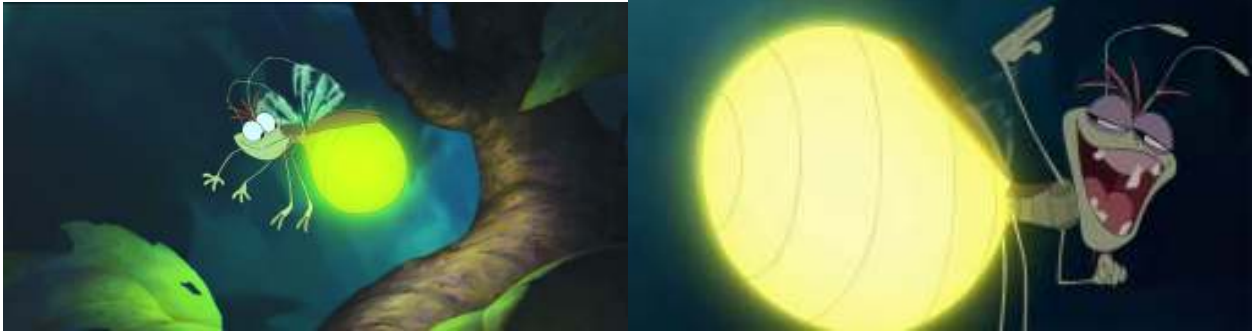


"Don't Make Me Light My Butt!"



THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

Release Date: December 25, 2009

Distributor: Walt Disney Pictures

Director: John Musker, Ron Clements

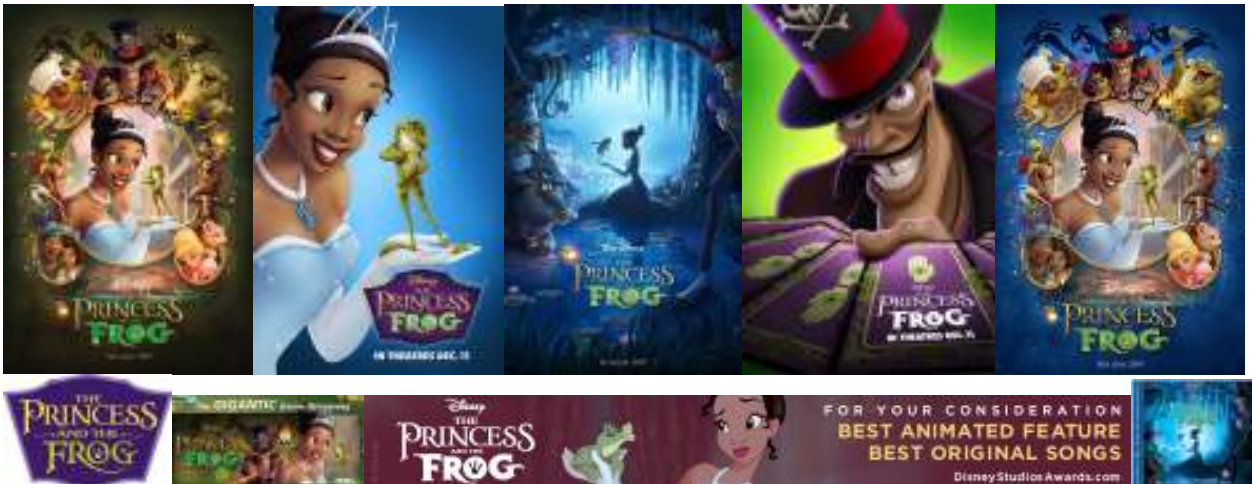
Screenwriter: John Musker, Ron Clements

Cast: Anika Noni Rose, Keith David, Jenifer Lewis, John Goodman, Bruno Campos

Genre: Animation, Musical

Website: <http://disney.go.com/disneypictures/princessandthefrog/>

Synopsis: Walt Disney Animation Studios presents the musical **THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG**, an animated comedy set in the great city of New Orleans. From the creators of "The Little Mermaid" and "Aladdin", Ron Clements and John Musker, comes a modern twist on a classic tale, featuring a beautiful girl named Tiana (ANIKA NONI ROSE), a frog prince who desperately wants to be human again, and a fateful kiss that leads them both on a hilarious adventure through the mystical bayous of Louisiana. The film has Oscar®-winning composer Randy Newman who created a musical set in the greatest city of them all, New Orleans. *The Princess and the Frog* marks Disney's return to the timeless art form of traditional animation to tell the most beautiful love story ever told with frogs, voodoo, and a singing alligator.





What I Liked The Most:

The Princess and the Frog will challenge most serious film reviewer to find any really glaring faults. For what I liked most in the film I could start with the many memorable and easily singable songs like Anika Noni Rose's soulful "Almost There", Keith David's haunting "Friends On The Other Side" or equally good "Dig A Little Deeper" with Jenifer Lewis featuring the Pinnacle Gospel Choir. Or I could start with breaking down film's smart and highly likeable characters like Tiana, Prince, Louis the Gator, Mama Odie and my favorite Ray the Cajun firefly. There are funny action scenes with the hungry Cajun frog hunters. The film's witty writing gives us Ray saying with attitude "Don't make me light my butt!", which entertains without sacrificing the natural New Orleans and bayou accents. Screenwriter Rob Edwards's snappy dialogue for the film was not predictable or dumb down for just children. The plot was well thought out and using the "standard quest" format to find Mama Odie to return Tiana and Prince Naveen to human form keeps the story moving. And it was refreshing to see once again Disney's original hand-drawn artwork and 2-D animation light up the screen. There really is no one standout thing that makes *The Princess and the Frog* a great film, but rather many multiple cinematic elements that combine to create a new Walt Disney Animation Classic.







Hero & Heroine:

To say Tiana is not your typical Disney Princess heroine is not a critique but a mutual understanding that there has never been an African-American Disney princess. But the most unique aspect of Tiana is how easily relatable she is to audiences. Young Tiana is a curious and spunky little girl that is told by James, Terence Howard, her father and positive role model that “you can do anything you set your mind to. And the dream that Tiana most admires is her dad’s dream of owning his own restaurant to serve his crowd pleasing Gumbo. Tiana holds onto dearly of a scrap of paper that has a picture of her daddy’s future New Orleans restaurant. The film shifts to when Tiana is now a young woman who is working back to back jobs as a waitress to save up enough money to open her own restaurant. Her father has passed away in World War I and that did not deter her from fulfilling his dream. Tiana is on a mission and will not be deterred.



Tiana is a different type of Disney Princess because she is really not waiting around for a “Prince Charming” or “Mr. Right” to sweep her off her feet to make all her dreams come true. She is in fact more independent and is not really looking for love. Tiana even is willing to sacrifice hanging out with her peers, so she can work more overtime shifts. But I will say that I do see similarities with Cinderella and Tiana because they both have to do a lot of hard work to please others. Tiana is actually more happy making money selling her beignets at Charlotte’s party for Prince Naveen, than wishing she could meet Naveen for herself. And on a lighter note Anika Noni Rose made sure that “Tiana had some booty” as director/writer Ron Clements said at a NACCP preview screening. And Tiana looks like an animated version of the real life beautiful and naturally curvy Anika.



