

GET READY!

Watch [the official movie trailer of Black Widow](#). What do you know about this character? About her universe?

Black Widow is a recurrent character in several Marvel movies, especially the four Avengers movies. She is Russian and her name is Natasha Romanoff. She used to work for the KGB. She doesn't have super powers but she's really strong; she's an athlete and she masters martial arts.

READING COMPREHENSION

Simply putting women on screen won't be enough to sustain Marvel post-Avengers

By Rebecca Wright - May 23, 2018

- 1 From the New Woman of the silent movie era – an archetype of bravery and beauty in the very first action and adventure films – to the more recent summer of the “Alpha Female” in 2015 (think Charlize Theron in *Mad Max: Fury Road*) the female action hero has never failed to excite and challenge. Proving to be a commercially lucrative success in her own right, she has broken social convention and been dynamic and powerful for more than 100 years.
- 5 For today's action fan, few other film series have held as much potential as the movies of the Marvel cinematic universe (MCU). But with great power comes great responsibility, especially when it comes to diversity. This year, *Black Panther* offered groundbreaking¹ race representations and did not disappoint when it came to its portrayal of women either. Now, as the initial Avengers-led saga starts to wind down, and with the anticipated release of both *Black Widow* and *Captain Marvel* solo films, it seems only right to ask, what can the future hold for the
- 10 women of Marvel?

The first 10 years

Over the last decade, the films which brought Marvel comic books to life have been applauded for making a difference in true representations of diversity. [...]

- 15 However, looking to the female characters, any future opportunities will depend on Marvel's willingness to acknowledge and not be limited by their own history. From the first MCU films, examples of pervasive², everyday sexism have been overlooked or dismissed in the name of history. [...]
- Even more recent films are occasionally marred with a sense of humour that tends toward displays of toxic masculinity and casual misogyny, denoting an air of sexism the films can no longer afford. From the way the women are spoken to, to the way they are spoken of, the men of the cohort consistently undermine³ the female action heroes. [...]

20 Unnecessary romance

Female Avengers are still constrained⁴ by emotional or romantic responsibility to their colleagues, too. Why is it Black Widow's responsibility to sooth the savage Hulk when it's time for him to return to the form of Bruce Banner? How convenient the two characters are also possible love interests, a role Black Widow has been written to play in a number of Marvel films. [...]

- 25 Yet there is hope on the horizon for the MCU. Female action heroes have already successfully led other superhero films (DC Comic's *Wonder Woman* was a smash hit in 2017) so it won't be hard for Marvel to replicate this success – but they can't rely on tired old formulas.
- Hollywood is changing – just look at recent calls for celebrity power to push for equal pay for colleagues, or contractual inclusion riders for greater equality and diversity. One hopes that the MCU does not miss the mark in recognising the power in these possibilities. Representations of female action heroes can be more than a reflection of our culture, they must be a vision of how we view each other and our place in the universe, cinematic or otherwise.
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1. groundbreaking: *révolutionnaire, novateur, avant-gardiste* 2. pervasive: *omniprésent* 3. to undermine: *discréditer*
4. constrained by: *contraint/limité par*

Axe : Art et pouvoir/Diversité et inclusion **Niveau :** B2
Problématique : What vision of feminism do Marvel movies give?

A. What is the main topic of this document? Use your own words.

The main topic of this document is the release of Black Widow, the new instalment in the Marvel Comics Universe. The article deals with the way women are represented in Marvel movies.

B. Paragraph 1 (l. 1-10) - Pick up all the movies featuring female heroines (other than Black Widow) listed in this paragraph. What are the characteristics of these movies?

The movies which feature female heroines are Mad Max: Fury Road, Black Panther and Captain Marvel. Their characteristics are that they all highlight female action, show more diversity, try to portray women in a non-sexist way, and have proved to be commercial successes. They also symbolize a move towards a better representation of women in Marvel movies.

C. Paragraph 2 (l. 11-19) – Answer the following question and justify with a quote: according to the journalist, the main issue with the way women were represented in Marvel movies of the last decade is...

1. ... that they constantly undermine men's actions.
2. ... that the public cannot identify to them.
3. ... that their actions are constantly discredited by other characters.
4. ... that they don't have a sense of humour.

