OER Guidance for Schools
Supplementary information 4

Remixing with Shakespeare

In the Guidance documents, we talked about the idea of “remixing”, and here we provide another example for remixing text from several sources. **A remix is** simply a **new work made from one or more old works. This new work can take almost any form. Some remixed works are songs, stories or films, others are scientific articles or educational resources.**

The word “remix” **is new, but the practice is as old as culture itself. Ancient Greek tragedians like Sophocles adapted common myths — such as Oedipus the King and Helen of Troy — for their Athenian audiences.** The oldest known version of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet was first told by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BC - 17 AD) as the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, two lovers in the city of Babylon. Over a 1,000 years later, it was retold by Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio and by Matteo Bandello (1370s and 1550s), then adapted into an English poem by Arthur Brooke, and into English prose by William Painter (1560s and 1580s). William Shakespeare borrowed and added to create Romeo and Juliet (1590s). Romeo and Juliet has been adapted many times since, for instance in the movie by Baz Luhrmann (1996), with the original dialogue retold in a modern day setting. Despite being a 400 year old play, the creators acknowledged their sources and gave the movie the full title of “William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet”. The continuing process of adaptation has kept the story alive, adapting and contextualising it for different audiences.

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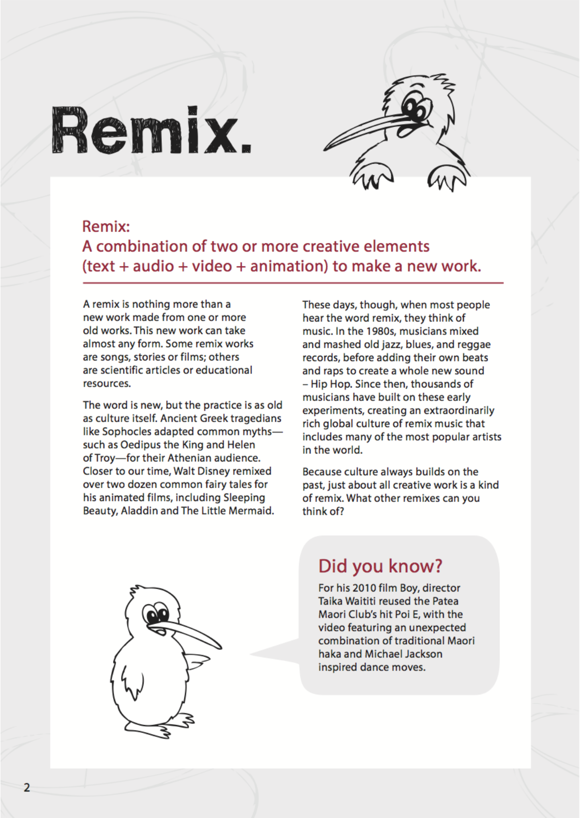	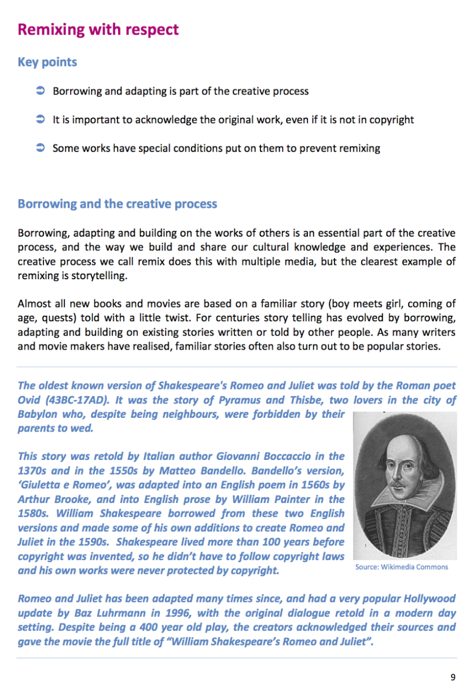
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Remix.

Remix:
A combination of two or more creative elements (text + audio + video + animation) to make a new work.

A remix is nothing more than a new work made from one or more old works. This new work can take almost any form. Some remix works are songs, stories or films; others are scientific articles or educational resources.

The word is new, but the practice is as old as culture itself. Ancient Greek tragedians like Sophocles adapted common myths—such as Oedipus the King and Helen of Troy—for their Athenian audience. Closer to our time, Walt Disney remixed over two dozen common fairy tales for his animated films, including Sleeping Beauty, Aladdin and The Little Mermaid.

These days, though, when most people hear the word remix, they think of music. In the 1980s, musicians mixed and mashed old jazz, blues, and reggae records, before adding their own beats and raps to create a whole new sound – Hip Hop. Since then, thousands of musicians have built on these early experiments, creating an extraordinarily rich global culture of remix music that includes many of the most popular artists in the world.

Because culture always builds on the past, just about all creative work is a kind of remix. What other remixes can you think of?

Did you know?

For his 2010 film Boy, director Taika Waititi reused the Patea Maori Club's hit Poi E, with the video featuring an unexpected combination of traditional Maori haka and Michael Jackson inspired dance moves.

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Remixing with respect

Key points

- Borrowing and adapting is part of the creative process
- It is important to acknowledge the original work, even if it is not in copyright
- Some works have special conditions put on them to prevent remixing

Borrowing and the creative process

Borrowing, adapting and building on the works of others is an essential part of the creative process, and the way we build and share our cultural knowledge and experiences. The creative process we call remix does this with multiple media, but the clearest example of remixing is storytelling.

Almost all new books and movies are based on a familiar story (boy meets girl, coming of age, quests) told with a little twist. For centuries story telling has evolved by borrowing, adapting and building on existing stories written or told by other people. As many writers and movie makers have realised, familiar stories often also turn out to be popular stories.

The oldest known version of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet was told by the Roman poet Ovid (43BC-17AD). It was the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, two lovers in the city of Babylon who, despite being neighbours, were forbidden by their parents to wed.

This story was retold by Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio in the 1370s and in the 1550s by Matteo Bandello. Bandello's version, 'Giuletta e Romeo', was adapted into an English poem in 1560s by Arthur Brooke, and into English prose by William Painter in the 1580s. William Shakespeare borrowed from these two English versions and made some of his own additions to create Romeo and Juliet in the 1590s. Shakespeare lived more than 100 years before copyright was invented, so he didn't have to follow copyright laws and his own works were never protected by copyright.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Romeo and Juliet has been adapted many times since, and had a very popular Hollywood update by Baz Luhrmann in 1996, with the original dialogue retold in a modern day setting. Despite being a 400 year old play, the creators acknowledged their sources and gave the movie the full title of "William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet".

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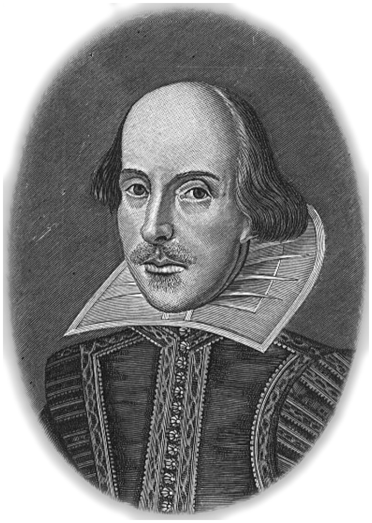

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