Prince Naveen from Maldonia is also a different type of typical heroic Disney Prince because he is such a carefree, flirtatious and energetic character. He is also unique in that he is essentially broke because of his bad relationship with his estranged parents. Prince Naveen is over in New Orleans for his intense love of jazz. But that decision may have also cost him his princely inheritance. So Naveen really is looking for a rich “Ms. Right” to take care of him. Naveen has a hustler and dashing streak that makes him more like Aladdin. Rarely, if ever, has Disney had a prince character that is more unsure and accepting of his non-royal status. New Orleans also represents the New World mentality of people coming to America and reinventing themselves. Prince Naveen has no problems marrying Charlotte and continuing his rich, impulsive lifestyle. And little is made of Prince being colored because his royalty outdoes his race. Brazilian born actor Bruno Campos, who is a co-star on USA’s hit **Royal Pains**, does a consistent job of giving Prince Naveen--an optimistic, upbeat and playful attitude throughout the film.

Villains:

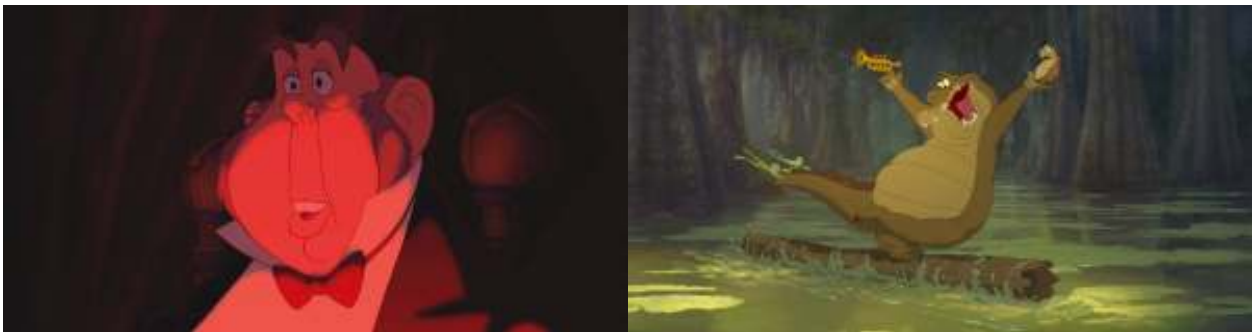
The only true villain in **The Princess and The Frog** is the slick and shady Dr. Facilier aka Shadow Man who is voiced expertly by the smooth and gravely Keith David. Being in New Orleans is the ideal place to have Dr. Facilier go in a blink from a common street charlatan to a dark master of voodoo and black magic. Dr. Facilier has a pretty easy time convincing Naveen’s manservant Lawrence, Peter Bartlett, to impersonate Prince Naveen so he can live the high life married to Charlotte. And Dr. Facilier gets demonic shadow help from his friends from the “Other Side” to make his evil plans happen. And we see a darker and greedier side of Lawrence when he realizes that he is reverting back from Prince Naveen and desperately wants to stay handsome and young. I’d put Dr. Facilier right up with Disney villains like Hercules’ Hades and Aladdin’s Jafar. Dr. Facilier aka Shadow Man should be brought back if there is any direct-to-DVD sequels.





Supporting Characters:

Tiana's childhood friend Charlotte LaBouff, Jennifer Cody, is a lovely chatterbox, rich "Daddy's Girl". Young Charlotte grows up to be the same type as a young woman. Charlotte, wants to meet Prince Naveen more like a teenage fan that wants to meet a visiting rock star. Charlotte's flighty and romance seeking persona is a perfect contrast to Tiana because she does not think that Charlotte's life will ever be hers anytime soon. John Goodman gives a hearty voice to Eli "Big Daddy" LaBouff, but he does not do much in the film. Neither does Oprah as Eudora, Tiana's mother. Both are steady and bland characters. I found it interesting that the film choose not to give Charlotte a visible and active mom character--to sort of balance out Tiana not having a father when she is grown up. On the lighter note, Louis, the trumpet playing alligator, is a very funny and loyal companion and protector for Tiana and Naveen. Louis will make one remember Baloo in *The Jungle Book*. Michael-Leon Wooley gives such a passionate performance you really wish Louis could be turned into a human. Mama Odie is a high spirited blind and toothless swamp witch doctor who is voiced with a lot of sass by Jenifer Lewis.



