The Girl Who Leapt Through Time
Education Resource

The Girl Who Leapt Through Time, Mamoru Hosoda, Japan, 2006, 98 Mins
Japanese Language / English Subtitles
THE GIRL WHO LEAPT THROUGH TIME

*The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* is an anime directed by Mamoru Hosoda. This was his first film and he has followed it with *Summer Wars* (2010) and *Wolf Children* (2011). Hosoda has a distinctive visual style, with slightly faded or washed out clear, bright colours. His films are all set in modern times but this colour palette links them with the past and adds depth.

*The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* is an adaptation of a popular novel written by Yasutaka Tsutsui in the 1960s. It tells the story of high school student Makoto who finds herself caught between childhood and adulthood, reluctant to grow up and wanting everything to stay the same. When Makoto finds herself magically able to leap back in time, she becomes completely taken up with going back to the past so that she can change the events of the present.

INTRODUCING ANIME

Anime is a significant moving image form in Japan. It is the French word for animation but has come to be associated with a distinctive style of Japanese animation. Anime is interconnected with the Japanese love of manga, which could be loosely described as comics. Unlike western comics which primarily target children, manga cover a range of subjects, styles and themes and are read by Japanese people of all ages. Similarly, anime targets a more diverse audience than the majority of western animations and deals with different topics and themes. Although manga and anime emerged in Japan after World War 2, they are part of a centuries old tradition of telling stories through pictures.

ACTIVITIES

- Find out more about Japanese storytelling traditions like Emakimono.
- Ask students to bring in some manga and imagine how they might be animated.
- Students could create their own manga. This could be instructions for changing a tyre, a description of a historical event or an adventure story.
OSAMU TEZUKA

Japan’s most famous manga artist is Osamu Tezuka was a huge cinema fan and incorporated the techniques of cinema into his work to make it more visually exciting. Tezuka was also inspired by American animation conventions, in particular the portrayal of ‘cuteness’ in Disney films like Bambi. He was particularly taken with Disney’s use of big eyes and high foreheads to suggest innocence. Thanks to Tezuka’s influence, ‘big eyes’ have become a highly recognisable and distinctive feature of manga and anime characters.

When television broadcasting began in Japan, Tezuka transposed the style and stories that he had developed in print form to animation. He began with Astro Boy in 1963 and followed this with The Jungle Emperor. Each of these animes is very cinematic in a way that made these animations quite different from American animations made for TV at this time.

ACTIVITIES

- Find out more about Osamu Tezuka.
- Compare some examples of Tezuka’s manga with the anime version. (There are examples of Tezuka’s manga on the internet and some of the anime is on Youtube.) What are the similarities and what are the differences?
- Watch 5 minutes from an episode from Astro Boy or The Jungle Emperor. Identify the different shot types and describe their effect.

ANIME THEMES

Some key themes explored in anime are:

1. The relationship between people and the mechanised world explored through robots and machines and, more recently, computer technology.
2. The connection between people and nature.
3. Loss.
4. Time passing.

ACTIVITIES

- List the anime films or television shows you have seen and try to identify the themes. Have you noticed any patterns or recurring themes?
Find out more about Japanese history and culture and consider why these themes might occur in Japanese stories and moving image texts.

**HAYAO MIYAZAKI, STUDIO GHIBLI AND MAMORU HOSODA**

The most famous anime creator of feature films is Hayao Miyazaki of Studio Ghibli. Miyazaki’s films are noted for their rich, painterly visual style, strong female heroines, heartfelt themes and concern for the environment. Mamoru Hosoda, the director of *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, worked for Studio Ghibli before leaving to make his own distinctive contribution to the anime tradition. It is possible to see some of the influences of Miyazaki in his work including the look of some of the characters, the tough female hero and the fascination with people’s relationship to the past and the future.

At the same time, this comparison also works to emphasise the differences. For instance, where Miyazaki usually creates fantasy, often quasi-European settings for his stories, Hosoda is much more interested in presenting the world of present-day Japan but infusing it with magic and the unexpected.

**ACTIVITY**

- The Miyazaki film that has the most in common with *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* is *Kiki’s Delivery Service* – also a coming of age film. Choose a scene from *Kiki* and compare it with *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*. Focus on the visual appearance of the characters, the setting, the colours used, the animation effects and the personality of the main character.

**THE GIRL WHO LEAPT THROUGH TIME AS A TEEN FILM**

Just as Tezuka was inspired by American and European cinema in developing distinctive elements of manga and anime style, more recent manga and anime continue to borrow ideas from the stories and films from other cultures. In *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, Hosoda is working within the teen film genre, which is very much associated with Hollywood and with American teenagers. Teen films are about growing up and learning about yourself and this is what happens to Makoto.
ACTIVITIES

- Describe the aspects of *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* that make it a teen film.
- What are some of the teen film conventions that Hosoda uses?
- In a number of ways the lives and experiences of the Japanese high school students in this film seem very similar to the experiences of American teenagers. Explain.
- There are also ways that these students and their lives are quite different. Describe some of the differences.

CHARACTERISATION AND JAPANESE CULTURE
One of the reasons Japanese anime has become so popular with audiences outside Japan is that anime films are not the same as the American films we are so used to watching.

ACTIVITIES

- Focus on the character of Makoto to explore the difference between the American culture of individual achievement and the Japanese focus on group identity. Explain this idea with reference to specific scenes.
- What are some of the reasons that Makoto does not want to grow up?
- Why does she fear change so much?
- Do you think Makoto uses her ‘time-leaping’ power wisely?
- What does she learn from her experiences?
- Make a list of other key characters. Describe them and consider how they connect with Makoto’s story.

KEY THEME: TIME
In the classic American teen film that focuses on the challenges of growing up, the emphasis is very much on the future. This seems obvious but, of course, in *The Girl who Leapt Through Time*, the past, present and the future are interconnected.
ACTIVITIES

- Find out more about Japanese traditions and cultural ideas about time.
- What are some of the ways that the significance of the past is depicted in the film?
- How does Makoto destroy the balance between the past, present and the future?
- How does she restore it?

THE SETTING

*The Girl who Leapt Through Time* explores history and time through the setting of the story. As well as the real-life setting of the high school, the film is also set in a recognisable area of Tokyo known as the Shita Mache.

ACTIVITIES

- Describe the ‘world’ of the film.
- Research the real life setting and consider why it features in this film?
- How does the setting contribute to the theme of time?
- Consider the film and animation techniques used in communicating the importance of place in this film.

NARRATIVE

Anime filmmakers construct their stories or narratives differently from those that we are used to in western filmmaking.

ACTIVITIES

- In *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, the narrative structure reinforces the key theme. Explain.
- Visit a screenwriting website and explore the idea of the classic three-act structure that is the basis of most western feature films. Provide a brief summary.
- Compare this structure with the way that the story is told in *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*. At what point in the story does it break away from the typical western/Hollywood feature film? Explain.
- Did you find the ending problematic? Explain why.
• Consider the ending of *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* in relation to the idea of Wabi Sabi. Explain.

• If you were asked to rewrite the story to give it a more satisfying ending for western audiences, how would you do it?

• Explore this idea of the satisfyingly unresolved ending by rewriting the ending of a teen film of your choice.