



***How to Train Your Dragon* book and film learning activities**

Activities to help you explore the book *How to Train Your Dragon* by Cressida Cowell and its film adaptation

Age 8-11

CFE Second Level

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About this resource

This resource contains cross-curricular activity suggestions to help you explore both the book and film adaption of *How to Train Your Dragon* by Cressida Cowell. The [Screening Shorts website](#) and [Into Film website](#) have further resources to help pupils to analyse films.

If you are taking part in [Reading Schools](#), the activities in this resource could support delivery of Key Area:

- 1.5.1: Access to high-quality books
- 2.2.2: Interdisciplinary book projects.

Book learning activities

Activity 1: Design your own dragon

LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-21a, LIT 2-24a, LIT 2-26a, HWB 2-11a, MNU 2-20a, MNU 2-20b, MTH 2-21a, EXA 2-04, EXA 2-06, EXA 2-07a

Design dragons to suit your personality or to meet particular criteria, e.g. design a set of dragons that focus on particular learning power or skill. This could be concentration, perseverance, or focus, to name a few. Create images showing specific attributes that help the dragons to be better at that power. Perhaps the concentration dragon has scales that create a protective layer that blocks out distractions! Develop these into a whole-school project with each year group

contributing to the designs and attributes.

Individuals could design dragons to their own specifications and character types. Fact sheets and descriptions can be made to create posters or a class yearbook of dragons. Back-stories can be written: how the dragon became your pet and what it got up to with you in its early life. Develop some spreadsheets to be able to collate information on the dragons for a database, graphs and charts. The novel has pages with a particular style of fact sheet that you could replicate.

Make a set of Top Trumps for the class dragons and add in the dragons from the book. What properties or attributes do you think are important? Which properties are measurable this way? You can download a template for your cards, and receive free packs of Top Trumps cards, from the [Top Trumps Schools Club website](#) by Winning Moves.

You could also create dragons as part of your art programme. Look at dragons as they are portrayed in art from ancient times to present day – has it changed particularly? There is so much you can do here from the dragons of Chinese culture to those of the Vikings, through medieval times and beyond. Make up a PowerPoint with different images and allow your learners free rein. There are online tutorials if you wanted to be structured, or to act as a starting point. Remember to be very specific about the skills to be learned.

Finally, you could look at the opportunities to create 3D dragon art using recycled materials and raise awareness in sustainability at the same time. This could be a large-scale piece made by the whole class, or a home learning project. Pupils could get inspiration for their dragon sculptures from the [Tower of London dragon](#) and [dragon statues around the world](#).

Activity 2: Bashyball

TCH 2-09, TCH 2-11a, LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-21a, LIT 2-24a, LIT 2-26a

Bashyball is a game referred to in the book - mainly to say Hiccup isn't very good at

it – but we don't find out much more about it. Have your class reinvent the game creating rules and tactics etc. Have them write instructions to help others play this game. Could it be made into a board or tabletop game?

Activity 3: Hiccup and his family

LIT 2-26a, ENG 2-31a

In the novel we are introduced to lots of characters but we hear very little of their individual families. We know they are all part of the Hairy Hooligan tribe and later in the book we are introduced to the Meathead tribe. Choose a character, perhaps Dogsbreath, Fishlegs, Snotlout, Clueless, Speedifist or Wartihog. Give them families with a background, a home, siblings, grandparents, etc. Present all the information on large sheets and have a 'Meet the Hooligans' wall display. This activity could be developed this further by using these characters to write the 'lost chapter' where your character gets his own adventure with his dragon.

Alternatively, develop a whole new family, one with a strong female character at the centre. This is done in the film but not in the book.

Activity 4: Dragon training manual

LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-21a, LIT 2-24a, LIT 2-26a

Hiccup tries to study Professor Yobbish's book on training dragons, but regrettably it's rather brief! It has an inviting front cover, a dedication page, a library label page and a page about the author. The book begins in earnest with Chapter the First (and the Last). It lasts for one page! Professor Yobbish tells us that the way to train a dragon is to YELL AT IT! Needless to say, Hiccup is a little frustrated by this. He works on his own list entitled 'Dragon Motivation' which includes gratitude, fear, greed, vanity, revenge, jokes and riddling talk.

Make a more comprehensive training manual using Hiccup's list for starters, expanding it with specific activities to cover each category. It would be good to make this more visual with illustrated directions and diagrams.

Later in the novel, the tribe needs advice on how to get rid of the giant sea monsters and Stoick the chief is appalled to see the book is so poor on advice. At the end of the novel he writes a letter of complaint to Professor Yobbish. We don't see a reply from the professor. Write a response for him justifying his actions.

