



The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore

In this short film, a man who has been displaced from his home by a storm befriends a flying book that leads him to a library. He stays there for many years—caring for the books, lending them out to the community, and writing his memoir—until the time comes for another change.

Recommended for all ages

Themes: current events; life cycle; storytelling; natural disasters

Director(s): William Joyce and Brandon Oldenburg | **15 min** | **Animation** | **2011** | **Country:** USA | **Language:** In English

Official film website: www.morrislessmore.com



SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This film was inspired by Hurricane Katrina, which flooded the city of New Orleans in 2005, leaving massive devastation in its wake.

This film begins with Mr. Morris Lessmore, the main character, sitting on a balcony in the French Quarter and then, like the real residents of New Orleans, being forced to flee the city and rebuild his entire life. The directors were also inspired by *The Wizard of Oz*, modeling Lessmore's flight from New Orleans after Dorothy's flight from Kansas.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **Allegory:** A story in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for ideas or situations.
- **Memoir:** A written account of a person's past experiences and memories. Unlike a diary, memoirs are usually intended for publication and to be read by others.
- **Animation:** The appearance or illusion of movement when a series of drawings, computer graphics, or photographs of objects (such as puppets or models) are viewed in sequence.

For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary (pcffri.org/FilmHub).

TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

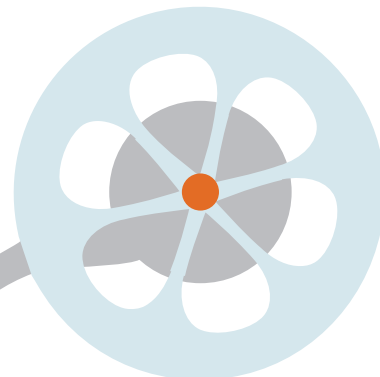
- In your own words, describe what happens in the film. Where is Mr. Morris Lessmore in the beginning? Where does he go? What happens to him?
- Describe Lessmore's relationship to books. How does he treat them? How do the books treat him? What might the books represent in this story?
- Why is the world in black-and-white after the storm? How might the lack of color reflect Lessmore's emotions? What makes the world turn to color again?
- This film has been described as an "allegory about the curative powers of story." That means this film is really about how sharing stories can help people heal and make sense of painful events in their lives. Has sharing a personal story ever made you feel better?
- Keeping Hurricane Katrina in mind, why do the words fall off the page when he tries to read after the storm?
- Why do you think the filmmakers decided not to include any dialogue? Did you understand what was happening even without dialogue, and how? How would the film change if it did have dialogue?



Clues
and
Cues

Pay attention while watching

- How do the scenes or visual images in the film remind you of other films you've seen?
- Notice when the film shifts from color to black-and-white and back to color.



GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: www.pcffri.org/FilmHub

• Writing Prompts

Imagine one of your favorite books comes to life. What does it say to you? What does it do? Write a screenplay or story that tells the tale of the adventure. Write about a time when a book or a story helped you. How and why did it help? Write an excerpt of your own memoir, choosing an important event from your life to narrate (maybe about a time of important change?). Then make it into a book by either stapling the pages together to bind them and decorating the cover, or using thin pieces of cardboard as a cover.

• Flip Book Making

Materials: Thick paper or blank index cards, drawing materials, binder clip

You will need thick paper stapled together into a booklet. On each page, draw something that changes position just slightly from page to page. When the pages are flipped through, the drawing will appear to come to life. This is the most basic way animations are made.

• Film Analysis

Materials: DVD Player or computer with internet access

Play the storm scene in *The Wizard of Oz* and the storm scene in *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore*. How are these two scenes similar? How are they different? Why does Mr. Lessmore's world become black and white after the storm and why does Dorothy's world change into color after the storm? Why do you think the directors chose to reference *The Wizard of Oz*?

MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

BOOKS

- **The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore**
by William Joyce (Author, Illustrator), Joe Bluhm (Illustrator)
- **I Survived Hurricane Katrina**
by Lauren Tarshis
The fictional story of a young boy separated from his family during Hurricane Katrina.
- **Zane and the Hurricane**
by Rodman Philbrick
The fictional account of a 12-year-old boy surviving the storm and the destructive aftermath. This book tackles race, police brutality and government mismanagement in an age appropriate fashion.

- **A Storm Called Katrina**
by Myron Uhlberg
A 10-year-old boy takes on adult responsibilities after his father disappears amid the chaos after the storm. This book also introduces young readers to New Orleans musical culture.
- **Hurricane Song**
by Paul Volponi
The story of a boy and his father in the Superdome after Hurricane Katrina.

FILMS

- **Eleanor's Secret (2011)**
A boy must learn to read an ancient spell that will keep his storybook friends alive for future generations of children.
- **The Wizard of Oz (1939)**
Dorothy and her dog, Toto's adventurous tale in the magical land of Oz after a tornado rips through their hometown, Kansas was a strong influence on the filmmakers of Mr. Morris Lessmore.
- **Steamboat Bill (1928)**
This Buster Keaton film also had a strong influence on the filmmakers. Compare the storm scenes in both films. Notice that the filmmakers modeled Mr. Lessmore's appearance after Buster Keaton.

 Indicates PCFF festival selection

BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- For a reading guide to the book:
www.books.simonandschuster.com/The-Fantastic-Flying-Books-of-Mr-Morris-Lessmore/William-Joyce/9781442457027/reading_group_guide
- How to make a flip book with a sticky note pad:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Njl-uqnmBGA
- Lesson plan for making a flip book:
www.education.com/activity/article/Flip_Book_Practice_Persistence/
- Hurricane Katrina for kids from Scholastic News:
www.teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/hurricanekatrina/
- Hurricane Sandy damage in Rhode Island:
www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2012/11/23/rhode-island-confronts-beaches-ravaged-hurricane-sandy/GTmBO5VNSpmF2uNLgq0PKJ/story.html