

Belle and Sebastian



Teacher Resource Package Prepared By:

Susan Starkman, B.A., M. ED.

Belle and Sebastian

Teacher Resource Package

Prepared by: Susan Starkman, B.A., M.Ed

Synopsis

Country of Origin: France

Release Year: 2013

Director: Nicolas Vanier

Runtime: 104 minutes

Language: French, German

Themes: Coming of Age, Heroism, Secrets and Lies, French Resistance Relationship Between Humans and Animals

Since its initial publication in the 1960s, Cécile Aubry's novel *Belle et Sébastien* has been made into a popular live action television series and a Japanese anime. This latest film adaption by Nicolas Vanier shifts the setting to World II on the French/Swiss border where the orphaned boy Sebastian tends sheep with his adopted grandfather. A wild dog known as The Beast is rumoured to be killing livestock, but when Sebastian encounters the animal he discovers that she is, in fact, a loving animal who responds to his affection. Naming her Belle, the two form a close bond and together help members of the French Resistance ferry refugees across the border. Using 35 mm film to capture the spectacular scenery of the Haute Maurienne-Vanoise region of France, *Belle and Sebastian* combines the old fashioned charm of a Disney family movie with a suspenseful WWII subplot that will appeal to audiences of all ages.

Curriculum Links

Belle and Sebastian can be used to meet the English and Media Studies component of the English curriculum from Grades 4-8. It can also be applied to the Social Studies curriculum from Grades 4-8 and the Grade 7 Geography curriculum.

Before Viewing the Film

There are different advertising posters for *Belle and Sebastian*, each conveying different messages about the film. In order to encourage students to think about how advertising shapes our expectations, teachers should ask the class to look at the posters below and answer the accompanying questions.



1. What do you think the movie is going to be about based on each poster?
2. How does the summer background give you a different impression of the film than the winter background?
3. In what period do you think that film will be set? Why?
4. What genre of film do you think this will be (e.g., family, action/adventure, etc.)? What gives you this impression?

Setting

Belle and Sebastian is set in the Haute Maurienne Vanoise region of France. Locate this area on a map and find out more about the area's geography, history and culture.

Suggested website:

<http://en.haute-maurienne-vanoise.com/discover>

Belle and Sebastian: Context

Belle and Sebastien is based on the popular novel of the same name by the French actress Cécile Aubry. She later wrote and directed a popular TV series based on the novel, starring her son, Mehdi El Glaoui. The series ran between 1965-1970 and was later dubbed into English for the BBC with the Anglicized title, *Belle and Sebastian*. The show was hugely popular in the UK and was the inspiration for the Scottish indie band of the same name. The serial spawned two further 13 part colour film sequels '*Sebastien parmi les Hommes*' (*Sebastien Among Men*) (1968) retitled '*Belle, Sebastian and the Horses*' by the BBC and '*Sebastien et la Mary-Morgane*' (*Sebastian and the Mary Morgan*) (1970). This second sequel was not broadcast by the BBC.

In 1981, an anime version of *Belle and Sebastian* was released under the Japanese title *Meiken Jolie*. The show was broadcast on French, Italian and Japanese television in 1981. The American cable network Nickelodeon picked it up in 1984.

Related Questions/Activities

1. For the 2013 film adaptation, Nicolas Vanier changed the time frame of the film to a WWII setting. Why do you think he did this? Do you think the subplot of the refugees adds to the main storyline of the film? Why/why not?
2. Watch a clip from the TV series at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZlizecHVBw>. In the TV show, Sebastian is aware that his mother died in childbirth. Why do you think Nicolas Vanier made it a secret to be revealed in the film version?
3. Watch a clip from the anime series at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2Z4GdAzpNM>. Do you think that the story translates well as an animated series? Why/why not? Give specific examples.
4. Write your own outline for an episode of a TV version of *Belle and Sebastian* set in 2015. How would you update the story to suit today's audience?

Historical Context: Vichy France

Belle and Sebastian is set in 1943 when France was occupied by Germany. Though the historical aspect of the film is used as a backdrop to the main story, it is important that students have some understanding of the role that France played in the war, in particular when it came to resisting the Nazi occupation. Listed below are some websites where students can learn more about France under the Vichy regime of 1940-1944:

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/VichyRegime.html>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005429>

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/gallery.php?ModuleId=10005429&MediaType=NM>
(animated maps of the Occupation)

Eyewitness to History

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pffrancedefeat.htm>

Historical Context: French Resistance to the Nazis

Though *Belle and Sebastian* is not a true story, the Pyrenees did, in fact, serve as an escape route for many European Jews escaping Nazi persecution, many of whom were aided by non-Jewish citizens who risked their lives to help them. Characters such as Doctor Guillaume and Angelina provided teachers with a springboard to discuss the theme of heroism and standing up to tyranny. To that end, teachers could look at both the escape routes used and the dangers they entailed as well as some of the real-life heroes who put their lives on the line to save Jews during the War. Listed below are some resources to begin your research.

