Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi) is a fantasy adventure with a ten year-old girl, which starts in everyday Japan but goes somewhere very different. For young Chihiro and her family, a mysterious tunnel and haunted town lead to the Land of Spirits, inhabited by gods and monsters and ruled by the greedy witch Yu-baba. Chihiro’s parents are transformed into pigs; to rescue them, she must surrender her name and serve in this world. Luckily she finds friends and allies, including the handsome but mysterious boy Haku. Initially sulky and listless, Chihiro (or Sen, as she’s now called) finds inner strengths and establishes an identity in this strange world.

But can she win back her name and return home?

A Brief Biography

Hayao Miyazaki was born in Tokyo on January 5, 1941. He is one of the greatest animators and directors in Japan. The entertaining plots, compelling characters and breathtaking animation in his films have earned him international renown from critics as well as public recognition within Japan. Disney’s commitment to introduce the films to the rest of the world will let more people appreciate the high-quality works Miyazaki has given us.

www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/miyazaki/
Chihiro Ogino is a little girl who is moving to a new town with her parents, Akio and Yuko. She is clearly unhappy about the move and appears rather petulant. They lose their way and come across a tunnel, and out of curiosity enter it, unaware that it actually provides access into a spirit world - specifically, to a spirit bathhouse - where the spirits and gods (drawn from the Shinto religious tradition) go to rest and relax. The family enters what is apparently an abandoned theme park populated with restaurants, and Chihiro’s parents, finding a place to eat, immediately help themselves to a meal. Chihiro is uneasy, and hesitates outside, watching her parents eat like pigs; soon they actually transform into large pigs (as happened to Odysseus’s crew in Homer’s Odyssey).

When Chihiro’s distress at losing her parents is compounded by discovering that she’s turning transparent, a mysterious boy or young man named Haku comforts her and gives her something to eat which turns her solid again. He then escorts her into the spirit world palace of Yubaba and admonishes her that the only way she can remain safely for long enough to rescue her parents is to find work in the spirits’ bathhouse.

Chihiro follows Haku’s advice, descending a long outdoor staircase to the boiler room where she asks the human-looking, six-armed boilerman, Kamaji, for work. He rebuffs her, until one of the coal-carrying sprites, collapses under an extra-heavy lump. Chihiro takes the sprite’s place and feeds the boiler. Kamaji warms towards the girl, and assists her getting a job in the bathhouse.

A young woman named Lin (Rin) helps Chihiro find her way through the labyrinthine palace undetected, diverting a fellow servant by tantalizing him with food while Chihiro squeezes into an elevator behind a gross but benign radish spirit (daikon kami).

Pulled into Yubaba’s penthouse suite, Chihiro discovers a regal but monstrous lady, who dotes on an equally monstrous (and unfeasibly large) baby. Chihiro repeatedly and stubbornly asks for a job, and finally Yubaba consents, on condition that she give up her name. Yubaba literally takes possession of Chihiro’s name, grasping the kanji from the contract in her hand and leaving Chihiro only one piece of her original 2-character name on the contract, in isolation pronounced “Sen”. By taking someone’s name, Yubaba keeps the owner of the name a prisoner of the bathhouse forever - unless she or he can remember who she or he is.

While at work Sen has a difficult time adjusting to the work regime, but wins respect by dealing with a difficult customer, a slimy “stink spirit” whom she discovers is a heavily polluted river god, who needs an extraction of the garbage inside it. A spirit called No-Face, whom she let in earlier on, in return helps her perform one of her tasks at the bathhouse. However he goes out of control and tempts the staff at the bathhouse with fake gold and swallows a few of them. Haku returns to the bathhouse in the form of a dragon, pursued and attacked by a large flock of origami birds. He is badly injured but makes his way to Yubaba’s quarters. Sen follows him there with one of the paper objects having attached itself to her back without her knowing it.

She meets Yubaba’s giant baby boy who wants to play with her. She manages to get away from him and finds Haku, who is badly injured. The paper object stuck on her back transforms into Zeniba.
The Story (cont.)

Yubaba’s twin sister, who was chasing Haku because he had stolen her gold seal. Zeniba transforms the baby into a little hamster-like creature because he makes too much noise, and Yubaba’s hawk-like lieutenant into a tiny bird-creature. Haku cuts Zeniba’s paper puppet into two with his tail, causing Zeniba’s image to split and disappear. He then tumbles down a shaft, taking Sen with him, but they land safely in Kamaji’s room.

