

National Theatre Collection



Hex

Cross-Curricular Learning Guide

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Introduction to the production

Recommended Age Group: Upper KS2

With lyrics written by the National Theatre's then Director, Rufus Norris, this production uses the traditional tale of 'Sleeping Beauty' and transforms it into a powerful and rich story that focuses on the fairy responsible for the curse, the hex.

Using captivating stage design, costume and powerful songs and music to guide the audience through the story, it offers audiences of all ages a theatrical treat.

The creative decision to retell, to reimagine a story from the perspective of an alternative character in the narrative offers fantastic opportunities for further in-class learning. Calling on previously acquired knowledge of traditional and fairy tales, myths and legends, one is led to question: how might the story be changed, the overarching message altered, if a story was told from a different viewpoint?

Cross-curricular in-class learning opportunities include:

- English
- History
- Geography
- PSHE

This Cross-Curricular Learning Guide illustrates how primary school teachers can use this production to support teaching across curriculum subjects such as English, History, Geography and PSHE. This guide offers sequences of activities and suggested lesson structures.

Any activity highlighted in red can be found in the Creative Learning Activity Guide, a separate document found on the [National Theatre Collection](#) and [National Theatre Learning Hub](#). That guide offers step by step instructions on how to deliver the exercises.

Synopsis

Deep in a forest live a clan of fairies – offering blessings to all creatures from high in the air. They are ‘above it all’, except for one, who is without wings. Her name is **Fairy**.

Secretary Smith from the Palace comes to the forest, to find a fairy to help make the king and queen’s baby princess sleep. He tells Fairy that she is ‘The One’.

Fairy desperately wants to prove her worth as a fairy so she goes to the palace. The exhausted **Queen Regina** and **King Rex** want Fairy to put a blessing on their daughter to make her sleep. But **Princess Rose** isn’t sleepy, and fairies only bless people with what they want, not what other people want for them. Staff in the palace trap Fairy and rip off her pretend wings, forcing her to make the Princess sleep. Finally, Fairy, scared, humiliated and upset, goes against her own rule and does what the Queen demands: ‘Before Rose is 16 she will be pricked by a Thorn and sleep, not ever waking ‘til her winning prince kisses her’. But this is a hex rather than a blessing and Fairy loses all her power.

The next 16 years sees the **equerries** of the palace and Fairy protect an adventurous Rose from the naughty **thorns**. However, on the evening of her sixteenth birthday, Rose is pricked, and falls into a deep sleep.

The next hundred years turn into a quest for Fairy to undo the curse, as she searches for Rose’s winning prince. Having lost her magic and self-belief, Fairy’s task isn’t an easy one, with all visiting princes also falling into a deep sleep when pricked by the thorns.

Just as Fairy gives up, a pitiful Queenie cries for help. Queenie is an ogress, but she is pregnant with a human child. She begs for Fairy’s help to bless her, so she won’t eat her baby. But how could a wingless fairy without magic be of any assistance?

When Fairy discovers that Queenie is immune to the aggressive thorns, she thinks she may be able to undo the curse – with the kiss of Queenie’s prince once he grows up. Fairy must stop Queenie from eating her boy! She places a series of pretend blessings upon Queenie, which work. Queenie doesn’t eat her baby, and Fairy happily stays with her in the castle while the baby grows.

Prince Bert becomes a ‘brave, cute and troubleshooter’ prince, and Fairy’s wish comes true. Immune to the thorns, Bert successfully makes it to Rose’s palace and awakes her with a kiss.

The curse is finally broken, and the other princes – who have also been asleep – begin to wake up, as Queenie calls Bert back to the castle for dinner time.

Two years pass, and the princes continue to wish for the day when they will be winners.

One day, Rose and Bert turn up at Queenie's castle with their twin children **Duncan** and **Dilys**. This plunges Fairy into her next dilemma. On meeting her grandchildren for the first time, Queenie understands that Fairy has betrayed her and only came to the castle in the first place in order to use her son to wake up the sleeping princess. She instructs Fairy to cook Duncan and Dilys so she can eat them. Fairy tries to put one of her pretend blessings on Queenie to cure her of these urges, but Queenie exposes Fairy as a fraud without any magic. Fairy is appalled but must do her best to 'Fix It' and save the babies. She tricks Queenie into eating some of the castle's animals - Goosey, Blair and Ratty – as she returns the babies unharmed to Rose. However, with the help of Smith-Smith, Rose discovers that Fairy was the one that put a curse on her as a baby and she tells Fairy that she never wants to see her again.

