

From *Rapunzel* to *Tangled* and beyond: Multimedia practices in the language and literature classroom

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Abstract

This is a classroom account of a project which consisted of a series of multimedia lessons that have been carried out with 11- and 12-year-old Language and Literature students in a bilingual school in the City of Buenos Aires with the aim of working with multimodal texts simultaneously. The lessons pivoted around the main characteristics of fairy tales as a literary genre and the identification of those elements in the film *Tangled* (2010); the relationship between the written version of the fairy tale *Rapunzel* by the Grimm Brothers and the film *Tangled* (2010), including the exploration of the idea of *fracture*; and a very general introduction to the concept of *remediation* defined by Bolter and Grusin (2000, p. 45) as “the representation of one medium in another.”

Keywords: fracture; genre analysis of fairy tales; multimedia; remediation.

Resumen

El presente artículo es un informe sobre un proyecto multimedia implementado en 2013 compuesto de una secuencia de actividades destinadas a alumnos entre 11 y 12 años de Lengua y Literatura en inglés de un colegio bilingüe de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires cuyo objetivo principal fue trabajar con textos multimodales en simultáneo. Las clases se desarrollaron en torno al análisis de los elementos que componen el género de los cuentos de hadas y la identificación de esos elementos en el film *Tangled* (2010); las relaciones entre la versión escrita del cuento *Rapunzel* de los Hermanos Grimm con el film *Tangled* (2010), una exploración de la idea de *fractura*; y finalmente una introducción muy general al concepto de *remediación* definido por Bolter y Grusin (2000, p.45) como “una representación de un texto de un medio a otro.”

Palabras clave: análisis del género de cuentos de hadas; cuento de hadas; fractura; multimedia; remediación.

THE GENERAL OBJECTIVE of this classroom account is to make connections between multimodal texts (written, video, digital) through the analysis of genre and the concept of remediation.

Teaching Sequence

Context of situation: The following teaching sequence was implemented in 2013 in a bilingual school in the City of Buenos Aires. Students aged 11-12 watched the Walt Disney film *Tangled* at home as pre-activity homework before the lessons.

Introduction

This article describes a series of lessons carried out with 11 and 12-year-old Language and Literature students in a private bilingual school in the City of Buenos Aires. It is a classroom account that employs multimedia. This presentation can be used as a guideline by teachers who are interested in working with multimodal texts simultaneously (written, video and digital) in their classroom practices.

The first part is dedicated to the discussion of the main characteristics of fairy tales as a literary genre and the identification of those elements in the film *Tangled* (2010). The second part compares the written version of the fairy tale *Rapunzel* by the Grimm Brothers and the film *Tangled* (2010) from the point of view of genre and the specificities of the film. It also explores the concept of *fracture*, a term that was originally used in the TV show *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*, an American animated television series aired in the 60's produced by Jay Ward Productions, in which short cartoons called, *Fractured Fairy Tales* were played for the creation of humour. According to the Paley Center for Media the term is popularly known as a trope that subverts or spoofs classical tales for the purpose of creating humour (<http://www.paleycenter.org/education-class-fractured-fairy-tales/>).

The last part of this project illustrates the work of remediation in such media as *Tangled* the film, the video game and the book app. The sources discussed include *Grimms' Rapunzel*, *Tangled Disney Comic* (2012), *Rapunzel's Revenge* (2008), *Tangled Video Game* (2010), *Tangled Storybook Deluxe* (2012), *Barbie Rapunzel* (2002) and *Tangled* (2010). The focus of the lessons has been the film *Tangled* (2010) for three reasons: to favour the work on multimedia, to break the traditional chronological line, a break that usually allows students to move more freely from present to past and from past to present; and finally to show students the multiple ways in which these texts are in dialogue or tangled, as the name of the film shows. Although the classroom practice has already taken place, the present account of good practice will be carried out in present tense throughout. The objective is not to give a step-by-step, detailed and comprehensive account of the methodological procedures used in class or to show

how students worked in the course of the lessons, but rather to give an overview of the contents of the different sessions for those teachers who might be interested in working with multimodal texts at the same time.

