



The Dam Keeper

In a desolate future, a small town's survival depends on a large windmill dam that acts as a fan to keep out poisonous clouds. Despite bullying from classmates, the dam's young operator, Pig, works tirelessly to keep the sails spinning in order to protect the town. But when a new student joins Pig's class, everything begins to change.

Recommended for ages 8+

Themes: bullying; loss; education; friendship; creative expression; stereotypes; discrimination; folklore; social and emotional learning

Director(s): Robert Kondo and Daisuke Tsutsumi | **18 min** | **Animated Short** | **2013** | **Country:** United States | **Language:** English

Official film website: www.thedamkeeper.com



SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This film is loosely based on the popular folktale "The Little Dutch Boy," otherwise known as "Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates." Contrary to popular belief, it is not a Dutch fairytale, but was written by American author Mary Mapes Dodge in 1865.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **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.
- **Metaphor:** A thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract.
- **Stereotype:** A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

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

TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

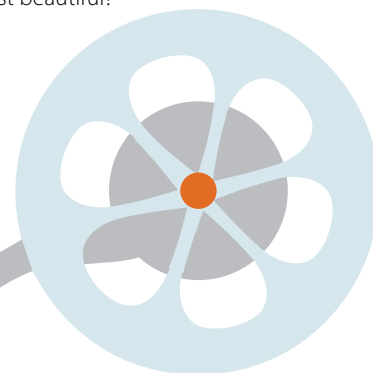
- The film opens with the line, "through one of the windows all I could see was a cloud, an ocean of ash. Out the other window I saw the people in town. Out both I saw darkness." What does that line mean? What does the darkness represent?
- Why do the scenes in the classroom slow down? How does that convey the passing of time?
- Through the Fox's sketches, we learn how she sees the world. How does she see the same classroom and classmates differently than Pig? What power does Fox give Pig when she hands him a piece of charcoal?
- What are the stereotypes about pigs in this film? How do those stereotypes make his life harder?
- How does the director use light to communicate Pig's loneliness?
- What does Pig originally see in Fox's sketch? What does he see when he looks at it a second time? Why did he see it differently when he first saw it? Have you ever made a similar mistake?
- The last shot in the film is of Pig and Fox playing while ash flies around. Why does the film end with a shot of ash? What does the ash symbolize?
- What is your favorite visual image in this film and why? Which image or scene do you think is the most beautiful?



Clues and Cues

Pay attention while watching

- How does brightness or darkness in some scenes affect the mood?
- When does the animation slow down or speed up? What emotions does the pace communicate?



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

Option 1: Have you ever felt like Pig at school? Have you ever been bullied or felt left out? Have you ever been a bully or been a part of an “in-group” that left others out? Have you ever been like Fox by befriending an outcast? Write about the incidents when you were either a pig, a fox, or a bully and what you were thinking and feeling at the time.

Option 2: The pig is a little kid burdened with an adult job. Have you ever had a responsibility beyond your years, like taking care of younger siblings? How did it feel?

Option 3: What are the stereotypes of pigs in this movie? Who are the pigs in our society or in your school? What can you do to change the way this group of people is treated?

Option 4: The two directors of this film were close friends but they still had a really hard time collaborating on this film because they didn't always agree. Think of a time when you productively worked with others on a project, and a time when you couldn't work well with others. What made one project successful and the other one unsuccessful?

• Fox's Sketchbook

Materials: Charcoal and sketch paper
Create your own version of Fox's sketchbook! How do you see your classroom? School? Family? World? You can keep most of the pictures private, but you have to share at least one with the class. Make sure not to be mean to your classmates by drawing images which will hurt their feelings. Remember, you're Fox, who is very kindhearted!

• Pigs and Foxes Can Be Friends!

Materials: Video camera or smart phone
Make a short documentary about stereotypes in your school. Using your classroom camera or smart phone, interview people at recess, in the hallway, at lunch about the stereotypes and categories in your school? Who are the pigs, foxes, alligators, etc.? (the popular kids, the loners, etc.) How can you all work together to change those stereotypes? You may want to use a storyboard to organize your thoughts.

• Animation on a Shoestring

Materials: Paper, pens or pencils, scissors, stapler

You can make your own tiny animation right in the classroom by creating a flipbook. Staple together a small stack of blank paper. On the bottom left-hand corner of the first page, draw something that moves, like a ball or a bus. Then on the next page draw the same image but slightly higher and maybe a bit to the right. Continue this process until you get to the last page. Then quickly flip through the pages and you'll notice that your drawing moves!

That's how animation works. Once you get the hang of this, try to create a flipbook using an object from the movie like Fox's sketchbook or the windmill!

MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

BOOKS

- **Hans Brinker or the Silver Skates**
by Mary Mapes Dodge
This was the original fairytale that inspired the directors for *The Dam Keeper*.

FILMS

- **Ernest and Celestine** (2012)
A bear named Ernest and a mouse named Celestine form an unlikely friendship.
 - **Le Tableau (The Painting)** (2011)
The inhabitants of a piece of art live in a strict social order based on their completeness.
 - **Ulises and the 10,000 Mustaches (Ulises y los 10,000 Bigotes)** (2014)
A young boy's humorous transformation that places him in the limelight challenges the bonds of friendships.
 - **Almost Friends** (2014)
A documentary about two Israeli girls—an Arab and a Jew—who live only 40 miles away but in many ways live worlds apart.
- **Indicates PCFF festival selection**

BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- The two directors of this film discuss the art of collaboration: vimeo.com/113347773
- An interview with the two directors Robert Kondo and Dice Tsutsumi about their artistic process: www.onanimation.com/2014/12/22/house-of-pig-and-fox-a-conversation-with-the-dam-keeper-directors-robert-kondo-and-dice-tsutsumi