Activity 5: Stylistic devices

ENG 2-12a, LIT 2-16a, ENG 2-31a

Cressida Cowell uses a number of different stylistic writing devices to enhance our reading experience. She makes use of italics for Dragonese, capitalisation for emphasis, fact files and other inserts. Can your learners identify these and their purpose?

Pupils could also have a go at using these devices and experiment with Dragonese to write a short story from Toothless' point of view.

Activity 6: Drop everything, let's Viking!

SOC 2-01a, SOC 2-02a, SOC 2-04a, SOC 2-06a

Have a 'drop everything, let's viking!' day where all your learning and activities are based around the Vikings. There are plenty of research opportunities here as well as collaboration with other classes or year groups. For example, you could share these [10 facts about Vikings](#) from NatGeo Kids and the [BBC Bitesize pages on Vikings](#).

For STEM activities, you could run a [Viking Animation Project using Scratch](#), or challenge the children to [design their own Viking ship](#).

Activity 7: How to Train Your Dragon word games

LIT 2-21a

Hold a *How to Train Your Dragon* word tournament using games like scrabble, Boggle or Bananagrams. All words used must be linked to the novel and just for once, proper names would be allowed! This could be a challenge across the upper

years and take place over the course of a few days/weeks to increase learners' skills in these literacy games. Like the Top Trumps, Winning Moves provides sets of Bananagrams for free when you register for their [Bananagrams School Club](#), although they do have a limit each year and close the actual challenge once they have reached their subscription maximum.

Activity 8: Dragon folklore

RME 2-07a, RME 2-09b, LIT 2-25a, LIT 2-06a

Select different periods in history and different areas of the world. Find out about the myths and legends about dragons which were believed by people at these times. Develop a portfolio of dragon myths and beliefs and use these to write dragon tales of your own. Look at the illustrations in medieval texts and use these to inspire the illustration of your tales.

Make a long wall display, Scottish Tapestry style with sections for each dragon tale; either the established tales you have researched or the originals you have made.

The [Encyclopedia Dramatica website](#) and the [KidsKonnnect dragon facts](#) can help with this research.

Film learning activities

Activity 1: Use of narrator and character development

LIT 2-02a, LIT 2-04a, LIT 2-07a, LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-24a, ENG 2-27a

The film's opening sequence is narrated by Hiccup. You are instantly on his side and immediately relate to him. Discuss how this 'sets up' the rest of the film for you and what the director is achieving here. The other characters are introduced through Hiccup which gives you his perspective on them. Do your perceptions change over the course of the film or does this device speed up the development of a character? Does this view of a character remain fixed for the rest of the film? In a novel, descriptive language is used to aid the reader to create their own mental picture, but in the film, we are given an immediate visual. How then do we build empathy with these characters?

Print off stills of the main characters and have your pupils select one to focus on. Ask them to jot down notes as they watch to be able to produce a written character description later. How does this compare to the book's descriptions? Is their character even in the book? If not, why has the character been introduced into the film? The most obvious character to discuss here is Astrid who is Hiccup's 'love interest' in the film although officially she is there to give the film a strong female role model. Why would this be considered necessary? Does she fulfil this role?

Write your own narration for the opening of the film, or another film of your choice. Have a go at voice overs and see what it brings to the films you have chosen. The Voiceover Gurus Blog has lots of [tips to perfect your narration technique](#).

Activity 2: Film themes

LIT 2-02a, LIT 2-04a, Lit 2-29a, HWB 2-44b

One of the main themes of the film is strained father/son relationships. Another is the forbidden friendship between Hiccup and Toothless. Watch the film with the recurring themes as a focus. What other themes can we see emerging? Discuss how successful the filmmakers have been. Have they missed any that could have been pursued with more intent or is a children's film the place for big themes to be discussed? If you are also reading the novel, how do these themes differ in both storylines? Why might this be?

Have a general class discussion using cooperative learning techniques such as [carousel](#) or [placemat](#) group chat and if you have time planning, write a piece of persuasive writing based on your findings.

Activity 3: Use of accent, vocabulary and slang

LIT 2-02a, ENG 2-03a

There is an interesting discussion to be had about the use of accent or dialect, in this case, in the film, but this could be extended to consider television and the evolution of regional accent over received pronunciation. All the adults in the film have Scottish

accents but the youngsters, Hiccup included, speak with American accents. Ask your class what they think about the following questions:

- What is the director trying to achieve here? How does this affect how we feel about the characters, does it make a difference?
- Why are Vikings speaking with Scottish accents anyway?
- The directors have said that the use of the accent change was to show the older generation making way for the next generation of Vikings. What does your class think about this?

Use this to prompt a discussion about accent, spoken grammar and general speaking skills. What importance should we place on how we speak and the words we use? Try to tease out an understanding of where text speak is acceptable. There is considerable debate out there just now about whether we should desist from using words children don't know, or if this is one of our roles as educators.