Fairy returns to the woods to seek comfort from the High Fairies. They tell her not to get involved in the world of humans. Bert finds Rose in the forest, with Dylis and Dylan. They have an argument about the princes and about Queenie.

Queenie is devastated that she has driven away Bert and Rose. She returns to her ogress form and walks the woods, finding Dylis and Dylan. But instead of eating them, she hugs them. Bert finds Queenie and doesn't realize it is his mother. He goes to kill her but Fairy stops him.

In the end, they realize, everyone has lied. Everyone has tried to hide their true self. But they realize that they are all loved for who they are.



Cross-Curricular Learning

English

- *Spoken Language: Physical; Linguistic; Cognitive; Social and Emotional*
- *Oracy (Leading to high-quality written outcomes)*
 - Whether using the play as part of an English unit of study or for the purposes of Foundation subject exploration (see Foundation subject learning suggestions), it is important to ensure that students have a full grasp of the narrative and are able to retell, discuss and question it with confidence.

The following activities can be used time and again for any narrative, ensuring your class possess a deep understanding of all events in the story:

WHY NOT:

- Follow a viewing of the production with **And Then** (see Creative Learning Activities)
- Building on from **And Then**, invite students to use **Group Speeds** (see Creative Learning Activities), to form partners and to carry out **3-2-1** (see Creative Learning Activities)
- Gather outcomes from **3-2-1** and consolidate thinking by establishing a shared set of 6 story beats before inviting students to carry out **Six-Part Story Method** (see Creative Learning Activities)
- Invite students to work in small groups or partners and to carry out **Story Stones** (see Creative Learning Activities), illustrating stones they have gathered as part of home learning or a class trip to a local outdoor area
- They will now be ready to carry out a written English activity with confidence and/or to apply their thinking to any of the following Foundation subject areas.

Reading - Comprehension

In particular:

Continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks; reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes; increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions; making comparisons within and across books; preparing poems and plays to read aloud and to perform, showing understanding through intonation, tone and volume so that the meaning is clear to an audience.

Script work:

- To understand scriptwriting fully, students should be able to study the features of a script and to examine the ways in which scriptwriting supports the creation of a performance piece: stage directions; character notes; the layout of dialogue.

Start this project by reading a scene from the script (see appendix 1).

Exploration of a scene from a script, prior to viewing the performed version will allow for predictions regarding staging, costume and characterisation. Conversations after watching the scene will encourage students to consider choices made by the director and to understand exactly how they interpreted the script. Questions you might explore with your students might be:

- How does it feel to read a script compared with other forms of writing? What aspects of a fiction text, for example, are missing from a script?
- How do we read a script? In our heads or out loud? Which method is most useful in allowing us to engage with it? Why?
- How might students decide to stage the play? How would their scenes compare to those seen in the National Theatre production?
- The writers chose 'Sleeping Beauty' as the basis for their production. Which other traditional or fairy tales, myths or legends, could they have chosen? Which alternative characters might they have selected as the new 'main character'? How would the story and message have changed?

WHY NOT:

- Use the National Theatre's *Hex* script (see appendix 1) to share the opening scene with students and discuss initial thoughts:
 - What they think the play might be about?
 - Where they think the play might be set/What do they think the world of the story might look like?
 - What do they think characters and costumes might look like?

Explain that a script is given to a director and a set designer who work together to create a 'set' – a stage for the story to be performed on. Tell students they are going to have the chance to try that job now and guide them through **Dioramas** and **Puppets** (see Creative Learning Activities).

- Use the dialogue in the opening scene to carry out **One Word Add** and **Speaking with Animation and Inflection** (see Creative Learning Activities). Students will now have set, characters and dialogue and are ready to perform their own opening scenes
- Explore the script, scrutinising the information that is provided and what is missing. Explain that set designers and directors have the job of adding detail to shape the world of the play and characterisation to give the play depth, context and to ensure it is engaging to the audience. Use **World of the Story Mind-Maps** and **Role on the Wall** with **Statues** and **Thought Tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities), inviting students to become set designers and directors
- Invite students to read the script and others during Guided Reading sessions. Explore how lines might be delivered and use **Speaking with Animation and Inflection** (see Creative Learning Activities) to elicit fantastic line delivery
- Use *Hex* as a starting point to identify other stories that could be adapted in the same way. Explore options by retelling traditional tales using **3-2-1** and **Story Machine** (see Creative Learning Activities)
- Explore how *Hex* gives a second chance to the character often referred to as the 'evil fairy' in 'Sleeping Beauty'. How do students perceive the 'Low Fairy' character in the play? Is she evil? What characteristics does she possess? Why does she do the things she does? Use this discussion as a basis to identify the characters that would be best placed to become the new 'main character' using **Role on the Wall with Statues** and **Thought Tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities) and use **Character POV** to create an initial version of the new narrative(s).



