

Educational Worksheets
for Secondary Schools



the story



Adventure, action and danger await 12 year old Brendan who must fight Vikings and a serpent god to find a crystal and complete the legendary Book of Kells.

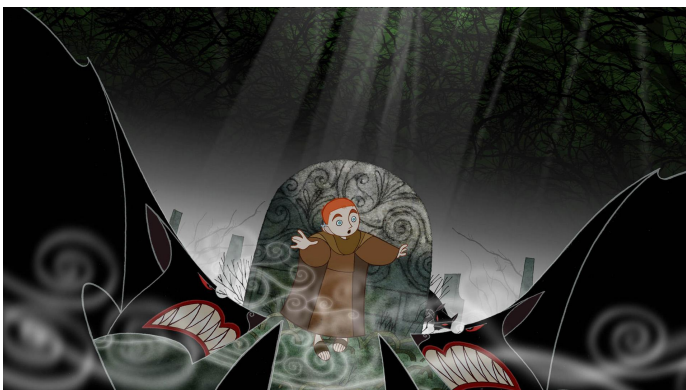
Brendan is hard at work with his uncle, Abbott Cellach and the other monks, helping to strengthen the abbey walls as protection against the Viking raids. But a new life of adventure begins with the arrival of Brother Aidan, a celebrated master illuminator who initiates Brendan into the art of illumination, awakening his hidden, but extraordinary talents.

In order to finish the magnificent book, Brendan has to overcome his deepest fears on a secret quest that will take him for the first time ever, beyond the abbey walls into the enchanted forest where dangerous mythical creatures hide. It is here that he meets the fairy Aisling, a mysterious young white wolf/girl, who will become his closest friend and helper.

BUT with the terrifying Viking Hordes closing in, will Brendan succeed in his quest to illuminate the darkness and prove that enlightenment is the best fortification against barbarians?

Brendan's Secrets

In one scene of the film there is Latin text.
Translated into English it reads:
And so the little monk became better and better
at illumination but stayed mediocre at latin.



animation

The Secret of Kells is an unusual film in many ways. For one using a 1200 year old book, written by monks as the inspiration for a film is extremely unusual. Tomm Moore, the director of the film, also made a deliberate decision to use a mix of traditional animation techniques as well as utilising computer generated animation.



Think about other animated films you have seen. What are the differences between them and the Secret of Kells.

Brendan's Secrets

The Book of Kell's was written 800 years after the arrival of St Patrick in Ireland.

What do you think about the style used in The Secret of Kells?



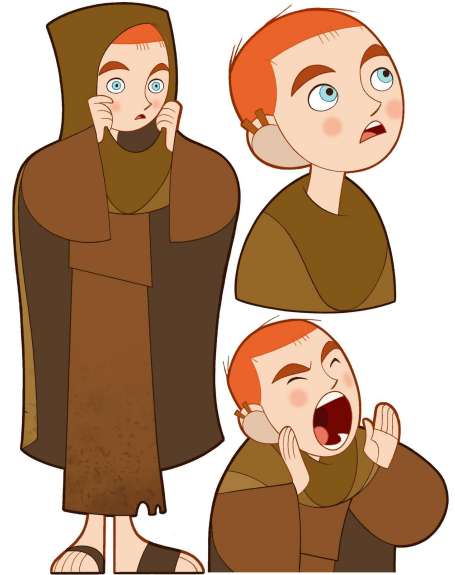
the characters

The image on the left show characters from THE SECRET OF KELLS at an early stage of development, while the images on the right are the final characters as we see them in the film.