Activity 4: The music score

EXA 2-19a

Music always plays a big part in films. This film won an Oscar nomination for its score by John Powell. He used the work of the Finnish composer Sibelius to inspire him. Listen to a segment of "[Finlandia](#)" by Sibelius and compare (the full video is 9 minutes and 36 seconds, but you only need to play the first couple of minutes or so). There are hints of pipes and drums there too (the theme tune was used in the Edinburgh Military Tattoo 2011).

Discuss what purpose the music in this film fulfils. Look at recurring themes within the music- can you identify them and any slight variations? When are they used? Do different characters have their own compositions?

Put groups of children together to either recreate the music, or to develop their own film scores. Pupils can listen to the movie score through the internet, rather than replaying the film. Listen to 'Romantic Flight' and 'Test Drive' to get you started.

Activity 5: Use of animation with little or no dialogue

LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-26a, ENG 2-27/31a

Toothless communicates through sound and facial expressions. The production team chose a puma on which to base his image, which has some elements of horses and dogs as well as a little bit of Stitch from *Lilo and Stitch*. Watch the scenes where Hiccup and Toothless interact with only short phrases of dialogue from Hiccup – for example, the scene around 28 minutes into the film where Hiccup feeds Toothless a fish, they play a game and start to become friends. If you could, what dialogue would you write for Toothless? You may find you need to ‘tweak’ Hiccup’s dialogue too. What words would you use? Have your learners write the screenplay for a scene of their choice.

Extend this to other films. Pixar shorts work well for this sort of exercise to. Use one of the clips below for a whole-class example before dividing your class up to look at different shorts. Have the groups write their screen plays and perform them to the rest of the class.

Pixar’s shorts are available on DVD but some clips can also be found on [Pixar’s YouTube channel](#). Some good options for this task are:

- [Dante’s Lunch – A Short Tail](#) (1 minute, 55 seconds)
- [The Blue Umbrella](#) (26 seconds)
- [La Luna](#) (30 seconds)

Activity 6: A ‘beautiful oops’

HWB 2-11a

Early in the film, Hiccup persists in trying to befriend his Night Fury dragon through various actions e.g. bringing him fish. There is a defining moment when Toothless allows Hiccup to raise his hand and touch the dragon on his muzzle (32 minutes into the film). There is a slight pause as he does this, which was originally a technical glitch within the animation. It was agreed that the slight pause gave more poignancy

to the moment, and hence the glitch was left in.

There is a big emphasis in education to help children to understand that it is perfectly 'safe' to make mistakes; that mistakes should be regarded as a positive aspect of our learning and that we can make something from them. This technical hitch is a lovely example to share with them – a 'beautiful oops'.

You could share [Beautiful Oops by Barney Saltzberg](#) with pupils. *Beautiful Oops* is a great picture book which celebrates the creative potential in making mistakes. The [Mindset Kit resource on celebrating mistakes](#) may also be helpful for this discussion.

Discuss the following questions with pupils:

- Everyone makes mistakes. What are all the different reasons why someone might make a mistake?
- Is making a mistake always a bad thing? In what ways could making a mistake be a good thing?

You might like to try a carousel task asking your class in their groups to respond to each of the words written on large sheets of paper- one word per sheet e.g. mistakes, risk, courage, perseverance, effort, success and creativity. Discuss their responses and why you wanted them to complete this to develop a receptive attitude to mistakes.

Invite your learners to share their mistakes during plenary sessions to reduce the 'taboo' around them. This can be linked into the idea that it's okay to ask for help - it's a strength, not a weakness.

Activity 7: Prosthetics

HWB 2-09a, HWB 2-10a, HWB 2-21a, Soc 2-16a

Gobber the Viking has a prosthetic arm. Over the course of the film he is shown with 14 different attachments. Hiccup ends up losing his foot and has a prosthetic too.

Lots of joking goes along with cartoon characters who wear a prosthetic and this film uses a very light touch to let us know about Hiccup's injury. It is not shown to be a

hindrance or a disability for him and he goes on to do great things in the next film.

How does this affect children in real life? There are many reasons why children might lose a limb. How do they cope, what support is available to them and how might we make their lives easier in school and out? How can we adapt activities and events to ensure they are able to take part and be included? Perhaps there is someone within your school community who has experience of this and can be asked to come in and discuss how they manage and what others can do to be of help.

Pupils could research charities who provide services for people who have amputated or absent limbs, like [Finding Your Feet](#) and [Team Unlimbited](#), to learn more about this. They could also research role models such as famous Paralympians.

Can your class plan an awareness/fundraising day? They might include activities for others to try which highlight difficulties, sporting action adjusted to meet their needs. Checking into the backgrounds of your families before contemplating this activity would be advisable.