But my favorite character in the whole film was Ray the Cajun firefly. Jim Cummings does a phenomenal job of literally stealing scenes whenever Ray is on the screen. And Ray has lots of depth from being a take charge type of character helping Tiana and Prince Naveen get to Mama Odie's swamp lair. Ray is loyally fearless and gutsy when he directly attacks the Cajun frog hunters and Dr. Facilier. Or Ray being a hopeless romantic because he sincerely believes with all his might that a bright star in the sky is his firefly girlfriend, Evangeline. And because Ray has such a scrappy and genuine Cajun character that he really exemplifies the New Orleans spirit. Ray asking if Tiana and Naveen were from Shreveport is very funny and insider joke. And when Ray starts singing "Gonna Take You There" I loved hearing the washboards in the zydeco music.



Jim Cummings



Ray



Jenifer Lewis



Mama Odie



Teaching Moments:

The major teaching moments and moral lessons that are almost in every classic Disney animated film occur mainly when Tiana and Naveen are frogs. Some silly social critics have complained that half of Tiana and Naveen's time on screen are as frogs. But that is baseless criticism because there would be no true growth or even romantic feelings from Tiana and Naveen if they were not frogs. I love the fact that Disney starts off the film telling upfront the traditional tale of The Frog Prince. But the fact that Naveen is technically a real Prince when he is a frog and Tiana is not truly a princess when she kisses him only complicates matters. Tiana and Naveen must learn to trust and respect each other as frogs more than they ever would as humans. Naveen has to learn from Tiana that there is more to life than just having fun and Tiana equally learns from Naveen that she needs to lighten up and enjoy life. There are many cute and funny moments. Edwards, Clements and John Musker have a steady narrative that gradually builds the romance between Tiana and Naveen until everyone watching the film would be just as happy as if they ended up as a couple of frogs in love or as a pair of humans.







The Story Behind The Story:

How we got a historic film that breaks decades of racial barriers in animation is a long story. First, you have to go back Michael Eisner's decision in 2003 to stop making big budget hand-drawn 2-D animation films after the less than successful **Brother Bear** and **Treasure Planet**. That decision basically wiped the decks of all other animated projects that were in development. So with a blank slate Disney had no real pressure to deliver any new 2-D animated films. A few years later John Lasseter expanded his duties at Pixar and also took over running Walt Disney Animation Studios. Disney had been tinkering around with The Brother's Grimm's The Frog Prince story for quite awhile and was looking for Ron Clements and John Musker to take a fresh approach by making the story's heroine Black. And Lasseter made Disney's big multiracial casting decision even easier by wanting **The Princes and the Frog** set in his favorite city of New Orleans. Anika Noni Rose can vividly remember in 2005 auditioning as just a supporting role. She even had practiced a special squeaky voice for the possible role of a bug. She had no inkling that less than two years later she would be the whole focal point of the film as Tiana. By the time Anika was fully onboard as Tiana, her career was on the fast track by playing a lead role in **Dreamgirls** and getting chosen to play Grace Makutsi in HBO's **The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency**. Sadly, Anika told me at the NACCP preview screening that she is still waiting for HBO to renew her well written dramatic series.

Disney chose the final cast for the film's voices. And most likely the cast inspired the final drawing of their characters. Rob Edwards, who was a writer on **Treasure Planet**, was brought into bring more authentic flavor to the overall narrative. Oprah even chimed in about Tiana's overall character development. Oprah wanted Prince Naveen's family to reunite with him at the end, so he would be a fully restored Prince when he married Tiana. Producer Peter Del Vecho said Disney even went out of its way to give periodical screenings of the film to the NACCP to make sure they were getting the right feedback. So it has been sort of a five year journey to produce the first Disney African-American Princess with lots of influential behind-the scene players to shape the finished film.



