

# Marvel Avengers Assemble



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**DIRECTED BY:** Joss Whedon

**CERTIFICATE:** 12

**RUNNING TIME:** 143 mins

**COUNTRY:** USA

**YEAR:** 2012

**KEYWORDS:** heroism, representation of male and female heroes, director Joss Whedon, superhero franchises

**SUITABLE FOR:** 14–19 media/film studies

## SYNOPSIS

When an intergalactic force jeopardises the future of the human race, just one of Earth's best Superheroes isn't enough to deal with the threat. Super Agent Nick Fury hastily assembles a team of heroes to face the problem – egotistical Tony Stark (Iron Man), noble Steve Rogers (Captain America), volatile Bruce Banner (Incredible Hulk) and God of Thunder Thor along with superspy Black Widow and sharp-shooter Hawkeye. But the team's combustible personalities and their troubled histories collide, threatening the stability of their mission. The stage is set for a massive, destructive showdown in New York City, but will *The Avengers* be battling the evil Loki, or each other?

## BEFORE VIEWING

### TROUBLED HEROES

In the late twentieth century, superhero films rarely dug beneath the surface of their protagonists. However, since the first *X-Men* film and *Spider-Man* film (which both closely coincided with the events of September 11th 2001), superhero characters have been deeper, darker and more troubled. In many movies, our heroes spend as much time battling inner demons as they do fighting villains. Do *The Avengers* have the same faults and flaws as other superheroes? Are heroes originally found in DC Comics more damaged than their Marvel counterparts?



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Fill in the table that follows; two have been filled in already but you may have more to add, as well as more superheroes.

Superhero	Marvel or DC?	films featured in	powers/ strengths	weaknesses/ fears/flaws	troubled history
Batman	DC	Tim Burton's <i>Batmans</i> ; Joel Schumacher's <i>The Dark Knight</i> Trilogy	armoured suit, vehicles and weaponry, unlimited funds	Not superhuman therefore vulnerable	Saw parents murdered
Daredevil	Marvel	<i>Daredevil</i> (2003); possible <i>Daredevil</i> Reboot (2014)	heightened sense of hearing, smell, balance and touch	blind; over-sensitive to sound	father killed; crisis of faith
Spider-Man					
Green Lantern					
Elektra					
Wolverine					

Superhero	Marvel or DC?	films featured in	powers/ strengths	weaknessess/ fears/flaws	troubled history
Professor X					
Magneto					
Superman					
Iron Man					
The Hulk					
Captain America					
Thor					

## AFTER VIEWING

### Why Joss Whedon?

You may be surprised to learn that a film as huge and expensive as the *Marvel Avengers Assemble* was directed by someone who had made only one film before (*Serenity*, 2005). But a closer look at Joss Whedon's writing and directing history reveals that he is perhaps the best person for the job. Use the internet to find out a little more about Whedon's credentials.

- What popular TV series has Whedon created and how is one of these related to *Serenity*?
- How did critics and fans receive *Serenity* and what genre, narrative and character conventions does it share with *The Avengers*? Watch the trailer of both films to get an idea.
- On which popular films was Whedon a 'script doctor'?
- To what extent are the careers of the directors of the original (and forthcoming) *Avenger* movies similar to Whedon's? Are they new directors? Do they have experience in sci-fi/fantasy or with television? Why might the *Avenger* films that they each directed suit their particular style or thematic interests?

- John Favreau (*Iron Man and Iron Man 2*)
- Kenneth Branagh (*Thor*)
- Joe Johnston (*Captain America*)
- Louis Leterrier (*The Incredible Hulk*)
- Shane Black (*Iron Man 3*)
- Alan Taylor (*Thor 2*)
- Anthony & Joe Russo (*Captain America 2*)



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## SCENE ANALYSES

*The Avengers Assemble* has the task of re-introducing several big characters from a range of previous films, most of whom have never met, and some of whom may be unfamiliar to average moviegoers. Imagine the challenge Joss Whedon faced in bringing together a god from another dimension, a missing Hulk, a soldier frozen in ice since the Second World War and an arrogant billionaire who doesn't work well with others! Think back to how all the Avengers are introduced as individuals and how they are each given identities to distinguish themselves before they team up.

