

Fleur Bennerson

Non-Traditional Casting; Unique or Normal?

Fleur Bennerson explains how non-traditional casting should not be negatively viewed.

In the theatre and acting industry, most roles would be portrayed by white men. But recently, more people of different identities and races have been taking the acting world by storm.

First of all, non-traditional casting is when people are cast in productions regardless of age, gender, race or skin colour. In the 2023 adaptation of Disney's 'The Little Mermaid', the lead role of Ariel was filled by actress Halle Bailey. This sparked joy among black youth across the world, as they saw someone that looked like them in a stereotypically white role. Although it may seem that Bailey's casting was met with support from everyone, that is unfortunately not the case. Lots of racist backlash came from critics who argued that a black Ariel would destroy the film's original legacy. However, director Rob Marshall thought the exact opposite. "It feels so small-minded, and that's what the film is about – to not be afraid of someone who is not like you," said Marshall. "My hope is that this beautiful tale of a mermaid can remind us that we are all one."

Another example of this is in 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child', a theatre production. Harry and Ron are both played by white actors, as expected, but in this play black actress Noma Dumezweni plays the role of Hermione. This casting was not met well by people, and JK Rowling had to come out and address the racism being hurled around online. Rowling states: "I had a bunch of racists telling me that because Hermione 'turned white' that she must be a white woman, which I have a great deal of difficulty with," she says. "But I decided not to get too agitated about it and simply state quite firmly that Hermione can be a black woman with my absolute blessing and enthusiasm." This makes a lot of sense, as Hermione's race is never explicitly mentioned, and she is often depicted as black in fanart. The production managed to sell 175,000 tickets in 24 hours, so it is certain that the play was a complete success, no matter the races of the actors.

In conclusion, the races or identities of actors does not matter, for it is more about the talent and skills of the actors to determine the success of a production.