Part 1

Topic: Elements of Fairy Tales

The first part is an introduction to the genre of fairy tales based on Gates, Steffel and Molson (2003) with an exploration of the main elements of the genre in the film *Tangled* produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2010, a new *fractured* version of *Rapunzel* classical fairy tale by the Grimm Brothers written in the 19th Century. In class, we draw on the knowledge of the oral fairy tales the students have heard in their own language—Spanish—to list the most important elements: the settings such as enchanted castles, forests; cast of characters usually divided into good and evil such as kings, queens, princes, princesses, soldiers, peasants, witches, etc.; the roles of guardians such as mentors, fairy mothers, magical helpers; the role of witches and princes; the use of natural symbols such as day and night, rain and sun; the organisation of the plot in terms of adventure trips; some of the main themes such as mistaken identity, criticism of human weakness (gluttony, pride, curiosity, ambition) and glorification of human strengths (generosity, love); magic objects or persons with magic power such as wands, enchantments, elves, witches, animation, magic words, etc. Each element is presented with a brief oral explanation and some screenshots from the film and video clips which were edited with the software Microsoft Movie Maker and then inserted in separate Microsoft Powerpoint presentations to best illustrate the different discussion points.

Below you will find a few examples to illustrate the mechanics of this part of the lesson. In the first column, you can find references to screenshots and video clips while in the second column, you can read some oral explanations given by the teacher which may serve as suggestions to be taken into consideration when dealing with the elements of fairy tales in *Rapunzel*. The questions that appear in the second column were answered by the students in class but here, for the sake of simplicity and space, the students' authentic voices are not recorded. The answers are given as guidelines to the readers of this article.

Examples shown to students:	Teacher's comments:
Images of the castle, the forest and Rapunzel's tower. Images of Fragonard's paintings.	<i>Tangled</i> has some elements that belong to the traditional genre of the fairy tale, which we are going to explore. Most fairy tales take place in an 'unreal

place' or no place, also called utopia. This means that the place is not geographically specific. What is the setting in *Tangled*? Do you remember?

Let's consider these images before you answer.

Do you think the settings of the film actually exist or existed somewhere? In which country? Is the name of the place mentioned? Why not? There is a beauty and vividness to the setting that make it unreal. In reality the forest is not like the forest that appears in the film. This is an ideal forest. And the castles are too impeccably presented.

Each place creates a certain atmosphere because of cultural ideas attached to them. For instance, what is the atmosphere created by a castle? There is always something mysterious about a castle, mysteries that have to be revealed. There is also a connection between castles and important people, people with power. And what kind of atmosphere does a forest create? In a forest there is a lot of danger, there are beautiful trees and animals but there are a lot of unknown elements that can harm us. The forest is not actually a place for children alone.

• The Role of Gothel, the Mother

Examples shown to students:	Teacher's comments:
Video clips and screenshots of Gothel Scene: Gothel talking to Rapunzel	In many traditional fairy tales there is a witch whose job is to ruin a girl's life. Who is the witch in <i>Tangled</i> ? Let's watch her in the house with Rapunzel at the beginning

<p>“The outside world is a dangerous place, filled with horrible, selfish people. You must stay here, where you’re safe. Do you understand, flower?”</p>	<p>of the film. She is kind of nice, isn’t she? She does not look like a stereotypical witch. How is she presented?</p>
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• Rapunzel’s Hair, a Magic Element

<p>Examples shown to students:</p>	<p>Teacher’s comments:</p>
<p>Images of Rapunzel using her hair. For example: Rapunzel heals Flynn’s hand with her hair.</p>	<p>In the traditional fairy tales, there is always magic. In Rapunzel there is magic in her hair. Have a look at these images and list all the uses of the hair. What can she do with her magical hair?</p>