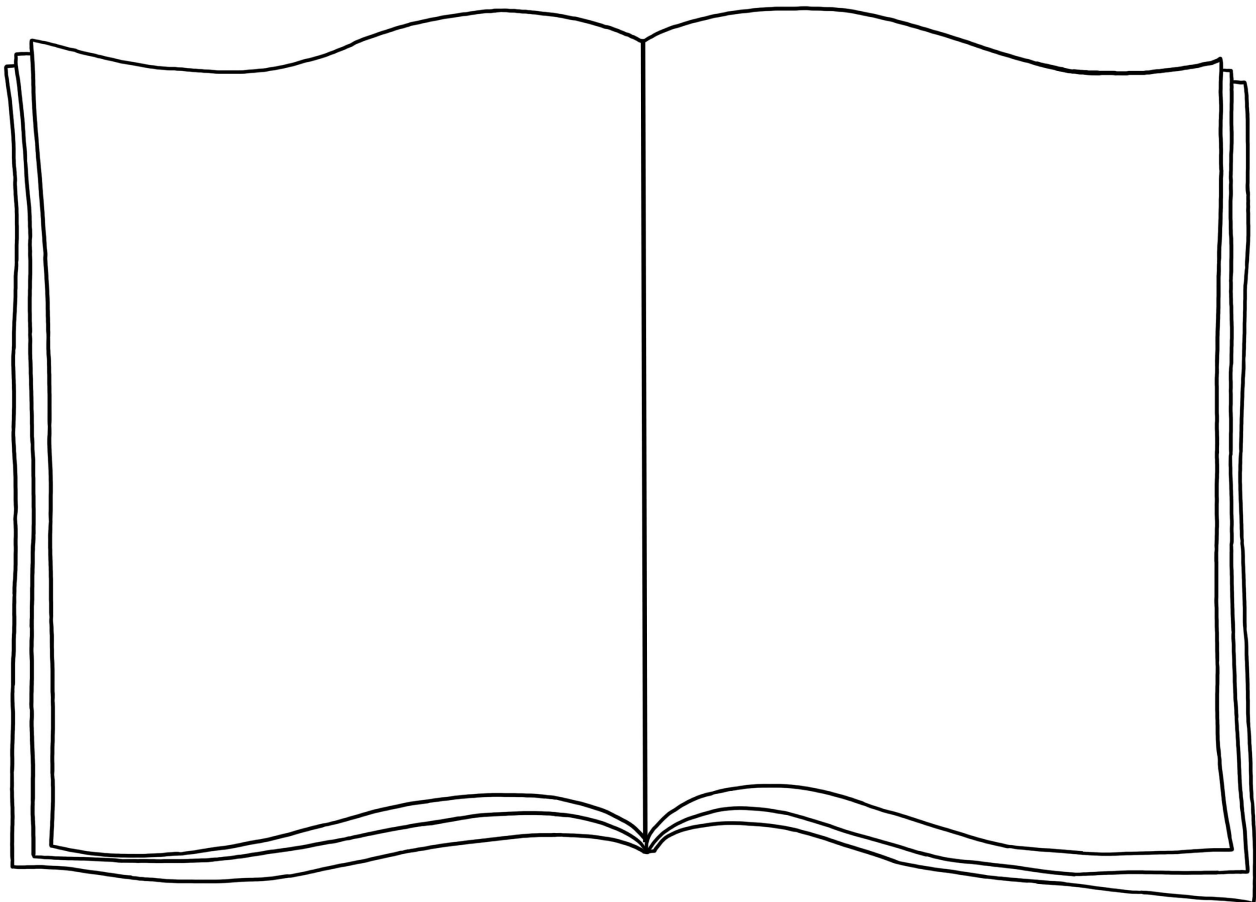
What differences do you notice?

What reasons can you think of why the film makers went with the characters on the right?



In THE SECRET OF KELLS Brendan is an illuminator, one of the illustrators of the Book of Kells. The term Illuminator, comes from the latin word Illuminare, which means to illuminate. The bright colours used in the creation of the Book of Kells make the pages seem like they are glowing.

Below is a blank page from the Book of Kells. Can you illuminate it with Celtic designs of your own?



irish history

In *The Secret of Kells* Brendan meets Aisling and her spiritual pet cat, Pangur Bán.

Pangur Bán is actually an Irish poem written by an unknown ninth century monk. There is some confusion about the attribution. Some sources say it was found in the margins of a manuscript in the Monastery of St Paul, Carinthia, Austria. Worse, it was on a copy of St. Paul's Epistles. Others say it was 'on the back' of a page the monk was copying.

Another reference says the monk was a student and it was written at Reichenau Monastery, on Lake Constance. While some believe that it was written while the monk was working on the Book of Kells!

Pangur bán

Messe agus Pangur Bán,
cechtar nathar fria shaindán:
bíth a menmasam fri seilgg,
mu menma céin im shaincheird.