Oprah Winfrey



Eudora



Bruno Campos



Prince Naveen



Terrence Howard



James

What I Liked Least:

What I liked least about *The Princess and the Frog* has nothing to do with the film. But rather all the lies, false stories and half baked conspiracies on the Web about the film. After I got done reporting on the big E3 Expo in June 2009, I turned my full attention to *The Princess and the Frog* and I was amazed at how many bloggers, mainly urban or Black bloggers, were going nuts over why Prince Naveen was not African-American? Why Tiana was turned into a frog for half the film? Or why it took Disney so long to make a Black Princess in the first place? Like 72 years ago Disney was gonna make *Snow White* and then a few years later make an African-American Princess animated film before Blacks could go to non-segregated schools, ride in the front of public buses in the South or live anywhere they wanted in America. We did not even make interracial marriage legal nationwide until 1967. Now Disney could have made *The Princess and the Frog* in the late 50's or early 60's with Dorothy Dandridge as Tiana, Harry Belafonte as Prince Naveen and Louis Armstrong as Louis. But someone would have had to sit down and ask Floyd Norman, Disney's first and lone Black animator during the 50's and 60's, how realistic that scenario would be at the time. Floyd, who worked on *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Jungle Book*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Toy Story 2*, *Mulan*, etc., has been quoted saying in a 2007 www.jimhillmedia.com essay that "overly sensitive people see racial or ethnic slights in every image and in their zeal to sanitize and pasteurize everything--they've taken all the fun out of cartoon making."



There were many academics and social critics weighing in on the New York Times about the social and racial aspects of Disney creating an African-American Princess. Or there are offbeat, bitter social media critics, like Armond White, who stupidly asked why Disney did not deal with overt racism of 1930's Southern Jim Crow laws in a G-rated cartoon film. Armond, writing for the New York Press, even suggests at the end of his angry tirade against Disney that the *Song of the South* was actually a better film because it's racially tinged Southern animal characters "were historically, authentically, enlighteningly black, but this disingenuous Princess is a toad." Armond is just a big Princess Tiana hater! But I do think Disney should release *Song of the South* on DVD.



And there was extra scrutiny put on *The Princess and the Frog* because it was being released in the shadow of the world's greatest act of diversity—the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States. This was now truly historic times and groundbreaking multiracial film deserved better than snide gossip blogs spreading false rumors because—they never considered for a moment that maybe the film was going to be better than expected. Good news is always in short supply on urban blogs—even if it occurs 72 years too late for some Disney skeptics in the African-American community.



The “D” in Disney Now Stands For Diversity:

What can be stated now with the release of *The Princess and the Frog* is that the “D” in Disney now stands for diversity. What misguided critics of Disney often fail to realize when they tick off the procession of multiracial Disney Princess films from *Jasmine*, *Pochantas*, *Mulan* and now Tiana; is that they forget that young Disney film fans most likely watch the Disney Channel. So there are millions of kids who regularly watch lots of multiracial cartoon characters featured on Disney’s *The Proud Family*, *Gargoyles*, *American Dragon*, *The Emperor’s New School*, *Lilo & Stitch* and *Kim Possible*. Or they see multiracial lead actors on *That’s So Raven*, *Corey in the House*, *Jump In*, *The Cheetah Girls*, *Wendy Wu: Homecoming Warrior*, *Johnny Tsunami* and *High School Musical* films. And *The Lion King* is one of Disney’s best multiracial films.



Of course, Walt Disney's first African-American Princess is a special moment, but film critics should not isolate that moment and not consider it outside of the context of all the diverse animated characters that are being shown 24/7 on the Disney Channel and other Disney owned media networks. There were many little kids of every color at the NACCP preview screening of **The Princess and the Frog** and they were, excited and highly receptive at seeing Tiana on the screen. These kids at the screening were especially in awe by getting to meet Anika Noni Rose in person. Anika is the living embodiment of Princess Tiana and she was very proud to answer all the kids questions and even sing live for them. I wish the NACCP had filmed the preview's Q&A session with Anika, Peter, Rob, Clements and Musker and posted it on Youtube or Facebook.

