

Tiana (Disney)

Tiana is a main character who appears in Walt Disney Pictures' 49th animated feature film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). Created by directors Ron Clements and John Musker and animated by Mark Henn, Tiana is voiced by Anika Noni Rose as an adult, while Elizabeth M. Dampier voices the character as a child.

Tiana is loosely based on two princesses: Princess Emma, the heroine of E. D. Baker's novel *The Frog Princess*, and the princess from the Brothers Grimm fairy tale "The Frog Prince", which inspired Baker's novel.

A hardworking waitress who dreams of opening her own restaurant, Tiana finds her progress stalled when she transforms into a frog after desperately kissing a prince who has been turned into one by an evil witch doctor. The ninth Disney Princess, Tiana is the first to be of African-American heritage.

Tiana has been mostly positively received, with critics praising her personality and values. However, the depiction of Tiana and her community has been criticized for lacking "emphasis on racial issues".^[1] The decision to depict the two main characters, Tiana and Naveen, as frogs for the majority of the movie has also caused controversy, with some saying that it is equating people of color to animals.^[2]

Contents

Character development

- Conception and ethnicity
- Voice
- Design and characteristics

Appearances

- The Princess and the Frog*
- In other media

Reception and legacy

References

External links

Character development

Conception and ethnicity

According to co-director John Musker, adapting the fairy tale "The Frog Prince" by the Brothers Grimm into an animated feature film had been a subject at Walt Disney Animation Studios for 18^[3] years.^[4] The project was repeatedly shelved because the studio was unsuccessful in creating a version with which they were satisfied.^{[5][6]} Disney bought the rights to *The Frog Princess*, a novel by E. D. Baker that is based on the fairy tale, in 2006. Co-directors Ron Clements and Musker were then hired to lead the studio in yet another attempt at adapting the fairy tale, choosing 1920s New

Tiana	
 <div><i>The Princess and the Frog</i> character</div>	
 <div>Tiana as she appears in Disney's <i>The Princess and the Frog</i>.</div>	
First appearance	<i>The Princess and the Frog</i> (2009)
Created by	Ron Clements and John Musker
Voiced by	Anika Noni Rose (adult) Elizabeth M. Dampier (child) (<i>The Princess and the Frog</i>)
Based on	Princess Emma from <i>The Frog Princess</i> The Princess from the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale
Information	
Species	Human Frog (briefly via incantation)
Affiliation	Disney Princesses
Title	Princess of Maldonia
Family	James (father) Eudora (mother)
Spouse(s)	Prince Naveen

Orleans as its setting.^[7] Although originally conceived as a computer-animated film, Clements and Musker fought for *The Princess and the Frog* to be traditionally animated.^[8]

Relatives	King of Maldonia (father-in-law) Queen of Maldonia (mother-in-law) Prince Ralphie (brother-in-law)
Nationality	American

[I]t was certainly about time [for an African American heroine]. But we didn't approach this movie with that as any kind of agenda. John Lasseter suggested taking the fairy tale *The Frog Prince* and setting it in New Orleans. The idea of making our heroine African American simply grew out of the setting and that was an integral part of the story we pitched to John in March of 2006. We all thought it was a great idea. But it wasn't until later that we fully realized the importance of this in the African American community.

— Co-director Ron Clements on their reasoning behind Tiana's ethnicity.^[9]

Tiana is loosely based on both Princess Emma, the heroine of Baker's novel, and the princess who appears in the Grimm fairy tale. Clements described Baker's *The Frog Princess* as "a kind of fairy tale with a twist" because in it "the princess kissed the frog and instead of him turning into a prince she turned into a frog."^[10] Clements and Musker pitched the idea for the film to Walt Disney Animation Studios CEO John Lasseter "as a hand-drawn film with an African American heroine",^[7] conceiving Tiana "as someone who would never have been a big fan of Disney fairy tales."^[11] The character was inspired by famed restaurateur Leah Chase, who Clements and Musker met on their

research trip to New Orleans.^[9] Clements elaborated, "There's a woman in New Orleans named Lee (sic) Chase who was a waitress and ultimately opened a restaurant with her husband ... we met with her and we talked with her and she went to kind of into her story her philosophy about food, which is a big element of the movie."^[10]

