



JAMES & THE GIANT PEACH

FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE FILM

After his parents are killed by an escaped rhinoceros, James Henry Trotter is sent to live with his cruel aunts. One hot summer day, he is approached by a little old man who gives James a bag of green crystals. Instead of drinking them, James loses them in the ground under a peach tree. Soon, a giant peach begins to grow! Before the aunts can execute their plan to exhibit the massive fruit, James enters the peach, where he meets a group of giant talking insects. Working together, they cut the peach loose in order to escape the hillside. The peach rolls and rolls, presumably crushing the aunts, and then plunges into the sea.

Threatened by circling sharks, James takes command, and he and the insects work together in order to attract seagulls, lasso them, and lift the peach out of danger. They fly west through the night, encountering unexpected sights and dangers. Morning light reveals that they have crossed the Atlantic and are now above New York City. An airplane slices through their strings and they crash to earth. James and the crew are welcomed as heroes. Children from the surrounding

Henry Selick (USA, 1996)
79 min, Color, English, Ages 7 and up

Key Concepts, Themes & Buzzwords

Adventure	Hero vs. Villain
Compassion	Imagination
Courage	Magic
Roald Dahl	Orphan
Dreams	Reality vs. Fantasy
Family	Stop-motion vs. Live-action
Friendship	Storytelling

neighborhoods eat the entire peach, and the massive pit becomes James' home in Central Park. Each character finds success and happiness in their new home.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

CHARACTERS & STORY

1. How would you describe the character of James at the beginning of the story? What is his personality like? What does he care about? Who is his family? What does he want?
2. Does James change at all over the course of this story? How is his character different at the end than at the beginning? Why do you think he changes in this way?
3. What are James' aunts like? Why does he end up living with them? How do they treat their nephew?
4. Did you have any favorite supporting characters? Any least favorite? What are some words/adjectives you would use to describe:
 - a. Miss Spider
 - b. The Centipede
 - c. The Grasshopper
 - d. The Ladybug
 - e. The Earthworm
5. To what extent did the story of the film match the story of the novel? Did you notice any key differences?
6. Did you have a favorite moment from this film? Did you have a least favorite? What moments were funniest? Saddest? Scariest?

CONTEXT

1. What other stories by Roald Dahl have you read? Have you seen any other movies based on his books? When did Roald Dahl write James & the Giant Peach? Why do you think it has been such a successful children's book?
2. Where else have you seen stop-motion animation? Do you think it worked well in this film? Why do you think the filmmakers chose to shoot certain segments in live-action but to animate other parts of the story?
 - a. Have you ever seen The Nightmare before Christmas, another movie directed by Tim Burton? How was that film visually similar to this one? How do the stories of the two films compare?

MESSAGE & THEMES

1. If you had to describe the overall message of this film in a single sentence, what would it be? What is the moral of the story?
2. What lessons does James learn throughout this story? Do these lessons make James' life better or worse?

MEDIA LITERACY

1. This film was made using a combination of stop-motion animation, digital animation and live-action filming. Which segments of the film were shot in live-action? Which segments of the film were animated? What is the difference between stop-motion animation and traditional animation (like that of morning cartoons)?
2. Who do you think this film was made for? Who was the intended audience?



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SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

James & the Giant Peach on IMDB

Study Guide from Oregon Children's Theater

Entertainment Weekly Review

United Kingdom Study Guide

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116683/>

http://www.octc.org/pdf/guides/james_rg.pdf

<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,292168,00.html>

http://www.filmeducation.org/resources/film_library/getfilm.php?film=1166

ARTICLES & REVIEWS

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Making the Movie

The model designers worked from Lane Smith's drawings of the characters and also pictures of real bugs to see how the model creatures should move. 130 people worked on the models as 180 puppets were needed in the film—this includes the main characters and all the pirates that we see in the underwater sequence.

First, metal skeletons were made for each puppet with parts that moved including legs, ears and eyes. Latex rubber forms were baked around the skeletons for their figures before they were painted and given costumes. 15 puppets were made for each of the 7 main characters and each character needed replacement faces or mouths for all their different expressions. For example, 45 different moving heads were made for the character of James because of the different emotions he needed to express.

A creature like the centipede caused problems because in reality the animal has 144 arms! The model in the film was simplified and had just 12 arms to flap around. Even a simple creature like the earthworm model needed 10 joints to help him move.

Creating the Sets

The sets were designed by Harley Jessup using the designs of Lane Smith. Jessup worked hard on the inside and outside of the peach. "We settled on the idea of making it look like a kid's treehouse, with many levels, and we proposed that things from the garden had gotten swept up and enlarged inside the peach, along with the bugs. So the floor is a big sundial and there's a big seed packet on the wall, along with a big garden rake. We also tried to have a little place that was sort of home for each of the characters with lots of nooks and crannies to make it an interesting place. The spider has her web, the grasshopper sits on top of a jar, the earthworm lives in a flower pot."

More than 50 peaches were made using rubber foam and a felt covering. They ranged from real peach size to a massive 20 foot peach weighing 2,000 pounds. The biggest peach was so heavy that it had to be put into place using a gigantic crane.