- How is Captain America's isolation from others and from the modern world emphasised through camerawork and mise en scène in the sequence where he is hitting a punching bag?
- What characteristics does Bruce Banner display and what activities does he engage in in order to suppress his alter ego?
- Is Tony Stark's billionaire lifestyle and technology shown as a help or a hindrance in the film?
- How is Thor's 'otherness' emphasised through costume, dialogue and story?

## REPRESENTATION

One of the challenges of *The Marvel Avengers Assemble* was ensuring that no one actor or character dominated. Many expected Robert Downey Jr as Iron Man to overshadow the film. However each superhero has their own moment to shine on screen. Each character has a narrative function and brings an ingredient to add to the film's broad appeal. In addition, many conventional representations of women and of masculinity are challenged – the males in the film are arguably more vulnerable and flawed than the two main female characters, and while we're used to seeing deep, dark superheroes not many of them have been quite so arrogant and juvenile as this bunch!

- What kinds of humour are used through each different character?
- How do the male characters clash?
- What stereotypical attributes of masculinity, both positive and negative, are present in each hero?
- In what unexpected ways does Black Widow exploit notions of feminine sexuality and vulnerability to outwit enemies?
- What narrative function does each of the Avengers team have? How do they fit in to the plot?
- What flaws, traumas or vulnerabilities does each team member have to overcome in order to be effective as a hero?

## RECEPTION STUDY

A huge weight of expectation met *The Avengers Assemble* upon its release. The film needed to be a rewarding smash; many had invested in these characters before and paid to see a range of related films. *The Avengers* is perhaps the most humorous of recent superhero movies, a big contrast to the two other major comic adaptations of 2012 - the moody and serious *Dark Knight Rises* and the gritty and emotional *Amazing Spider-Man*. *The Avengers* had plenty to satisfy a range of moviegoers.

- Find out what time of year *The Avengers Assemble* was released in UK cinemas. Why do you think this release date was chosen, in relation to all the other huge blockbusters released in 2012?
- To what extent did the filmmakers and distributors attempt to appeal to audiences who had not seen the previous *Avenger* films? Had you seen them before watching this? Did it affect your enjoyment of the film?
- To what extent are the following blockbuster conventions present in *The Avengers Assemble*?
  - spectacle
  - humour
  - romance
  - engaging characters
  - sequel potential



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## ACTIVITIES

### THE JUSTICE LEAGUE

After the success of *The Avengers Assemble* and *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, it is rumoured that Marvel's rival DC Comics is planning to make a Justice League film – the Justice League is a team of superheroes that belong to DC Comics and unite, much like *The Avengers*, to defeat evil. The Justice League has included such characters as Batman, Superman, Wonder-Woman, The Green Lantern and The Flash.

While *The Avengers Assemble* has the benefit of following a series of successful original movies that each focused on one of the team members (and were each designed to lead up to *The Avengers Assemble*), DC Comics movies have had varying degrees of success from the hugely successful (*The Dark Knight Trilogy*) to the critically and commercially derided (*The Green Lantern*).

What's more, DC Comics films are not explicitly linked and a number of the characters have either had a wide range of film and TV interpretations (Batman, Superman) or have had little mainstream exposure outside of the comic book world.

What challenges might DC Comics have ahead of them if they are to produce a Justice League film? Consider the questions below in order to focus your class discussion...

- What previous or forthcoming interpretations of the following DC characters can you find across film, television and other media?
  - Batman
  - Superman
  - The Green Lantern
  - Wonder-Woman
  - The Flash
  
- What reputation and presence do the characters have in popular culture?
  
- How is director Christopher Nolan associated with the Justice League?

### PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

- Design a series of posters or thirty-second teaser trailers that promote either a new Justice League film or a series of reboots for each character. Consider actors, directors and release dates.
  
- Film a thirty-second post-end-credits sequence for one of the *Dark Knight* films which hints at a forthcoming Justice League film

Written by Gareth C. Evans