Tiana is recognized for being Disney's first African American princess.^{[13][14]} As the film's writers and directors, Clements and Musker claim that their decision to depict Tiana as an African American young woman came naturally^[5] simply as a result of the location in which the story takes place.^[15] Clements explained, "We didn't realize it was that big of a deal,"^[16] and originally gave the character the French name "Madeleine"—"Maddy" for short. However, when the name drew controversy and speculation as a result of alleged racial connotations—according to various sources, the name "Maddy" was commonly used as a "slave name"^{[17][18]}—they decided to change it to the Greek name "Tiana", which rhymes with "Diana" and "rana" (Latin for *frog*).^[12] Though "Tiana" (Τιάνα) does not translate as "princess" (πριγκίπισσα),^[19] it can be decoded as a portmanteau, coined by blending the princess names Τία and Νταϊάνα.^[20] Vying to continue to approach the film with sensitivity, Clements and Musker sought guidance from screenwriter Rob Edwards, who is African American.^[3] In order to add emotional weight to the story, Clements and Musker placed further emphasis on Tiana's relationship with her father James,^[9] who originally "wasn't as much in the picture."^[10]

Si quis amat Ranam, Ranam putat esse Dianam.
If someone loves a frog, he thinks the frog is Diana.

— Perry 591^[12]

Voice

Directors Ron Clements and John Musker opted against hiring "big stars" to voice the film's main characters, explaining, "It can help with the identification of that animated character with the voice if you don't get an instant mental picture of the real actor."^[5] Several well-known African American female entertainers expressed interest in voicing Tiana, including recording artists Beyoncé,^[21] Jennifer Hudson and Alicia Keys, and actress and fashion model Tyra Banks.^[22] The role of Tiana ultimately went to actress and singer Anika Noni Rose, who co-starred alongside Knowles and Hudson in *Dreamgirls* (2006).^[8] When Rose was personally contacted by Disney about voicing Tiana, her expectations were not particularly high. She explained, "I wasn't planning on being a princess. I thought I'd be like a weeping willow or something." To prepare herself for her audition, Rose made sure that she "had a voice ready."^[23]

Rose auditioned for the role of Tiana a total of three times.^[8] Both "thrilled"^[24] and "ecstatic" by the fact that she would be voicing Disney's first African American princess, Rose, a longtime fan of Disney who had always wanted to voice a Disney character, was "surprised by some of the things that the community took issue with."^[24] When the film was brought to her attention, Rose was

drawn to it more by "the story of the young woman" rather than Tiana's ethnicity. "I don't think the cultural significance hit me until later," she told *The Root*.^[25]

Rose described the recording process as "very solitary work" that required her to do much research and preparation. She elaborated, "I called people in New Orleans; I listened to their voices to hear what they sounded like. I did a lot of reading up on the city, and listened to a lot of music in the jazz era."^[25] Rose gradually received the film's screenplay "in pieces". During her first recording session, Rose read through and recorded the entire script in eight hours, describing the experience as "exhausting, but wonderful."^[26] She and co-star Bruno Campos, who provided the voice of Prince Naveen, recorded the majority of their dialogue separately.^[25]

Design and characteristics

Mark Henn served as the supervising animator for Tiana.^{[27][28][29]} Henn was hired by Lasseter because he had animated nearly every Disney Princess since Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*.^[27] Describing Tiana, Henn said that she is following "a new trend in our princesses," likening her to Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*.^[27] Henn was inspired by studio employee Jaimie Milner, a film intern who was working in post production.^{[11][27]} The fact that Tiana is African American was "never a big issue" for Henn when it came to animating her, but drawing her as both a human and a frog proved difficult.^[27] He said, "Tiana appears in the movie in so many different forms ... she's a little girl, she's an adult human, and then she's a frog!"^[27]

Rose's thoughts, ideas and concerns were taken into consideration when it came to finalizing Tiana's design.^[30] "I ... said I wanted it to look like she ate and wasn't skinny, and she has a full mouth and a little round nose and curly hair and these are all things that made her look distinctly herself," she said.^[30] Rose didn't want Tiana to resemble "a cookie-cutter princess who had been coloured in brown. When I saw her for the first time and realized how much she looked like me I was really blown away"^[30] Rose also served as a form of visual, live-action reference for supervising animator Mark Henn as he worked on Tiana,^[27] videotaping her as she recorded her lines and incorporating some of her distinct characteristics, such as her dimples and left-handedness, into Tiana's design.^{[11][30]}