Caraimse fos, ferr cach clú
oc mu lebrán, léir ingnu;
ní foirmtech frimm Pangur bán
caraid cesin a macdán

Ó ru biam, scél gan scís
innar tegdais, ar n-óendís,
táithiunn, díchríche cluis
ní fris tarddam ar n-áthius

Gnáth, húaraib, ar gressaib gal
glenaid luch inna línsam;
os mé, du-fuit im lín chéin
dliged ndoraid cu ndronchéill

Fúachaidsem fri frega fál
a rosc, a nglése comlán;
fúachimm chéin fri fégi fis
mu rosc réil, cesu imdis.

Fáelidsem cu ndéne dul
hi nglén luch inna géchrub;
hi tucu cheist ndoraid ndil
os mé chene am fáelid.

Cia beimmi a-min nach ré
ní derban cách a chéile
maith la cechtár nár a dán;
subaighthus a óenurán

Hé fesin as choimsid dáu;
in muid du-ngní cach óenláu;
du thabairt doraid du glé
for mu muid céin am messe.

Aistrithe ag Robin Flower



Pangur bán

I and Pangur Bán, my cat
'Tis a like task we are at;
Hunting mice is his delight
Hunting words I sit all night.

Better far than praise of men
'Tis to sit with book and pen;
Pangur bears me no ill will,
He too plies his simple skill.

'Tis a merry thing to see
At our tasks how glad are we,
When at home we sit and find
Entertainment to our mind.

Oftentimes a mouse will stray
In the hero Pangur's way:
Oftentimes my keen thought set
Takes a meaning in its net.

'Gainst the wall he sets his eye
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;
'Gainst the wall of knowledge I
All my little wisdom try.

When a mouse darts from its den,
O how glad is Pangur then!
O what gladness do I prove
When I solve the doubts I love!

What do you think the poem is about?

So in peace our tasks we ply,
Pangur Bán, my cat, and I;
In our arts we find our bliss,
I have mine and he has his.

Pangur perfect in his trade;
I get wisdom day and night
Turning darkness into light.
Practice every day has made

Aistrithe ag Robin Flower

irish history

The Book of Kells is a very rare treasure, not only because it is so old, but because it has such beautiful paintings in it. It is the gospel according to Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. It was written around 800 A.D. nearly 600 years before the invention of moveable printing characters in China and almost 400 hundred years after St Patrick arrived in Ireland. Two monasteries are important to the story of the Book of Kells: the monastery of Iona, an island near the west coast of Scotland, and the monastery of Kells in Co Meath. St Colum Cille (or Columba) was the founder of the monastery at Iona. We believe that the Book of Kells might have been written to honour the anniversary of his death.

It is considered one of the world's greatest treasures because it tells us so much about early medieval life in Ireland and because of the quality of the beautiful artwork. When it was written, over a thousand years ago, there were less than a half a million people living in Ireland. Now there are over 5 million. During this period, people lived and farmed in close communities along rivers and waterways that they had to defend against raiding groups.

There were three categories of social standing in a community. There were either slaves or hostages, peasants and soldiers, and tribal kings. These tribes often fought over land and Viking raids were widespread at the time of the creation of the Book of Kells. The monastery at Iona was moved to Kells some two hundred years after St Colum Cille's death because Viking raids made it too dangerous for the monks to continue living on the island.

Why do we think the Book of Kells was created?

What social divisions existed in communities in early Ireland?



music

As in many films, music plays a very important role in THE SECRET OF KELLS. The music in THE SECRET OF KELLS is provided by acclaimed French composer Bruno Coulais (Microcosmos, Les Choristes) and Irish traditional band Kila. Many traditional Irish instruments were used in creating the music for the film, including, uilleann pipes, Harp, Bodhrain and Fiddle. The music for the film was actually inspired by Sean-nos (old style) Irish singing as well as the monophonic chanting commonly practised by Monks. Music in film is used to enhance the visual images and create atmosphere and provoke emotional responses.

Pick your favourite scene from the film. In your opinion, how does the music enhance the film?

Brendan's Secrets

The Book of Kell's can be viewed at the Old Library Building in Trinity College Dublin.

