

Azur and Asmar: The Princes' Quest

Film Synopsis

Once upon a time there were two children brought up by the same woman.

Azur, a blond blue-eyed son of a nobleman and Asmar, the dark skinned and dark-eyed child of the nurse. As they grow up the nurse tells them many enchanting stories but their favourite is about the Djinn fairy waiting to be released from captivity by a good and heroic prince.

One dark day Azur's father cruelly separates them, he sends Azur to the city for a private education and banishes the nurse and Asmar from his home. Some years later Azur returns and sets out to a land far away to find the nurse and Asmar. Finally reunited, it soon becomes clear that Azur and Asmar will compete against each other to be the first one to rescue the fairy.

Directed by: Michel Ocelot

Certificate: TBC

Running Time: 95 minutes

UK release date: 8th February 2008

Background

Visit the downloads section for background information (in Word format) that includes:

- An article on The Princes' Quest and its director Michel Ocelot
- Interview with director with biography and selected filmography
- Interview with head of background design, Anne-Lise Koehler

You can listen to our exclusive podcast of Michel Ocelot talking about The Prince's Quest; there is also a Film Education resource for Michel Ocelot's previous film Kirikou and The Sorceress, released in 1998. Find it at <http://www.filmeducation.org/primary/Kirikou.html>

Teachers' Notes

The **Azur and Asmar: The Princes' Quest** educational resource is suitable for pupils aged 7–11 and relates to Literacy, P.S.H.E. & Citizenship and Art & Design. It contains activities that look at the following themes and issues:

1. Stories from other Cultures

Literacy

Key Stage 2 Objectives link:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/literacy/planning/Year5/Narrativestories/unit3/>

2. Film Narrative

Literacy

Key Stage 2 Objectives link:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/literacy/planning/Year5/Narrativestories/unit5/>

3. Film Trailer

Literacy: Persuasive Texts

Key Stage 2 Objectives link:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/literacy/planning/Year4/Nonfiction/unit4/>

4. Living in a Diverse World

PSHE & Citizenship

Key Stage 2 Objectives link:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes2/ks1-2citizenship/cit05/?view=get>

5. Art & Design

Activities

Stories from other Cultures

The story of **The Princes' Quest** begins in France and then moves to North Africa where the architecture, plants and culture are very different. Azur pretends to be blind however and keeps his eyes closed so people don't see his 'cursed' blue eyes. Crapoux rides on his shoulders through the land but he is not very honest when Azur asks him to describe the surroundings. Crapoux makes the environment sound ugly and bare when it is far from it!

Activities

- Azur needs to be told the truth about his surroundings! Look at the images on this page of the site and discuss the colours, shapes and patterns. Choose an image and write a letter to Azur describing what you can see. Try to use a combination of literal and figurative language. Think about nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Try to include some similes, metaphors or personification.
- Alternatively, write a letter or diary entry from Azur's point of view describing the plants, buildings, costumes and food he experiences in this different culture.

Some characters in *The Princes' Quest* speak more than one language. Azur cannot speak Arabic as well as some characters and he feels lost and alone when he struggles to communicate with people. The director decided *not* to provide subtitles when characters speak Arabic, so even audiences cannot always tell what is being said exactly. What effect do you think this might have on the audience?

Activities

- In an interview about the making of *The Princes' Quest*, Michel Ocelot said:

'I considered the obstacle of languages, because I wanted to show the condition of the immigrant for whom the language barrier is a major difficulty. So, in certain passages, I do not try to make people (the audience) understand so that they feel a little lost.'

Can you imagine what it would be like to be unable to understand the people around you? Discuss Azur's thoughts and feelings after his first day in this strange new land. Write an entry for that day in Azur's diary.

Film Narrative

Before animating the film Michel Ocelot created a storyboard of the whole film, frame by frame. In an interview about the making of *The Princes' Quest*, Michel Ocelot said:

'The 1,300 shots in the film are each defined in a file in which we also keep the framing of the shot, the characters' principal positions in the shot, the sketches of the background, dialogue indications and camera movements.'

Filmmakers and animators use various 'shot types' to tell a story on screen. Each plays a part in describing setting or character and help to tell the story

from a certain point of view. Can you match each image to the shot type name and description?