Sen manages to treat Haku and makes him spit out the seal that he stole from Zeniba. She decides to return it and travels with the reformed No-Face (who was aggressive only because of the corrupting influence of the bathhouse) and the little baby-creature, who is carried by the bird-creature. When Yubaba finds out that her baby is missing she is furious. Haku manages to make a deal: he will get the baby back and in return Yubaba must set free Sen and her parents. (The plots of the Japanese- and English-language versions differ slightly here: in the original, Yubaba and Haku talk about what’s necessary to break the spell on her parents.)

Haku (again a dragon) finds Sen at Zeniba’s cottage. The two of them fly back to the bathhouse. On the way, Sen remembers where she had met Haku before: he is actually a river spirit, specifically the spirit of the Kohaku River, near which Sen used to live (and once fell into) but that was drained up and built upon. Upon remembering Sen tells him that his name is ‘Kohaku River’. This frees Haku from the control of Yubaba. At the bathhouse Sen has to perform one last task to free her parents: she has to pick them out from a group of pigs. She correctly answers that none of the pigs are her parents. As a result she and her parents are set free and return to the human world.

Note: In some parts of the movie the main character Chihiro has climacophobia (fear of falling down stairs).

Possible Themes

It is often commented that the film constitutes an allegory on the progression from childhood to maturity, and the risk of losing one’s nature in the process. The main character’s development in the setting could also be seen as a sullen, spoiled and very modern Japanese ten-year-old being forced to grow up when faced with more traditional Japanese culture and manners.

There are perhaps also veiled references to competing political ideologies, including a theme of environmental awareness (as seen by the river spirit being freed from its stink spirit form once freed of the material dumped in it, and Haku’s discovery he is the blocked up River Kohaku). Miyazaki also refrains from creating any characters with complete ideologies of good or evil, all characters exhibiting some negative and some positive traits in different situations.
The Story

Through the tunnel,
There was a town of wonder.
It was an inconceivable place,
Where inconceivable things happened.

A world existed right next to the humans’ world,
A world humans could never see.

Local gods and various lesser deities,
Goblins and monsters.
It was a hot springs town,
Where old gods came to heal their illness and wounds.

10 year-old Chihiro wanders into this world,
Where humans shouldn’t enter.

Chihiro can only survive in this world if she accepts two conditions:
To work for Yu-baaba, an avaricious witch
Who rules the huge bath house at the center of the town.
And to be deprived of her name and become a non-human.

Chihiro lost her name, and began working under her new name, Sen.

In the town of surprise and wonder, Chihiro comes to know
A huge sense of helplessness... and a small amount of hope.

However, in this difficult world, she discovers many things,
And Chihiro becomes more lively than she ever was.

Kamajii, the boiler keeper with his rich life experience.
Rin, who teaches Chihiro the work at the bath house.
Susuwatari, who carry coal.
Bou, the son of Yu-baaba.
The god of the river, a refugee from the human’s world, who is covered with trash and sludge.
Kaonashi, the masked man.
Zeniiba, the twin sister of Yu-baaba.

Unimaginable things keep happening.

Chihiro’s sleeping “power to live”
Has gradually begun to awaken.

And Chihiro meets Haku, a handsome but mysterious boy.

The encounter of a boy and a girl, tied together by a promise.
With awakening memories,
They understand and help each other.

*Can Chihiro take her name back,*
*And return to the humans’ world . . . ?*
Text type: Narrative
Purpose: to tell stories which
- are about a person or a group of people overcoming problems
- show how people react to experiences
- explore social and cultural values
- entertain an audience

REMEMBER

OVERALL DESIGN OF NARRATIVES

Humans have been telling stories ever since they first started to use language. For example, the story ‘The Trojan Horse was written over three thousand years ago by Homer, a storyteller of Ancient Greece. Narratives act as a form of entertainment and as a way of exploring issues in our society. We have developed a familiar pattern for constructing narratives.

The five stages of a narrative are:

Orientation which:
- introduces the characters and tells the reader something about them
- tells the reader when, where, who, what and why
- gives a hint about the problems which the characters will encounter

Complication which is where the reader discovers the problem and something happens that the characters do not expect.