Part 2

Topic: Fairy tales and Fractured Fairy Tales

After discussing the elements of the fairy tales that appear in the film we start working on the comparison between *Rapunzel* and the film *Tangled* (2010). For this task, we use a free audio story downloaded from the website [Storynory](#). The podcast of *Rapunzel* is listened to in class. Students follow the reading with the printed version provided by the teacher. Then they are asked to compare and contrast the fairy tale *Rapunzel* with the fairy tale video *Tangled* (2010) especially from the point of view of characters and plot. This part lends itself to a discussion of the concept of *fracture*. One way in which this fracture works is by changing the personality of characters, that is to say, by ascribing personality traits to the characters that deviate from the personality these characters have in the classical version of the tales. We show the following videos from *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show* for students to become better acquainted with the idea of fracture: [fractured fairy tales 1961 the frog prince](#) which presents a prince that is a frog and [sleeping beauty fractured fairy tales](#) in which the prince is an ambitious business crook.

In our lesson, we pay special attention to the unprincely nature of the saviour—a thug called Flynn in *Tangled*—as opposed to the prince in the written story. These are some of the scenes we play for students to discuss the fractures and the humour they produce.

Examples shown to students:	Teacher’s comments:
<p>Scenes: Flynn steals a crown, Flynn is captured by Rapunzel.</p>	<p>In several traditional fairy tales, there is a prince whose role is to save a girl. In <i>Tangled</i> there is something different. There is no prince, there is a thug!!</p> <p>How is he presented? What personality traits does he have? Isn’t he a bit of a smarty pants? He thinks he can take advantage of people. He manipulates them kindly but with deceit.</p> <p>And at the end, does he become a prince? Which has been his dream? To marry the girl like some princes in fairy tales? Who makes you laugh more? Rapunzel, the mother or Flynn? Probably Flynn because as we watch the movie we compare him with a prince. He is the opposite of a fairy tale prince. He is selfish person who has betrayed his friends. Friends do not have a nobility background either. They are thugs like him.</p>

We also discuss another fracture in the tale: the dismantling of the binary opposition of the role of *saviour*, which is usually given to the prince, and the role of *saved*, usually ascribed to the girl. We show students some scenes such as the one in which [Rapunzel uses her powers and saves Flynn](#) in the tunnel.

Apart from discussing the genre of fairy tales, we examine some specificities of the film such as allusions for the creation of humour.

Examples shown to students:	Teacher’s comments:
<p>Picture of Thugs wanted by the ‘police’ “wanted poster”</p>	<p>The story takes place in the past but it is not clear when exactly. Notice that the ‘long time ago’ implies that we will learn about archaic events. However, is there anything contemporary in the film? Have a look at this picture. Who are they? They</p>

	<p>have been made contemporary for the purpose of creating humor. They are really unexpected in this long-ago context with no technology. Also, they are an allusion to a movie you probably know: <i>Men in Black</i>, it is an allusion to make us laugh. The glasses are also anachronistic items. They do not belong to the far-away setting of the film.</p>
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The next step is a follow-up of Rapunzel’s development. Like many protagonists in fairy tales, Rapunzel goes through an initiation rite, such as the death of an old self in order to be reborn on a higher level of existence. For example, at the beginning she is only concerned with her situation and her wishes but at the end she is worried about Flynn. We can conclude that one of the most important themes in this film is the difficulties of growing up. Growing up means becoming independent and learning about one’s capacity to be in the world alone. Like in all fairy tales, the film shows that growing-up is hard, that there are a lot of obstacles that must be overcome. At the end of the struggle there is always success. Below you will find a few examples of her transformation which can also be included in a timeline created on the following website: <http://www.classtools.net/education-games-php/timeline>.