Close-up

A close-up helps us to see the emotions of a character in detail.

Mid-shot

A medium shot is often used to show two or more characters together, so we can see them interact (e.g. talking) and understand their relationships. Some shots like this can be called a two-shot.

Long shot

A long shot establishes the environment in a scene by showing a lot of background as well as characters, weather, buildings etc. A long shot can be a good opening shot to set the scene.

High angle

When the camera is placed above and looking down on the action this is called a high angle. This shot is used to make characters being looked down on appear smaller, perhaps to make them seem vulnerable or to show the point of view of a character looking down.

Low angle

When the camera is placed low and looking up at the action this is called a low angle. A low angle is used to make characters being looked up to appear larger, perhaps to make them seem intimidating or to show the point of view of a character looking up.

Activities

- Look carefully at the images on this section of the site and discuss each shot in turn. What is happening in each frame? What do we learn about characters, locations and action? Are the shots from another character's point of view? How can you tell?
- Choose your favourite moments of the film and draw your own pictures of characters and locations demonstrating each of the five shot types.
- What was your favourite scene in the film? The storm at sea? When Azur meets the Scarlet Lion? Draw a storyboard of the scene and try to include different shot types for each frame. For more information about storyboarding download the following Film Education resource: <http://www.filmeducation.org/secondary/StudyGuides/index.html>

Trailer Activity

A film trailer is a persuasive text.

Watch the trailer for *The Princes' Quest*. Share your initial thoughts about the film. Who is interested in seeing it? Does it remind you of any other films you have seen? Which parts of the trailer do you find most interesting?

A trailer can provide cinema audiences with key information about the film and tell the overall story in a short space of time. This makes it clear what type of people will enjoy the film. For example:

- genre (the type of story, e.g. romance, science fiction, fantasy)
- key themes of the story (e.g. heroism, loyalty, family)
- key characters and their personalities

Get into groups and watch the trailer a second time. Be ready to discuss these different aspects of the trailer.

Watch the trailer one more time. Each group should focus on one of the following areas, ready to share your ideas about how the trailer is trying to *persuade* people, getting them excited about seeing the film:

- use of music
- voiceover
- any written text
- choice of shots

Activities

What might happen in a sequel to *The Princes' Quest*? Discuss what could happen to Azur and Asmar and storyboard a trailer for the next film.

Living in a Diverse World

A key theme of *The Princes' Quest* is racism and the experiences of immigrants in society. The two main characters are best friends but very different. Azur is a blond, blue-eyed son of a rich nobleman, Asmar a dark skinned and dark-eyed child of a nurse.

At the beginning of the film Azur often treats Asmar badly and Azur's father cruelly banishes Asmar and his mother, despite the fact the nurse raised both boys. However, once Azur is older he visits another land and *he* suffers prejudice as he is seen as dirty and dangerous due to superstition that blue eyes are cursed.

Activities

Have you ever been bullied because you are different? Have you ever treated anyone badly because they are different to you?

- Take turns in class to play the role of Asmar or Azur. Think of questions to ask each other to explore the feelings of the characters when people treat them unfairly in the film. Start your questions with 'How did you feel when...?' or 'What did you think when...?'
- Near the end of the film Asmar defends Azur and protects him against people who want to hurt him because he is different. What can you do to deal with prejudice, including racism, and to support others who encounter it in school and society?

Art and Design

Download and print original artwork of characters from the film that can be used for colouring and decorating.

Activity

Michel Ocelot has created fantastic, magical creatures for The Princes' Quest. He invented the Scarlet Lion with blue claws and he based the giant bird on the Saimourh (or roc bird), a mythical creature from Persian tales.

- Can you invent a new creature for the world of The Princes' Quest? Think of your favourite animal and use your imagination to change them like Michel Ocelot has changed the lion and bird. Use bright, vibrant colours like he does too.

Activity

The buildings and backgrounds in The Princes' Quest are full of intricate detail. Look at the tessellated patterns in these images. Michel Ocelot has based these beautiful designs on Islamic art and architecture.

- Use plain or dotted paper to create your own tessellations. Be as bold with your use of colour as the animators of The Princes' Quest.