"Even more recent films are occasionally marred with a sense of humour that tends toward displays of toxic masculinity and casual misogyny, denoting an air of sexism the films can no longer afford. From the way the women are spoken to, to the way they are spoken of, the men of the cohort consistently undermine the female action heroes." (l. 17-19)

D. Paragraph 3 (l. 20-31) – Fill this board with information from the text. Use your own words.

The main characteristic of female Avengers	They are "constrained by emotional or romantic responsibility to their colleagues" (l. 21)
What the journalist thinks future Marvel movies will be like	The journalist is quite optimistic as she believes there will be more successful movies featuring female heroes.
The way Hollywood is evolving	More and more celebrities are pushing for equal pays and more diversity in movies.
The role Marvel should have in this evolution	According to the journalist, Marvel should influence that shift to more feminist and empowering movies.

E. Using your own words, explain the following quote: "Representations of female action heroes can be more than a reflection of our culture, they must be a vision of how we view each other and our place in the universe, cinematic or otherwise." (l. 30-31)

The journalist means that Marvel movies should not just be a reflection of misogynistic and sexist behaviours in our society because if they are, things will never change. She means that Marvel should lead a revolution towards more feminist and inclusive movies and show people how women should really be represented and treated: without any "toxic masculinity and casual misogyny" (l. 17-18).

GRAMMAR CORNER

The **present perfect** is used to indicate a link between the present and the past. The time of the action is before now but not specified, and we are often more interested in the result than in the action itself. The present perfect of any verb is composed of two elements: the appropriate form of the auxiliary verb *to have* (present tense), plus the past participle of the main verb, e.g "It has never failed".

There are six examples of present perfect in the text. Find them and explain why present perfect was used for each sentence.

- "the female action hero has never failed to excite and challenge": it's still the case today, hence the use of present perfect.
- "she has broken social convention": the fact that she did it still has an impact on what is happening today.
- "few other film series have held as much potential as the movies of the Marvel cinematic universe": their potential still has an impact on the public and the production of new movies today.
- "the films which brought Marvel comic books to life have been applauded for making a difference in true representations of diversity": they were applauded in the past but they still have an impact today and are still recognized as important movies for the representation of diversity.
- "everyday sexism has been overlooked or dismissed in the name of history": the fact that sexism was overlooked has an impact on a current society and its misogyny.
- "Female action heroes have already successfully led other superhero films": feminist superhero films are being created right now thanks to the impact of previous female action heroes.

WRITING

Watch the movie *Wonder Woman* (2017). Let's organize an online debate about feminism in the movie on a collaborative wall! Some of you will give arguments to say the movie is feminist, some will say it's not. In turn, post messages on the wall to answer previous messages and give your opinion on the movie.

- Exemples de productions :
- Student A: I really think *Wonder Woman* is a feminist movie, because the main character is a woman and she has very strong powers.
- Student B: I disagree with you as I think that just having a female heroine is not enough to call a movie "feminist". I do not believe *Wonder Woman* really is feminist as I have observed during the movie that men are always telling her what to do and how she should fight.
- Student C: I agree with what Student B said. I would add that her costume is quite sexualizing her and she's always wearing heels. Do you really think it is easy to fight with heels? I'm pretty sure she's wearing them because they wanted her to look sexy (as if you couldn't be without heels...).
- Student D: I disagree with you guys. Sometimes feminist works are imperfect. Yet *Wonder Woman* has the merit to represent a feminine heroine who is strong, independent and was never raised with misogynistic clichés!

SPEAKING

Do some research on famous Marvel heroines and prepare an oral presentation including the following elements:

- A brief description of the character's physical appearance and powers,
- A depiction of the character's story (in comic books and movies),
- The vision this character gives of feminism, according to you,
- Suggestions of scenarios for a potential future Marvel movie featuring this character.

You can use the following website to choose a character to work on: <https://www.marvel.com/articles/comics/the-greatest-female-marvel-super-heroines>.

Film or record your presentation at home!

Exemple de production :

My favourite Marvel heroine is Captain Marvel. I have not read a lot of comics but I watched the movie and I really loved it. Captain Marvel's real name is Carol Danvers. In the comics, several characters are called Captain Marvel, including Carol. Their common point is their incredible force. In the movies Captain Marvel and Avengers: Endgame, she has long and then short blond hair. She is very strong as she absorbed all the energy of a powerful engine and then lost her memory. She was brought to a planet named Kree and was lead to investigate on her past as a human being. I think this movie is really feminist. I loved the fact that Carol has no love interest in the movie, which shows that super heroines do not necessarily need to be romantically involved to be strong and powerful. I also particularly enjoyed the scene in which she beats her enemy and proves she's incredibly stronger than him. I hope that in future Marvel movies, Captain Marvel will get to work with other female super heroes as we desperately need more women to play lead characters. I also hope she will work more with Avengers!