Examples shown to students:	Teacher’s comments:
Scene: Rapunzel singing “When will my life begin?”	First Rapunzel is a maid. What does she do around the house?
Scene: Rapunzel wants to go out the day of the birthday and her mother wants her to stay inside.	Look at Rapunzel in a conversation with her mother. She wants to get out but her mother does not allow her to do so.
Scene: Rapunzel hides Flynn, lies to her mother and decides to leave the tower.	<p>Later when mother comes back she finds that Rapunzel is hiding a man in the house. Watch.</p> <p>This is a new Rapunzel. She does not trust her mother so much. And she lies to her, she uses the same technique her</p>

	mother has used with her: deceit.
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Part 3

Topic: Remediation

Finally we work on a very general introduction to the concept of *remediation*, defined by Bolter and Grusin (2000, p.45) as the representation of one medium in another. Although the idea is not new because its origin can be placed at the beginning of art, *remediation* is a defining characteristic of the new digital medium. In this context, Bolter and Grusin suggest that “what is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media” (p.15).

In this part our aim is to show how some elements of the *original* fairy tale are imported into newer media. The use of italics in *original* all along is meant to highlight that artificially we consider the tale by the Grimm Brothers as the original version. However, fairy tales are part of an oral tradition. The written form is an adaptation of one of those oral renderings—with alterations carried out by the writer—whose origin is really unknown.

In this third part of the lesson we go back to students’ practising their comparing and contrasting skills. We work with the following sources, which we show students in class: *Grimms’ Rapunzel*, *Tangled Disney Comic* (2012), *Rapunzel’s Revenge* (2008), *Tangled Video Game* (2010), *Tangled Storybook Deluxe* (2012), *Barbie Rapunzel* (2002) and *Tangled* (2010).

Firstly, we work with *Barbie Rapunzel* (2002) and *Tangled* (2010) and show students various scenes from both films. In doing so, we find out that *Tangled* (2010) repairs technological issues from its predecessor *Rapunzel* (2002). In fact, it remediates the style of the computer graphics used in *Barbie Rapunzel* (2002) and refashions live-action Hollywood films, making the electronic interventions transparent. In other words, one of the goals of *Tangled* (2010) is to make the settings and human characters look as natural as possible and as a result, make the computer disappear. From the point of view of plot and characters, *Barbie Rapunzel* (2002) is more faithful to *Grimms’ Rapunzel* than *Tangled* (2010) although it is not really transparent. We show some scenes in which we compare the presentation of Gothel, the witch in the two versions for students to draw their own conclusions about characterisation.

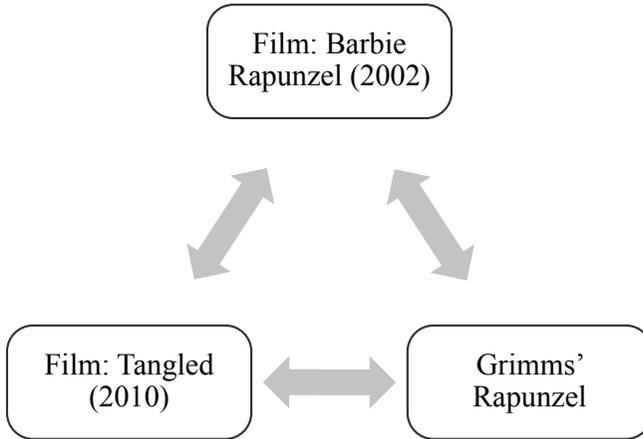


Figure 1. *Grimms' Rapunzel* and the remediated versions of *Tangled* and *Barbie Rapunzel*

Then we compare the written fairy tale with the graphic novel *Rapunzel's Revenge* (2008). This is a novel that sets the *original* tale in the western tradition so it deviates from the generality of the genre of the fairy tales we saw above in that both the setting in time and place are not unspecified, they are anchored in a real time and place. Therefore, the cultural element is very pervasive in the graphic novel and needs to be taken into account for a detailed reading of the text. It would take a long time to dedicate ourselves to a detailed analysis of the graphic novel and besides, this is not our purpose in this part of the class. Therefore, students are presented with four meaningful scenes so that they can do some close reading and become familiar with the pictures, captions and balloons. Then they are expected to compare their analysis with the source text, the tale written by the Grimm Brothers [available at Storynory](#) and discussed before in this article.



Figure 2. Comparison between the written fairy tale and the graphic novel.