History

- *The Middle Ages: 14th century France and England; 17th century France and England; 19th century Germany and England;*
- *History of the role of women up to modern day*

The earliest known version of the 'Sleeping Beauty' tale is found between 1330 and 1344. Versions followed, written during the 17th century, in the 19th century by the Brothers Grimm and later by Walt Disney in the 20th century. Each feature similar events, though some are inappropriate for young audiences. *Hex* appears to use a selection of narrative points from across the versions.

Most adaptations do still place the narrative in the 14th century, with 'Sleeping Beauty' living in a Medieval castle. Here are some prompts to get you thinking about how you might use *Hex* to think about 14th century life...

- What was life in 14th century France like? How did young girls spend their time? Who ruled over France in the 14th century? How many castles were in France at that time? Who lived in them? How did princesses live?
- What was happening in England in the 14th century? Was life similar to those living in France?
- The story adapts with each retelling or rewrite, depending on the author and the time period. Why do we think that is? How did life differ between the 14th and 17th century in France? What was happening in Germany in the 19th century that inspired the Brothers Grimm to create their adaptation? How did the changes made by Walt Disney reflect the change in society by the 20th century?
- In the tale, the Queen wishes that her daughter marry a prince at the age of 16. What were the expectations of a princess in the 14th, 17th and 19th centuries?
- What does the story and study of life during these eras tell us about the role of women in historic times? Does this story fit with life today? How do we feel about the female characters we see in the production and in the original story? When did life start to change for women?

WHY NOT:

- Use ICT, non-fiction and other research materials to explore the time periods of each version of the story and use **Soft Start** (see Creative Learning Activities) to create complete overviews of life in each era
- Use research to create a list of people who would have inhabited a castle in the 14th century, from the king and queen to the servants and all of the other people who lived in castles during this period. Use **Role on the Wall with Statues and Thought Tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities) to bring them to life and to gather thoughts about life in their times
- Invite character groups from the Role on the Wall activity to make a list of activities they might do every day and use **Stop/Go with Actions** to see 14th century castle life in action
- Research the life of a royal family in 14th century France. Invite students to adopt the roles of king, queen, princess or prince and carry out **Paired Hot Seating** (see Creative Learning Activities) to gather insights into thoughts and feelings about the duties and expectations they experienced and any worries or fears they might have had
- Examine the female characters in the narrative of *Hex*, using the Role on the Walls created previously as a starting point. How do students feel about the role of women? Did the role of women change during any of the eras associated with a retelling of 'Sleeping Beauty' (14th, 17th, 19th and 20th centuries)? If so, how and if not, what factors stayed the same? How do the female characters in the narrative compare with women today? What would the story look like with 21st century female characters in it? Use **And Then** to retell the story (as suggested in English Spoken Language activities) and then carry out **STOP!** (see Creative Learning Activities) to identify narrative points the students feel they could update to create a narrative reflective of life for women today. This could be used to link in with writing in English for a modernised rewrite or as fuel for exploration into how the role of women changed so dramatically
- If deciding that the exploration into the role of women has changed is the area of most interest, follow on from STOP! by asking students to complete a Role on the Wall for the modern-day version of female characters. Compare and contrast the major differences. Explain that they are going to become history detectives, travelling back through time to identify when and how life changed for women. You could use the time periods in which the versions of 'Sleeping Beauty' were written as a starting point for research.

Geography

- *Location Knowledge;*
- *Place Knowledge;*
- *Physical and Human Geography;*
- *Geographical Skills*

‘Sleeping Beauty’ appears to have been set in northern France, in the Loire Valley, an area with an abundance of historic towns and villages, castles and fertile soils. The region is an outstanding cultural landscape, with modern life sitting alongside architecture from centuries past.

Despite authors of the different versions of the tale living in other locations, the narrative setting still appears the same – but is it? Is it possible that the Brothers Grimm or Walt Disney used settings from their own home countries, Germany and America? If so, where and what are the similarities between the region and the Loire Valley? If not, why not? – what are the differences between the alternative location and that of the original setting in the Loire Valley?