Appearances

The Princess and the Frog

Tiana works two jobs in order to raise enough money to turn a rundown sugar mill into a restaurant, a promise she made to her now deceased father. As a result, Tiana has become absorbed with her work and doesn't have time for anything else. Tiana finds hope when her wealthy childhood best friend Charlotte pays her a lump sum of money to make and serve beignets at a masquerade ball she is hosting for the handsome but disinherited Prince Naveen.

That night, Tiana's hopes are crushed when the owners of the mill tell her that she was outbid by someone for the sugar mill and that it is probably a good thing given her 'background'. When Tiana accidentally ruins her costume, Charlotte is kind enough to replace it with one of her own. Out of desperation, Tiana wishes on a star, only to be greeted by a talking frog who claims to be Prince Naveen. Mistaking her for a princess because of her costume, Naveen promises to give Tiana the money she needs if she turns him human again by kissing him. After some persuasion, Tiana succumbs, but becomes a frog instead.

While on the run from hungry gators, Tiana strikes a deal with Naveen, demanding that once he marries Charlotte, he will use the money he gets from her to help Tiana buy the restaurant. Things change, however, on their journey to end the spell. They both meet a jazz-playing alligator named Louis and a Cajun firefly named Ray, who help them reach the voodoo priestess Mama Odie. Tiana and Naveen help each other escape from frog hunters and Tiana teaches Naveen to help her cook. As Ray sings an ode to his true love "Evangeline", Naveen shows Tiana how to dance, something that she has never done before because she was afraid to. Both frogs find themselves falling in love with one another but are unsure how to say it.

Eventually Tiana comes face to face with Facilier himself, who promises to make her dream of "Tiana's Place" a reality if she hands over a voodoo charm which plays a significant role in his plans. After reminding her of all the work she has done and the people who held her back, he shows her an image of her late father, telling her that she can make sure the dream he never lived to see come true.

Seeing her family together, Tiana finally realizes what her father had meant that he never got what he wanted but he had love, what he needed. Tiana is able to smash the charm and leaves Facilier at the mercy of the angry voodoo spirits.

Tiana finds Naveen, who is promising Charlotte that he will marry her but only if she will give Tiana her restaurant. Tiana stops him and finally admits that she loves him. Moved, Charlotte says she will kiss Naveen, "no marriage required", but it is already midnight and she is too late to break the spell. Tiana and Naveen get married in the bayou. Once they kiss, they finally become human again because Tiana is finally now a princess and is shown wearing her princess ball gown. Louis "terrifies" the realtors into accepting Tiana's offer. Together, Naveen and Tiana open the restaurant, now named "Tiana's Palace" and dance under the stars. Tiana's singing voice is also provided by Anika Noni Rose

In other media

On October 26, 2009, "Tiana's Showboat Jubilee!" debuted with appearances from Tiana, Naveen, Louis, and Dr. Facilier, at the Walt Disney World Resort; and later at the Disneyland Resort. Tiana and Naveen are also in the "Festival of Fantasy Parade" at Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom. Tiana and Naveen are also doing meet and greets at Walt Disney World's Liberty Square. She joined Disney's "Once upon a Dream Parade" at Disneyland Paris in April 2010 as part of the "New Generations Festival". Tiana also joined *Fantasmic!* in early January 2010 during the finale with the Mark Twain Riverboat. Tiana, along with Naveen, Doctor Facilier, and Ray each make a cameo appearance in Disney's World of Color at Disney California Adventure Park. Tiana and the other Disney Princesses have an attraction at the Magic Kingdom called *Princess Fairytale Hall*.^{[31][32]} In 2014, Tiana made a guest appearance on *Sofia the First*. When visiting Walt Disney World visitors originally spotted Princess Tiana under a shady, forest gazebo at the edge of Liberty Square. Since June 2016, Tiana has been doing meet-and-greets at Princess Fairytale Hall.^[33]

