

DISCOVERY FILM FESTIVAL

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Teacher's Resource - The Secret of Kells

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Curriculum for Excellence Stage 2 Literacy, Social Studies, RME, Expressive Arts

Scotland's International Film Festival for Young Audiences

discoveryfilmfestival.org.uk

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The Secret of Kells

Introduction

The Secret of Kells is a visual delight that is sure to inspire. Set in 9th Century Ireland, the genre mixes fantasy and adventure alongside history, cleverly using the story behind the Book of Kells. The hand drawn 2D artwork used in most of the film mirrors beautifully the handcraft used to scribe and decorate the manuscripts.

This film has everything in it. Action and fantasy are cleverly woven into the historical events that surround this film. It offers a creative route into Celtic history and the Viking threat. This film demonstrates the importance of art and visual culture in severely difficult times.

I would recommend that children know a bit of background about the Book of Kells before viewing this film and we've supplied some information to get you started.

Curriculum for Excellence links covered by this resource

Inspired by a range of stimuli, I can express and communicate my ideas, thoughts and feelings through activities within art and design.

EXA 2 -05a

I can discuss why people and events from a particular time in the past were important, placing them within a historic sequence.

SOC 2-06a

I can describe and reflect upon practices and traditions of world religions.

RME 2-06c

I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by responding to literal, inferential, evaluative and other types of questions and by asking different kinds of questions of my own.

LIT 2-07a

When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can:

- share information, experiences and opinions*
- explain processes and ideas*
- identify issues raised and summarise main points or findings*
- clarify points by asking questions or by asking others to say more*

LIT 2-09a

The History behind the Film

The Book of Kells was written around 800 A.D, about 400 years after St Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland. It is a religious book which tells the story Jesus' life through the gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. It was created more as a sacred work of art than as a book to be practically read. The writing is ornate and the decorations are the most outstanding aspect of the book including intricate Celtic designs, rich colours and even gold.

Can the class work out how long ago the book was written?

Two monasteries are important to the story of the Book of Kells. One is the the monastery on Iona - a small island off the west coast of Scotland. The other is the monastery of Kells in Co Meath.

St Columba, also known as St Colum Cille, was an Irish monk who brought Christianity to Scotland. St Columba was the founder of the monastery at Iona.

It is believed that the Book of Kells might have been written to honour the anniversary of St Columba's death and that it was at least begun on the island of Iona.

The Book of Kells is considered one of the world's greatest treasures because it tells us so much about early medieval life in Ireland and because of the quality of the beautiful artwork.

By AD 795 Ireland was largely a Christian country. When local tribes fought against each other, they generally respected and protected the monasteries. Because of this, many rich people would store their valuables at the monasteries, and seek refuge among monks, in times of trouble.

But the Vikings, warriors and explorers from Scandinavia, were pagan and didn't believe in Christianity. They didn't have any problems with attacking monasteries and when they realised that monasteries had many riches inside their protective walls, they went out of their way to target them. This is why the characters in *The Secret of Kells* are so worried about their arrival in Ireland and at the monastery.

You can find further information about the history of this time and The Book of Kells at the two links below:

(<http://www.my-secret-northern-ireland.com/ancient-vikings.html>)
(www.bookofkells.ie/education)



Lesson Starters

Before Your Visit to the Cinema

1. Look at *The Secret of Kells* website; listen to the music that is playing.

Turn the music off (go to the bottom right hand side of the page where there is small text that says Music Off – click here)

Watch the Trailer (click through from the top menu of the website)

Discuss in groups then feedback to the whole class the following questions:

What kind of film is this? Why?

How does the music make you feel from the trailer or the website? Does it remind you of any other music perhaps in a film you've seen before?

What do you think will happen in the film?

2. Go to the link on the website which says The Story. This description of the film is called 'the synopsis'. Read the synopsis with the class.

What did the synopsis tell you that the trailer didn't?

What did the trailer tell you that the synopsis didn't?

Which gave you a better idea of what the film might be like? Why?

3. On the website go to the Image Gallery (again through the top menu).

Pick one image (or split into groups with an image each) and discuss what could be happening in the image.

What is happening?

Can you describe the characters?

From the information you have now, do you know who the characters are?

What might happen next?

If you could put an emotion to each image, what would that emotion be? Why does it make you feel that way? Think about setting, colour, characters, and how the picture is framed – are we close up or far away? What difference does it make?