WHY NOT:

- Use ICT, maps, atlases, globes and non-fiction texts to research the Loire Valley in the 14th century, 17th century and in modern day, exploring their identifying human and physical characteristics, key topographical features (including hills, mountains, coasts and rivers), and land-use patterns. You can then use World of the Story Mind-Maps (see Creative Learning Activities) to create multi-sensory overviews for the region in each era, identifying features that have changed and those that have not
- Use the mind-maps from the last activity as the basis for further research, looking for possible alternative locations in Germany and America. Use knowledge relating to the position and significance of latitude, longitude, Equator, Northern Hemisphere, Southern Hemisphere, the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, Arctic and Antarctic Circles, the Prime/Greenwich Meridian and time zones (including day and night) to find suitable location candidates
- Study castles in the Loire Valley to identify the castle closest to the castle we imagine Sleeping Beauty to have lived in. Use Masking Tape Worlds (see Creative Learning Activities) to map out the location. Now repeat this activity for the second and possible third location, such as a castle in Germany. Compare and contrast the locations, considering all human and physical features
- Use the above activities to link to English writing objectives and either create guides to the world(s) of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ or to create setting descriptions for script or fiction writing.

PSHE

- *Health and Wellbeing; Relationships H17.*
- *To recognise that feelings can change over time and range in intensity*
 - Low Fairy does not have wings and is not allowed to join the other fairies on high. They have a superiority over her and use unkind language about and towards her. Low Fairy does not tell them to stop or acknowledge her emotions. Instead, she revels in the praise she receives from Secretary Smith, believes herself to finally have a value and is ultimately heartbroken when she is once again denigrated by the Queen and her staff. The hex she places on baby Rose is her reaction to the emotional turmoil she feels inside. How might things have been different if she had 'strategies to respond to feelings, including intense or conflicting feelings' or knew 'how to manage and respond to feelings appropriately and proportionately in different situations'? (H20, PSHE Programme of study, PSHE Association)
 - Low Fairy does all she can to protect Rose following the hex and to ensure she has a 'happily ever after' despite her actions. Throughout the play we see her struggle with her failures and doubting her skills and self-worth. We as the audience see her strengths and could help her to reframe her thinking. (H28 and H29, PSHE Programme of study, PSHE Association)
 - Towards the conclusion of the play, we see the return of the High Fairies. They are still unkind and superior but Low Fairy wants to be included by them and to be above everything. She agrees to go with them even though they have always excluded her. What guidance could we give the High Fairies to alter their treatment? How could we help Low Fairy to recognise and manage 'peer influence and a desire for peer approval in friendships'? Or guide her by providing strategies 'to respond to hurtful behaviour'? (R14, 15, 19-21, PSHE Programme of study, PSHE Association)

WHY NOT:

- Use **Role on the Wall with Statues and Thought Tapping** (see Creative Learning Activities) to create a detailed characterisation of Low Fairy and the High Fairies. Gather thoughts and feelings, using moments in the script to guide questioning
- Use **Cardiogram** (see Creative Learning Activities) to map out Low Fairy's feelings and emotions against key story points from the play (created using the English: Spoken Language Activities)
- Use outcomes from Role on the Wall and Cardiogram to identify key moments for **Conscience Alley** (see Creative Learning Activities) to help Low Fairy with the challenges she faces or to alter the High Fairies' treatment of her
- Follow each Conscience Alley advice-giving session with a Circle Time using **Web of Trust** (see Creative Learning Activities) to encourage students to share thoughts and feelings in a supportive environment
- Gather advice given during Conscience Alleys to create helpful advice booklets for students around the school, exploring themes of acknowledging and responding to feelings appropriately, how to identify our skills, strengths, achievements and to realise our self-worth and/or advice regarding peer influence and how to respond to hurtful behaviour
- Perhaps your class could start a 'Low Fairy Friendship Squad'.



Other Learning Activities

Linked Texts

As a traditional tale, the opportunities for linking the production to other texts are plentiful. Whether you want to explore similar texts or scripts in Guided Reading, populate your reading corner or make recommendations for home reading books, the following is just an example of the selection you'll be able to find:

Scripts

Philip Pullman's Grimm Tales (stage version) adapted by Philip Wilson, original author Philip Pullman

Peter Pan (stage version) by J.M. Barrie, adapted by Evan Placey and Vikki Stone

The Secret Garden (stage version) by Frances Hodgson Burnett, adapted by Elizabeth Newman

Christmas Carol: A Fairy Tale (stage play) by Piers Torday, original author Charles Dickens

Beauty and the Beast (National Theatre stage version) by Lucy Kirkwood and Katie Mitchell

