

REEL TO REAL TEACHERS' RESOURCE

Belle

Understand more about the world of the film
Key Stage 3–5: English, Drama and History

INTO
FILM

V&A

Reel to Real: Belle

Key Stage 3–5: English, Drama and History

Introduction

This resource is intended for teachers to use with their students on site at the V&A. It was created as part of a partnership with education charity Into Film.

The resource explores the film *Belle*. It guides students to objects in the Museum that provide historical context for the film, and suggests activities and topics for discussion. The resource aims to immerse students in the world of the film.

We suggest that groups divide into pairs to follow the activities.

Film summary

Belle is inspired by the true story of Dido Elizabeth Belle. The illegitimate, mixed-race daughter of a Royal Navy admiral, she is brought as a child to be raised in an aristocratic home. An outsider, she is left on the sidelines as her cousin Elizabeth seeks suitors for marriage. She meets an idealistic young vicar's son, caught up in a legal battle over a sunken slave ship. Drawn to his passion for changing society, she questions her own situation.

At the Museum

Visit the following galleries to provide a context for *Belle*. Use this resource in conjunction with the V&A Map.

Britain 1760–1900, Level 2, Room 52

Belle and Lady Elizabeth have their portraits painted in the film. Find the panel *Portraiture*. Choose a portrait and look at the background. Is it set inside or outside? What do you think the facial expressions communicate about the character? Do you think the artist tried to paint his subject naturalistically or do they look posed?

Key scenes in the film take place in a 'Pleasure Garden'. In a different part of this long gallery, find *Public Entertainments 1730–1760*.

Watch the short film next to the text panel. What comparisons might there be between social media communication and how people gathered and chatted in a place like Vauxhall Gardens?

Britain 1500–1760, Level 4, Room 118a

Find the panel *Trade 1700–1800*. Belle lives in a world of luxury. How do the objects in this room communicate the idea of luxury? Discuss what they are made from, where they were produced and what influenced their design.

Fashion, Level 1, Room 40

Find the case *Court and Country 1750–1800*. Discuss what it might feel like to wear this clothing. Is the clothing loose-fitting or tight? How might you stand, walk or sit in it? Is the fabric heavy or light? Is the style formal or informal, complicated or simple?

Sculpture, Level 1, Room 24

Look at the portrait busts in the middle of this room, made in the 18th and early 19th centuries. What do you think the sculptor is trying to say about the person being portrayed? Do they look relaxed and happy or posed and imposing? Do you think you are meant to relate to them or to be in awe of them?

Follow-up activities/find out more

Search the V&A collections for resources connected to the issue of slavery. Type 'slavery' here:
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

Study images of slavery and Britain's involvement with the slave trade: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/i/images-of-slavery-and-abolitionism/>

Read the article 'The Black Presence in the White Home':
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/silver-service-slavery-the-black-presence-in-the-white-home/>

For a reading list on slavery and the African diaspora go to:
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/reading-list-slavery-african-diaspora/>

The National Video Archive of Performance (NVAP) is a collection of recordings of live UK theatre. Contact bookings.office@vam.ac.uk to make an appointment. A full list of recordings is available here:
www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/nvap/

Continue learning through film by setting up a free Into Film Club at your school. www.filmclub.org/register. Access a catalogue of over 4000 film titles including those in the Reel to Real programme, as well as curriculum-linked resources created in partnership with the V&A.
<http://www.intofilm.org/>