Evaluation which:
- is usually attached to the complication or woven into it
- is where the storyteller comments on the events and in this way gives significance to them
- makes the reader care about what happens to the character
- slows the action down and creates suspense which makes the reader want to find out what happens next

Resolution which is where the problem is solved.

Coda which rounds off the story with a short comment on what happened or with a comment about the future lives of the characters. Many fairy tales have a coda such as And they lived happily ever after.

All narratives must have an orientation and a complication with an evaluation and a resolution. The complication is the centre of the narrative. It is the reason why the story is told. Storytellers only sometimes give their story a coda. At other times they leave the reader to work out the coda for themselves.
**Chihiro**
A slightly willful, spoiled, ordinary 10-year-old girl. While moving to another town, she wanders into a strange town with her parents. To survive, she has to work at the bathhouse ABURAYA, which is ruled by Yu-baaba the witch. She is deprived of her name Chihiro (literally means a thousand fathoms) and is given a new name, Sen (literally means a thousand*). While working, she learns many things. (*Chi and Sen use the same Kanji. Hence, Sen is actually a part of her name, Chihiro.)*

**Haku**
A mysterious boy who helped the frightened Chihiro when she found her parents changed into pigs. He continues to help Chihiro, but sometimes he takes a cold attitude toward her. He seems to work for Yu-baaba, under her secret orders.

**Kawa no Kami The River God**
One of Chihiro’s customers. As a token of her service, it gives Chihiro a Nigadango (bitter dumpling), which seems to be a medicine. When the god feels good, it flies in the air.

**Kaonashi No Face**
A mysterious man. He seems to come from yet another different world from the world of ABURAYA. He comes into ABURAYA as Chihiro invited him in. His purpose and his true identity are mysteries.
### Rin
A girl who works at ABURAYA. At first, she is a bit blunt, but she comes to take care of Chihiro. Her dream is to save money to go to the world beyond the sea.

### Kamajii
An old man who is responsible for the boiler room of ABURAYA. He also makes medicines that are put in the baths. He helps Chihiro many times. He seems to be a spirit of a spider, as he has six limbs.

### Yu-Baaba
The mistress of ABURAYA, the bathhouse. No one knows her age. She uses magic and rules the workers. She is strict to her workers and greedy, but she might not be such a mean person. Everything, from her clothes and decorations to the articles of her room, is gorgeous.

### Susuwatari
They work at the boiler room of ABURAYA. When Chihiro sees them carrying coals to the boiler with their tiny bodies, she finds something important that she had not realized before. They love Kompeitou (small star-shaped candies).
Orientation

which:
• introduces the characters and tells the reader something about them
• tells the reader when, where, who, what and why
• gives a hint about the problems which the characters will encounter

Describe the setting.
Where is it?
Who is involved?
What’s happening?

Describe Chihiro’s Characteristics.
How is she acting?
What does this suggest to you?

Does Chihiro’s behaviour suggest any problems she may have?
Is she a reluctant participant in what is happening?
Is her attitude positive or negative?
Does she have any control over what is happening?
Complication

Complication which is where the reader discovers the problem and something happens that the characters do not expect.

What events happen that are unexpected?
Where is it?
Who is involved?

What problems do these events cause?
What is the main problem to be resolved?
What are the characters initial response to these problems?
Evaluation which

- is usually attached to the complication or woven into it
- is where the storyteller comments on the events and in this way gives significance to them
- makes the reader care about what happens to the character
- slows the action down and creates suspense which makes the reader want to find out what happens next

How does the story develop?

What insights into Chihiro's character do we get?

What makes you care about Chihiro?

What other characters do you care about or have sympathy for? Why?
Resolution which is where the problem is solved.

How is Chihiro’s problem resolved?
How is Haku’s problem resolved?
How is No Face’s problem resolved?
**Coda** which rounds off the story with a short comment on what happened or with a comment about the future lives of the characters. Many fairy tales have a coda such as *And they lived happily ever after.*

All narratives must have an **orientation** and a **complication** with an **evaluation** and a **resolution**. The complication is the centre of the narrative. It is the reason why the story is told. Storytellers only sometimes give their story a coda. At other times they leave the reader to work out the coda for themselves.

What do you think is the message or philosophy expressed in the movie? 
How is this reasserted at the end?

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