Beauty and the Beast (Lyceum Theatre stage version) by Stuart Paterson

Traditional Tales

Grimm Tales: For Young and Old by Philip Pullman (Author)

Forgotten Fairy Tales of Brave and Brilliant Girls (Illustrated Story Collections) by Various (Author, Illustrator)

A Year Full of Stories: 52 folk tales and legends from around the world: 1 by Angela McAllister (Author), Christopher Corr (Illustrator)

Modern-Day Texts

The Day I Fell Into a Fairytale by Ben Miller (Author), Daniela Jaglenka Terrazzini (Illustrator)

The Book of Stolen Dreams (The Stolen Dreams Adventures) by David Farr (Author), Kristina Kister (Illustrator)

The Firework-Maker's Daughter by Philip Pullman (Author), Peter Bailey (Illustrator)

In Darkling Wood by Emma Carroll

Rumaysa: A Fairytale by Radiya Hafiza (Author), Rhaida El Touny (Illustrator)

The Secret in the Tower by Andrew Beattie

Reading Corner Themes

WHY NOT:

Use one of the locations from the narrative to inspire and inviting and engaging reading corner? If you have carried out **World of the Story Mind Maps** (see Creative Learning Activities) during your exploration of the play or created **Dioramas** (see Creative Learning Activities), you'll all be in a perfect place to create a large- scale version.



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APPENDIX 1 - Extract from Hex Script

FOREST

An OGRE roars. Three gloriously cool HIGH FAIRIES float down from the sky.

(# 1) 1, 1 NATURE OF THE BEAST

HIGH FAIRIES

AAAAH AAAAH AAAAH
AAAAH AAAAH AAAAH
AAAAH AAAAH AAAAH

HIGH-DEE

Oh. A blessing before we've even started - where's low fairy?

HIGH-CHI

Grubbing round in the muck somewhere?

HIGH-ME

Digging to find herself a pair of wings...

HIGH-DEE

Quick, let's crack on, High Fairies, unencumbered.

HIGH FAIRIES

COME TO SEE THE FAIRIES
COME TO SEE THE FAIRIES
COME TO SEE THE
COME TO SEE THE
COME TO SEE THE
COME TO SEE THE FAIRIES
IN THE WOOD

FAIRY joins the song, completely at odds with the High Fairies' sound, as she hobbles in.

HIGH-DEE

Oh, grim.

FAIRY

Sorry! I was just checking to see if anyone was... around.

HIGH-DEE

Ready to bless?

HIGH-CHI

Ready to bless.

HIGH-ME

Ready to bless.

FAIRY

I'm ready to bless, too. Always.

ROSES appear.

HIGH-DEE

ROSES
WANT THE SUNSHINE
TO HELP THEM GROW SO HIGH

ALL

UNTIL THEY DIE

(Fairy doesn't always sing with the others)

PLUCKY LITTLE ROSES
WE CAN GIVE YOU RELEASE
FROM THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

*In turn, the High fairies bless the roses with strong
sunlight. The flowers bloom. Fairy blesses them
with a swarm of insects.*

HIGH FAIRIES

Aaah!

HIGH-DEE

Oh, insects!

FAIRY

They're bees!

HIGH-CHI

(panicky)

Get them away from me!

FAIRY

They need bees to pollinate, don't you, roses?

HIGH-DEE

Must you be so *literal*?

Various creatures skip on, including a DEER.

HIGH-DEE

CREATURES
WANT OTHER CREATURES
TO HELP THEM MULTIPLY

ALL

UNTIL THEY DIE

EAGER LITTLE CREATURES
WE CAN GIVE YOU RELEASE
FROM THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

*(High-Dee blesses the deer with a mate. High-Chi
and High-Me follow up with romantic blesses)*

THE NATURE OF THE
NATURE OF THE
NATURE OF THE BEAST
/THE NATURE OF THE
NATURE OF THE
NATURE OF THE BEAST (ETC)

FAIRY

(at the same time)

/NA NA NA NA NA NA NA NA
NA NA NA NA NA NA NA NA
NA NA NA NA NA NA NA NA
NA NA NA NA NA NA (ETC)

*Although her confidence is blunted, Fairy continues
to bless with enthusiasm. She blesses the FEMALE
DEER, who immediately gives birth.*

FEMALE DEER

Waaaah! Waaaah!

HIGH-CHI

Oh, gross.

HIGH-ME

That's disgusting.

HIGH-DEE

So unpalatable!

FAIRY

It's natural, though.

HUMANS appear.

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Thank you