Tiana, alongside other Disney Princesses, is set to cameo in the film *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, as was announced at the 2017 D23 Expo.^[34]

A live-action character inspired by Tiana is a main character in the seventh season of *Once Upon a Time*, and she is played by Mekia Cox.^{[35][36][37]} In the New Enchanted Forest Tiana is the Queen of her kingdom, but then everyone in the realm is cursed and taken to a Land Without Magic. A new area of Seattle called Hyperion Heights is created and everyone including Tiana are sent there with new memories. Her new counterpart Sabine was a fast food chef, but is now a food truck owner who sells beignets. Eventually the Dark Curse is broken and Sabine regains her memories. In the series finale, Tiana is seen attending Regina Mills' coronation as the Queen of the newly United Realms.

Reception and legacy

As a character, Tiana has been mostly positively received. Helen O'Hara of *Empire* wrote positively of the character, describing her as "a hard-headed heroine who works hard and displays a focus and drive".^[38] Catherine Shoard of *The Guardian* praised Tiana, congratulating Disney for creating "a heroine who's an actual character; a woman whose three dimensions you don't need to don daft specs to see."^[39] Betsy Sharley of *The Los Angeles Times* wrote positively of Tiana, describing her as both "beautiful" and "boisterous".^[40] Carey Bryson of About.com gave Tiana high praise, calling her both "a fabulous new princess" and "a decent role model".^[41]

Tiana is notable for being Disney's first black princess.^{[1][42][43]} The studio's decision to create a black heroine was met with mixed reception. While some critics, such as Richard Watson, praised the film for offering a long-awaited "break in tradition",^[42] others received it with much criticism and speculation.^[43] Rachel Bertsche of *O, The Oprah Magazine* called the arrival of a black Disney princess "barrier-breaking" and "long overdue".^[43] Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* wrote, "these avowedly black people spend an awful lot of the movie being adorable, unthreatening little green creatures. Disney may wish to reach out to people of colour – but the colour green wasn't what we had in mind."^[2] Bidisha of *The Observer* was fairly mixed in her review, calling Tiana a "one-dimensional" but "clever, strong woman", while criticizing the film's light-hearted plot and lack of emphasis on racial issues.^[4] Patricia Williams of *The Guardian*, who conceded harboring a general dislike of Disney animated films and the characters featured in them, including the princesses, accused Disney of being "unforgivably late" in their creation of a black heroine. Williams did, however, find Tiana to be "spunkier than most princesses", comparing her to Princess Fiona of the *Shrek* franchise, and reacted

positively to Tiana's portrayal as a tireless feminist restaurant tycoon.^[44] Writer Brooks Barnes from *The New York Times* highlights the two different issues for Princess Tiana, in her article "Her Prince Has Come. Critics, Too" that shows Disney with a good standing than with a negative standpoint, with the help of other writers expressing how, "Disney should be ashamed", said William Blackburn, a former columnist at *The Charlotte Observer*. "This princess story is set in New Orleans, the setting of one of the most devastating tragedies to beset a black community." From a rumor that surfaced online giving off that Disney was originally going to call Maddy (short for Madeleine) giving the idea that it was too close to the racist word *Mammy*, giving the aspect for her being a slave to her friend Charlotte La Bouff. Harvard teacher Michael D. Baran, a cognitive psychologist and anthropologist, expressed how children learn about race, and how Disney has a stereotyping history, "Because of Disney's history of stereotyping, people are really excited to see how Disney will handle her language, her culture, her physical attributes" said Michael D. Baran.^[45]

On August 19, 2011, Anika Noni Rose was presented with a *Disney Legends* award at the *D23 Expo* in *Anaheim, California*, to commemorate her work on *The Princess and the Frog*.^[46] At the same ceremony actresses *Jodi Benson*, *Paige O'Hara*, *Linda Larkin*, and *Lea Salonga* were also honored with awards for their individual contributions to Disney, having each at some point loaned their voice to a Disney princess.^[46]

On March 12, 2012, Sociological Images published a post arguing that using the Disney character Tiana to advertise watermelon candy perpetrated the racist *watermelon stereotype*. This criticism was reported on some other blogs.^{[47][48]}

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