It may be interesting to re-visit these still images after your cinema trip and look back over your ideas and predictions.

After Viewing Whole Film

Discussion points

Why do you think the opening credits are written in that way? What does it remind you of? What computer font does it remind you of?

The characters are formed using very varied outlines. Why do you think that is? What do they remind you of? (Look at Celtic lettering and compare)

Why are their hands drawn in a very particular fashion? Why are hands so important in this film and what words could you use to describe them? Do they remind you of anything?

Describe the different activities going on inside the walls at the beginning of the film where Brendan chases the goose. Think about:

- What kind of lifestyle is this?
- When do you think this took place and where?
- What are people doing?



Further Activities

1 The Book of Kells was written about 1200 years ago after the arrival of St Patrick in Ireland. Using an internet search engine and information books, make a 'collage' of the centuries leading up to the Book of Kells being written.

Allocate groups to given centuries. Learners work together to collate images, words, patterns etc. that pertain to their particular era. These collages should include names of important people at the time, information about wealth or poverty, war, modes of transport and communication.

After each group has finished, put the collages in chronological order and discuss similarities and differences.

2 The exquisite hand drawn art work in this film is inspired by Celtic mythology. In the film, Brendan is an illuminator. What is the origin of this word?

Imagine that some pages have been missed by Brendan. It's your job to illuminate them! Take two sheets of A4 paper to begin your designs. You might want to tea stain them and let them dry first for effect.

Use animals you see from the film to decorate the borders and lettering and make them glow!

Remember that the monks worked for days and days in the daylight to do this painstaking work. This required a tremendous amount of patience.

The following links may help give you ideas

(<http://www.artoffoxvox.com/cgi-bin/cpshop.cgi/celticletters>)

(<http://www.snake.net/people/paul/kells/>)

3 Brendan lived in a monastery under the watchful eye of his uncle, the Abbot. From the film you get a glimpse of what life was like then.

Brendan was a young boy, and longed to venture outside the Abbey's walls.

Using the words listed and adding your own, add to the picture of Brendan to display what his fears might be, his hopes and his wildest dreams. Keep it realistic and use the information you have gathered from Activity 1 which should remind you of what life was like then.

Word Bank

Pangur Ban

Manuscripts

Aisling

Forbidden

Brother Aiden

Raiders

Brothers

Faerie

Austere

Barbaric

Vikings

Book of Kells

Illumination

Scriptorium

Escape

I hope that.....

I'm scared that.....

I dream that one day....



The Production of *The Secret of Kells*

The film's website gives information about the film makers. Tomm Moore is the director and co-founder of Cartoon Saloon. *The Secret of Kells* is his first feature film. He is a lifelong comic book and animation enthusiast.

(<http://www.theseecretokells.com>)

(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0485601/>)

Useful Facts about Secret of Kells

The Book of Kells was written and decorated entirely by hand in natural daylight.

Monasteries were so fearful of accidental fire that the use of candles or oil lamps was forbidden inside the writing rooms.

Before St Patrick introduced books along with Christianity to Ireland, the Irish had no useful written language.

The Roman alphabet was introduced in 5th Century and the Irish adopted and changed it to suit them in order to record their ancient myths and legends.

Glossary

Barbaric - extremely cruel, brutal.

Book of Kells - ancient manuscripts telling the four gospels of the New Testament.

Chi-Rho - the first two letters of 'Christ' in Greek written in the Book of Kells - an important page.

Illuminated manuscript - handwriting that is surrounded and enriched with beautifully decorated borders and lettering using silver and gold.

Monastery - a building used for prayer by groups of people such as monks.

Monk - a person who practises religion either living alone or with a group. They live separately from others not sharing the same beliefs. They devote their life entirely to God.

Monogram - a picture or motif made by overlapping or mixing two or more letters together to make a symbol.

Ornate - decorated with complex patterns

Pangur Ban - the name of Brother Aiden's cat in the film. The name originates from an old Irish poem written in the 8th century by an Irish monk about his cat!

Scribe - a person who writes books or documents by hand.

Scriptorium - a place for writing in a medieval monastery.

Useful Web Addresses

(<http://www.mccelticdesign.com>)

(<http://www.thesecretokells.com>)

(<http://www.youtube.com>)

(<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/movies/reviews/2010/secretokells.html>)

(<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourIntroGen.asp>)