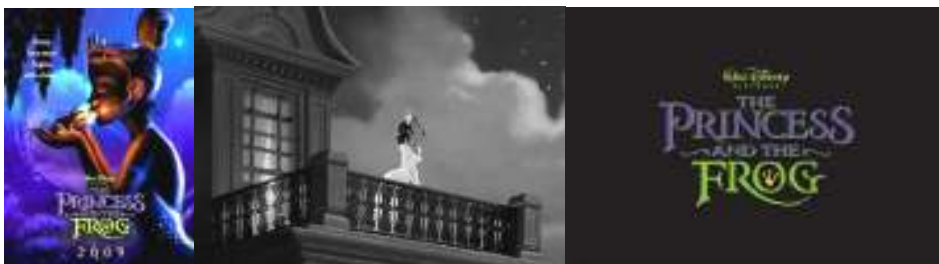




Even Walt Disney making an African-American Princess is a multi-billion dollar decision. But the most immediate and most positive social impact of having Disney making **The Princess and the Frog** is that an African-American Princess will be heavily promoted and marketed in almost every country around the world. Soon Princess Tiana will be seen greeting her new fans at Disneyland, Disney World, Disneyland Paris and soon in Disneyland's new resort in Shanghai. The Princess Tiana doll is already a sold-out and "must-have" toy of the Christmas season--not just among Black girls--but all girls who want to add the latest Disney Princess to their collection. Anything Tiana will be bought as collector items. The global merchandising possibilities of Princess Tiana and the film's characters are endless. I can easily see Princess Tiana joining the traveling cast of Disney On Ice. And I look forward to eventually seeing **The Princess and the Frog** Broadway Musical. Or maybe Ray the firefly will be turned into a giant balloon for the Thanksgiving Day Macy parade. There really is no limit to what a multi-billion media conglomerate like Walt Disney can do to make Princess Tiana a global merchandising brand of goodwill, prosperity and hope. As a Walt Disney screenwriter who wrote and created **Max Keeble's Big Move**, I was very proud to sit again in the same El Capitan Theatre where I saw the premiere of my Disney movie. From the moment the film starts to the hearing the audience clapping wildly with approval among hearing Ne-Yo singing during the credits I knew I had witnessed a proud and powerful experience. I am happily going to give **The Princess and the Frog** five cheesecakes out of five cheesecakes.