In the next section of the lesson we present the students with the video game (2010). We play *Tangled Video Game* (2010) with the students in class and we draw conclusions as to the similarities and differences between the two modes. We play as Rapunzel assisting Flynn in climbing walls and overcoming obstacles with the magic power of her hair. If the school does not allow playing in class, we suggest showing a few YouTube videos in which they can see how to play as in the following link: <http://youtu.be/ltDwfeeBu0A>. Students are invited to draw their own conclusions about the

characteristics of the video game. We mention the interactive part of the video game, the extension of the adventure part of the plot in the forest and all the challenges the two characters have to confront. We discuss the personality of the main characters in the video games and try to account for the way they are presented. We place emphasis on the *fractured* nature of the story of the video game with the reversal of the traditional gender roles (in the games, Rapunzel is physically more skillful than Flynn, which is clearly seen when she helps him climb and sort out problems with her hair). We conclude that the new medium, i.e. the video game, remediates the animated film *Tangled* (2010) and can be called an *interactive film*. Bolter and Grusni (2000, p.47) refer to the fact that in the video game the players become characters in the narrative who decide where to go and what to do. They have control over the narrative itself and can solve puzzles. This new medium is aesthetically a transparent version of the film but from the point of view of content and form, it absorbs and repurposes the film so that it gets a more sophisticated digital form. We also finish up with the idea that differences between them are related to the specificity of the two kinds of modes, one is a film whose main purpose is to tell a story and the other is a videogame, whose main purpose is to play a game, the story being in the background.



Figure 3. Comparison between the film and the video game.

Then we deal with the book app *Tangled Storybook Deluxe* (2012) in which students can listen to the story or read it at their own pace, experience some extras such as moving animated elements and tilting the Iphone or Ipad and doing three different activities aimed at younger learners like colouring Rapunzel, completing jigsaws and playing the Lantern Game. After exploring the book app and trying some of its features, we conclude that the interactivity it offers improves on the limits of the film. As in the case of the video game, the locus of control is on the user who can decide what to do.



Figure 4. Comparison between the film and the book/app.

Throughout the activities we discuss the particularities of the different modes: animated film, written tale, book app, video game and graphic novel. For instance, when we deal with *Tangled* (2010) we make references to some elements of *mis-en-scène*, or visual style in films which include ‘the contents of the frame and the way the frame is organized’ (Gibbs, 2002, p. 5) such as various kinds of shots and their effects on readers, gestures and clothing of characters, foregrounding and backgrounding, to mention just a few.

Final considerations

By the end of our lessons in school students were well aware of the connections between the texts in terms of genre, deviation or fractures in the genre mainly for the creation of humour and the concept of remediation. They also learned how to move from one mode to another through the analysis of main elements of each text. As the characters in the film who were tangled by magic and desires, the project has explored ways in which these multimodal texts are tangled too.

In this multimedia classroom account we have tried to show how to connect multimodal texts in a Language and Literature class. We have chosen texts which share the same genre, the fairy tale. We have explored the concepts of *fracture* as a funny deviation from the main elements of fairy tales and the idea of remediation which is a defining characteristic of the electronic medium. We hope teachers can explore the same path we have covered, centering on the film *Tangled* (2010) we moved backwards to the classical fairy tale *Rapunzel* and then forward to the remediated versions of the tale *Tangled Disney Comic* (2012), *Rapunzel's Revenge* (2008), *Tangled Video Game* (2010), *Tangled Storybook Deluxe* (2012) and *Barbie Rapunzel* (2002). In this experience, students were expected to participate actively and develop skills related to making comparisons, applying concepts such as *fracture* and *remediation* and discussing main elements of each of the modes. We believe that this trajectory can be replicated with films such as Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson's *Shrek I* (2001) and Cory and Todd Edwards' *Hoodwinked* (2005), both being based on popular fairy tales or parts of fairy tales, which are built on the concept of fracture for the creation of humour and which are the source to several remediated versions of the tales which include apps, video games and websites.

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