Activity 8: The Northern Lights

SOC 2-09a, SOC 2-10a

The Northern Lights feature in the background of the flying scenes with Hiccup and Astrid. Investigate this phenomenon as a class and present your findings to another class – [The Conversation website](#) and the [Northern Lights Centre website](#) will help.

There are lots of places in Scotland where the Northern Lights are visible. Ask pupils to research [places in Scotland where you can see the Northern Lights](#), and create a map to show these different locations. Pupils could find out facts about the different places, what time of year the Northern Lights are visible in each location, and include photos or illustrations. They could also come up with a key or colour coding system to show how strong the Lights are in each place.

Depending on where you live, you may be able to see the Northern Lights from your

home - you can check whether the Aurora is likely to be seen in Scotland by following [Aurora Watch](#).

Making use of your local library

How to Train Your Dragon is an extremely successful franchise with 12 books, a film trilogy, 4 short films, a television series, a graphic novel and even a stage play/musical. Ask your library if they can help you by lending your class any of these other resources to compare and enjoy!

Activity 1: The twelve book series

LIT 2-01a, LIT 2-11a, ENG 2-12a

There are twelve books in Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon* series. It's unlikely that many schools will have copies of all twelve but your local library should be able to help you with this. Pair up your class to peer read-and-share one or other of the novels. Wrap them all up in paper and have the pairs select by lucky dip or raffle ticket. Alternatively, pin up a list of all the books and have the pairs sign up to the title of their choice.

The pairs can then be given class time to read their book giving regular updates to the rest of the class along the way. Notes can be taken as they read to allow them the opportunity to develop a report of their novel in a style of their choice once they have finished. The library or librarians could be involved by encouraging the pairs to report back to them. The library may agree to you creating a display about the novels. You may wish to leave the very last book in the series to be a whole class experience for 'closure'!

Activity 2: Readathon

LIT 2-01a

Arrange a readathon at your library where different classes attend the library for ½ hour stints reading aloud the text as far along as they can before passing on to the next class until the novel is finished. Treat it as a Guinness World Record style event

and challenge other schools to beat you! Investigate the other [reading records](#) held - could you re-enact any of them on a mini scale?

Activity 3: Books and afternoon tea

EXA 2-01a, ENG 2-03a, LIT 2-06a

Hold an afternoon tea event where your class will take part in an intergenerational activity by reading to the older members of your community. This may need to take place in your local residential Home but the library may be able to help you with resources.

Serve tea and scones and reading aloud. This wouldn't have to be *How to Train Your Dragon*, it could be some of the children's classics which may appeal more to your listeners and trigger some very happy memories for them. Your class could research appropriate reading materials. They could complete some surveys of their potential listeners to see which children's books they would like to revisit.

Whole school activities

Activity 1: Film afternoon

SOC 2-22a, HWB 2-14a

Hold a film afternoon for the whole school and watch the film together. Later use this experience for vertical learning activities such as artwork for corridor displays, written film reviews, blogs and vlogs. Classes could write a report about the similarities and differences between the book and the film.

Have classes use the event as an enterprise project organising healthy snacks to sell. The money raised could perhaps be donated to charity.

Activity 2: Dragon art

EXA 2-05a

Hold a 'dragon doodle day' where every class is invited to join in: roll out long sheets of paper the length of your hall, or corridors, and provide pens and colouring pencils.

Agree a set of rules e.g. avoid drawing over someone else's doodle, venture only kind comments on another doodle and ensure all doodles are socially acceptable. If the weather is suitable, take the doodle outside with chalks instead and cover the whole playground!

Activity 3: Reading on...

LIT 2-01a, LIT 2-11a, ENG 2-12a

Who else writes about dragons? Select other novels with dragon related storylines and have a dragon-fest of reading. Older classes could select passages to read to younger classes. Compare the treatment of dragons in the different novels, and in particular, the relationship between humans and dragons, for example:

- *The Dragonsitter* by Josh Lacey
- *Dragons at Crumbling Castle* by Terry Pratchett
- *The Dragon Stoorworm* by Theresa Breslin
- *Tell Me a Dragon* by Jackie Morris
- *Dragon Rider* by Cornelia Funke
- *The Boy Who Grew Dragons* by Andy Shepherd
- *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* by Kelly Barnhill

Further resources

- For more Scottish folklore, see our resource on [Scottish myths and legends](#)
- For more learning activities using film, see our [Book reviews and trailers on film resource](#) with IntoFilm or our [How to create your own stop motion animation resource](#)
- For more cross-curricular book projects for Second Level, see our resources on [A Kind of Spark](#), [Tidy](#) or [Who Let the Gods Out?](#)