Le Chemin de la Liberté: WWII escape route to Spain

<http://www.ariège.com/histoire/chemin.html>

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation:

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/others/secret-spanish-evasion-routes/>

World Federation of Child Survivors of the Holocaust and their Descendants

<http://www.holocaustchild.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/escape-over-the-pyrenees-Joan-Salter.pdf>

The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies

<http://wymaninstitute.org/articles/2005-04-fittko.php>

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/general/john-henry-weidner-courageous/>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa21263> (photo of Jews being smuggled over the Pyrenees with the help of John Weidner's Dutch-Paris network)

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/general/raoul-laporterie/>

Yad Vashem World Centre for Holocaust Research

<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/deffaugt.asp>

Classroom Activities

Listed below are links to two lesson plans that teachers can use with their students to explore the theme of heroism.

The Holocaust Teacher Resource Centre

<http://www.holocaust-trc.org/forging-freedom/> (lesson plan about a Dutch man who saved Jews)

Florida Centre for Instructional Technology: A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust

<http://fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust/people/rescuer2.htm> (lesson plan about rescuers during the Holocaust)

Belle and Sebastian: Themes

Secrets and Lies

All of the major characters in the film either tell overt lies or keep secrets from each other. While these lies are designed to protect loved ones from either physical danger or emotional distress, they often have the opposite effect. Students should fill out the chart below listing the various lies and secrets that each character keeps (in some cases, more than one), the reasons for doing so and the consequences that result from these lies.

Character	Lie(s) Told/Secret(s) Held	Reasons for Lying/Keeping Secret	Consequences of Lie/Secret
Cesar			
Sebastian			

Angelina			
Doctor Guillaume			
Lieutenant Peter			

Classroom Activity: Film Review

Write a film review of *Belle and Sebastian*. Use the chart below to think about the qualities of a film that you need to consider when writing a review.

Criteria	Rating 5=Great, 1=Poor					Comments
	5	4	3	2	1	
Dialogue/Screenplay						
Believability of relationship between a human and a wild dog						
Emotional impact						
Overall interest level						
Message of the film						

Character Elements						
Character believability						
Character development						
Development of friendship between Belle and Sebastian						
Development of relationship between Sebastian and Cesar						
Technical Elements						
Cinematography						
Music						
Special effects						
Lighting						

Focus Discussion Questions/Activities:

1. Is it ever acceptable to lie? If so, under what circumstances?
2. Rank the secrets and lies told by the characters in order of least to most harmful. Explain your reasoning.
3. Compare your ranking with the other students in the class. Do you all agree? If not, discuss the differences in the way that you think.

General Discussion Questions

1. How does the opening sequence of the film foreshadow (predict) the end of the film?

2. Define the term metaphor. In what way is the baby sheep that Sebastian saves a metaphor for Sebastian himself?
3. Why does Cesar allow Sebastian to run free instead of going to school?
4. Why do you think that the director of the film chose to use the same theme song that was used in the original television series?
5. Why do you think that Belle instantly recognises a friend in Sebastian when all of the other humans she has encountered have been cruel to her?
6. What is the significance of the watch with the compass that Sebastian receives for Christmas? What do you think that it symbolises?
7. What do you think Angelina wrote in the letter to Guillaume that she gave to Sebastian to deliver?

References

(All websites cited are from April, 2015)

Haute Maurienne Vanoise

<http://en.haute-maurienne-vanoise.com/discover>

Belle and Sébastien TV series clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZlizecHVBw>

Belle and Sébastien anime series clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2Z4GdAzpNM>

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/VichyRegime.html>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005429>

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/gallery.php?ModuleId=10005429&MediaType=NM>

(animated maps of the Occupation)

Eyewitness to History

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pffrancedefeat.htm>

Le Chemin de la Liberté: WWII escape route to Spain

<http://www.ariege.com/histoire/chemin.html>

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation:

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/others/secret-spanish-evasion-routes/>

World Federation of Child Survivors of the Holocaust and their Descendants

<http://www.holocaustchild.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/escape-over-the-pyrenees-Joan-Salter.pdf>

The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies

<http://wymaninstitute.org/articles/2005-04-fittko.php>

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/general/john-henry-weidner-courageous/>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa21263> (photo of Jews being smuggled over the Pyrenees with the help of John Weidner's Dutch-Paris network)

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/general/raoul-laporterie/>

Yad Vashem World Centre for Holocaust Research

<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/deffaugt.asp>

The Holocaust Teacher Resource Centre

<http://www.holocaust-trc.org/forging-freedom/> (lesson plan about a Dutch man who saved Jews)

Florida Centre for Instructional Technology: A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust

<http://fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust/people/rescuer2.htm>