By

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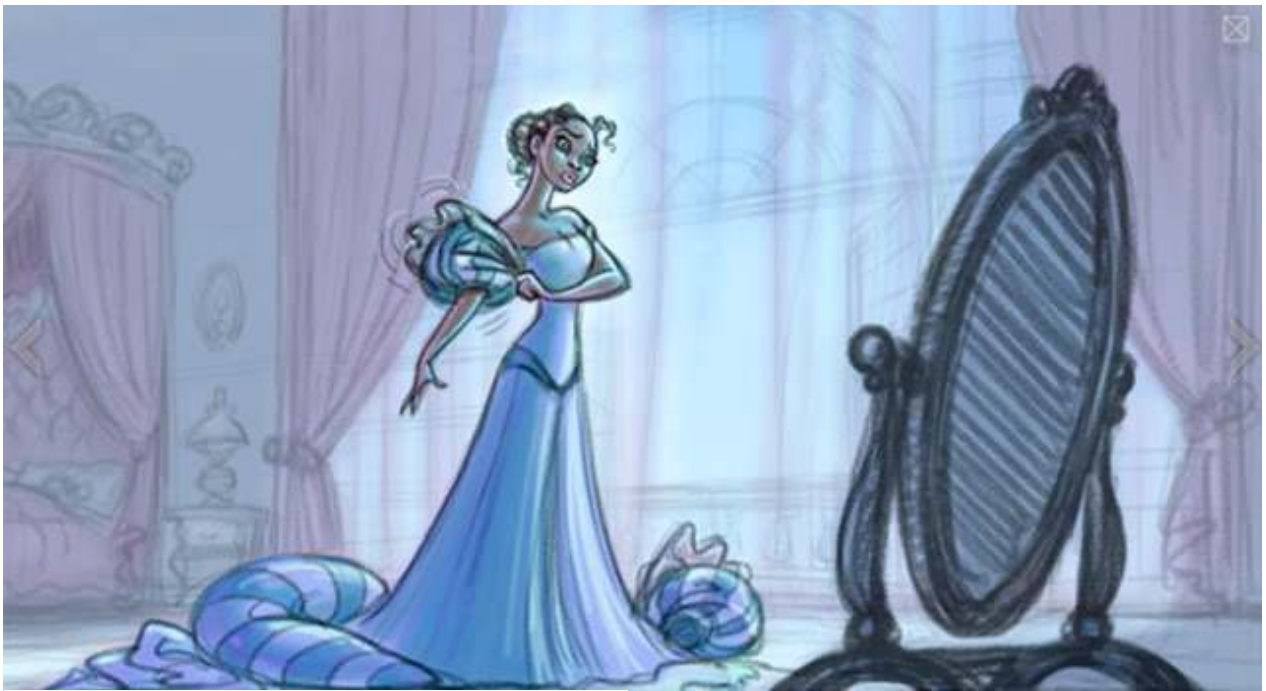


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Keith David



Dr. Facilier



Jennifer Cody



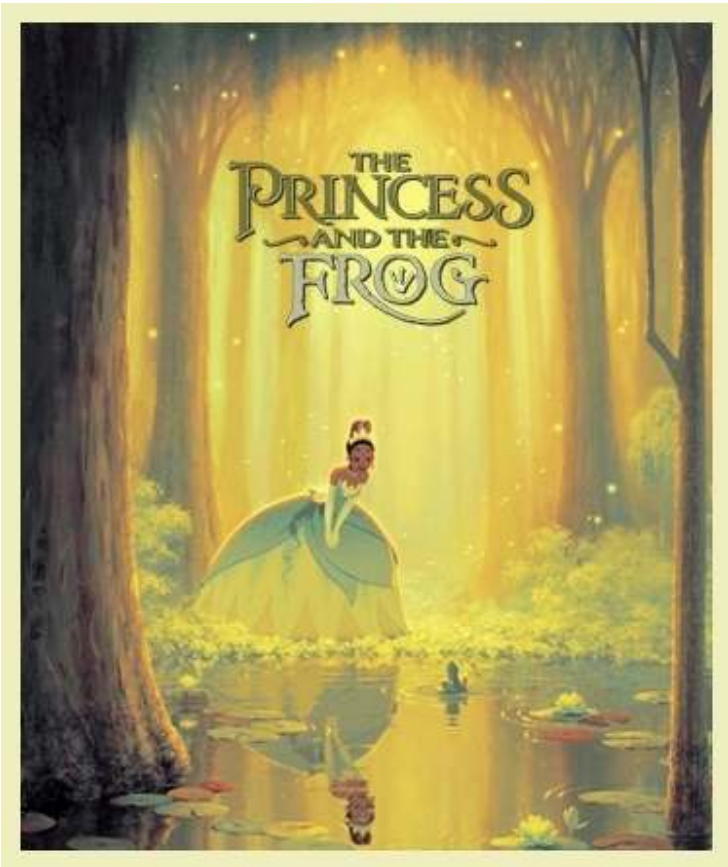
Charlotte LaBouff



Michael-Leon Wooley



Louis



John Goodman



Louis

Disney
THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG



Peter Onorati



Lawrence



LOUIS

Disney
THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG



Disney
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