:

1. What material the litter is made from. E.g. cans are made of metal, old books are made of paper etc.
2. Whether the litter is man-made or natural. E.g. crisp packets are made by man, but apples grow on trees.
3. Whether the litter can be reduced, reused or recycled. E.g. plastic bags can be reused, glass bottles can be recycled,
4. How the litter can be reduced, reused or recycled. E.g. bottles can be taken to a bottle-bank, food can be composted, everyone can reduce the amount of litter they create.

NB. Also covers the science topic 'materials and their properties'.

Literacy:

Year 1 Narrative – Unit 4: Stories about fantasy worlds

Use *The Iron Giant* as inspiration for the children to create their own science-fiction narratives:

1. Children have to invent their own robot character.
2. As a class, the children discuss their characters and how they could be used in a story.

Primary framework for literacy objectives: Year 1, Term 3: T1, T2, T3, T5, T6, T8, T14

Year 4 Narrative – Unit 2: Stories set in imaginary worlds

Use *The Iron Giant* as inspiration for the children to create their own stories set in outer space:

1. Create different planets and the robots that inhabit them.
2. Children have to write a story based on their creations, organised into paragraphs.
3. Extension activity: children have to incorporate a moral into their story using the heading 'The moral of the story is...'

Primary framework for literacy objectives: Year 4, Term 2: T2, T3, T4, T10, T13

Drama and PE:

KS1: The children move around the room. When prompted, they must alter their movements to how a robot 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 robot character, including the job that their robot does (sweeping, cooking etc) and the personality of their robot (grumpy, pleasant etc). The group must then imagine they are living together on a distant planet and improvise a scene using their robots as characters.

Art and Design:

KS1: Make a display of robots using a range of recycled materials.

KS2: Make a display about recycling, include messages about recycling and collages of people picking up litter using recycled materials.

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 THE IRON GIANT

The Iron Giant is an example of cell-animation, with some computer-generated imagery (CGI), and science-fiction. 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.

Cell-animation

Cell-animation is a traditional animation form popularised by several film studios, most famously Disney. The artists animate the foreground and background separately but painting characters in the foreground onto cells which can be laid on top of the background. This gives the animators less work to do as it minimises the amount of artwork that needs to be created for each frame. Nevertheless, it is still a time-consuming endeavour. For each second of film, up to 24 frames need to be animated (sometimes they halve this to 12 frames per second). In a film lasting one hour and thirty minutes between 64,800-129,600 pictures need to be drawn and painted! Because of this, traditional cell-animation has fallen by the wayside since the advent of CGI (computer-generated imagery). The Iron Giant also utilises CGI, particularly in some of the more complex landscapes and special effects.

LINKS

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

- Film Education website, including resources about film and literacy and animation:

<http://www.filmeducation.org/>



- 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 animation:

<http://www.kudlian.net/products/icananimate/>

FILMOGRAPHY

Other films to consider watching in relation to *The Iron Giant*

Other films by Brad Bird:

The Incredibles (2005)

Ratatouille (2007)

Other animated literary adaptations:

The Jungle Book

Alice in Wonderland

Peter Pan

Charlotte's Web

Animal Farm

James and the Giant Peach