

Where the Wild Things Are

Text and Film Comparisons and Analyses

A Curriculum Resource for Elementary and Middle School Teachers



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Book by Maurice Sendak



MAX RECORDS as Max with the "Wild Things" in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where the Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.
Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

Screenplay by Dave Eggers and Spike Jonze
Directed by Spike Jonze

Maurice Sendak Where the Wild Things Are

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- I. Background Information
- II. Introduction to Site
- III. Themes
 - A. Leaving Home and Returning
 - B. Realization of What You Want
 - C. Other Themes to Consider
- IV. Lesson Ideas and Prompts
 - A. Wild Thoughts: Questions to Spark Conversation
 - B. Exploring Book Text and Film Dialogue
 - C. Analyzing Book Illustrations and Film Scenes: Focusing on the Book
 - D. Analyzing Book Illustrations and Film Scenes: Focusing on the Film
 - E. Making Connections
 - F. Wrapping It All Up
- V. Worksheets
- VI. Bibliography
- VII. Webography
- VIII. Images

Note: This resource has been developed by the Office of Arts and Special Projects, The New York City Department of Education. Educators will find references in this document to the *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Visual Arts*. The *Blueprint* may be accessed at http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/canda_va.html

I. Background Information

Where the Wild Things Are, winner of the coveted Caldecott medal for picture books in 1964, was written by Maurice Sendak and originally published by Harper Collins. In the story Max's mother sends him to his room without supper for behaving like a "WILD THING." His imagination transforms his room into a forest and sends him on an adventure across the ocean where Max encounters the Wild Things.

A documentary about Maurice Sendak, directed by Lance Bangs and Spike Jonze entitled *Tell Them Anything You Want* airs on HBO in October 2009.

The film *Where the Wild Things Are*, distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures, is directed by Spike Jonze. An article in the New York Times magazine, *Bringing Where the Wild Things Are to the Screen*, offers insights into the work of Spike Jonze. The article may be accessed at:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/magazine/06jonze-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&ref=magazine.

The screenplay was co-written by Dave Eggers and Spike Jonze. The film embodies Maurice Sendak's book through Spike Jonze's personal interpretation. In a short featurette Maurice Sendak states, "The movie enhances and enriches my book." Visit <http://wherethewildthingsare.warnerbros.com>

II. Introduction to Site

This site has been developed for teachers to engage their students in comparisons and analyses of Maurice Sendak's book and the film adaptation of *Where the Wild Things Are*.

It is important to look deeply at the book in order to look deeply at the film. Images from the book and film and student worksheets have been included to guide your questions and discussions. Throughout the site and in the webography there are links to interviews with Maurice Sendak, audio and video clips, which pertain to the film and book and additional information that is relevant to an understanding of Sendak and his Wild Things.

The lesson ideas and prompts allow students to compare and contrast the text and illustrations in the book with the dialogue and visual aspects of the film, and discuss the impact of each art form. **It is essential that students read and discuss the book before viewing the film.** The pre- and post- lesson ideas and prompts can be adapted for all grades. The lesson prompts and ideas are to be used both before and after viewing the film.

After reading the book and seeing the film, you may wish to chart students' responses and questions. (*See the Charting Comparisons worksheet.*)

III. Themes

A. Leaving Home and Returning

In both the book and the film Max leaves home. In the September 2, 2009 New York Times Magazine Saki Knafo writes that:

In *Where the Wild Things Are*, Max leaves home...but not on a quest. In the film, his outburst escalates into a screaming match, Max bursts into tears and then he's running — running nowhere in particular, just running, face flushed, tears streaking his cheeks. There are no princesses awaiting him, no swamps in need of rescue, only his frustrated, mixed-up emotions driving him onward. Max is confused about the way he feels, and that confusion, for Jonze, was exactly what it felt like at times to be 9.

Ask students to describe what they believe Max is looking for, and what they think he has learned.

You may wish to compare the treatment of this theme to its handling by another author. For example, William Steig deals with the issue of leaving the comfort of home (for a variety of reasons) and then returning in *Zeke Pippin*, *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, *Brave Irene*, and *The Amazing Bone*.

Homer's *Odyssey* and fairy tales such as *Hansel and Gretel* and *The Gingerbread Boy* deal with this theme of leaving home and returning.

B. Realization of What You Value

Again, examine the characters in some of Steig's books. For a film connection, remind students of Dorothy's realization in *The Wizard of Oz*, "There's no place like home."

Discuss what you value: people, material things. What would you miss if you ran away?

C. Other Themes to Consider

- How We Cope With Anger
- Parent/Child Relationships
- The Value of Pretending

IV. Lesson Ideas and Prompts

Many of the following activities address one or more of the 5 strands of the Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Visual Arts as developed by The New York City Department of Education.

Strand 1: Art Making

Strand 2: Literacy in the Arts (knowing and using the vocabulary and terminology of the visual arts)

Strand 3: Making Connections (to other arts disciplines and other curriculum areas)

Strand 4: Community and Cultural Resources

Strand 5: Careers and Lifelong Learning

Strands 2 and 5 are emphasized:

Strand 2: There are many opportunities to analyze Sendak's illustrations and to compare the illustrations from the book to the film and stills from the film.

Strand 5: Students will engage in activities that explore the art of an author/illustrator and the art of a filmmaker.

A. Wild Thoughts: Questions to Spark Conversation

1. How is the reading of the book enhanced by viewing the film?
2. How has reading the book prepared you for the film?
3. What is your reaction to this statement?

Many readers find Sendak's Wild Things wonderfully strange yet not strange enough to be scary.

4. How is this film a reflection of contemporary life?
5. Listen to the film's theme song "All Is Love" <http://www.myspace.com/wherethewildthingsare>. How do you think it relates to the film?

B. Linking the Book to the Film: Exploring Text and Dialogue

(Strand 1: Art Making, Strand 5: Careers and Lifelong Learning)

Maurice Sendak's book is filled with beautiful, descriptive language that accompanies many of the illustrations.

1. Select a sentence or a phrase in the book and design your own illustration.

Find the corresponding scene in the film. How does your illustration compare to the film's version?

2. The text of the book is only ten sentences long. Read the text and compare it to the screenplay. Use the following questions in whole group or small group discussions.

- Has any language been added or subtracted in the film?
- In the book the Wild Things' dialogue is limited. In the film they are given more to say. How does this change your perception of the Wild Things?
- What may have been the rationale behind giving greater voice to the Wild Things?
- How do the characters' voices compare to the voices you hear in your head as you read the book?

3. In the film, the Wild Things have names, emotions and distinct personalities. After reading the book:

- Choose one of the characters and further develop that character's personality. (*See the Character Development worksheet.*)
- Compare how you developed your character with the character in the film; how have Dave Eggers and Spike Jonze developed that character?

4. Select another book by Maurice Sendak such as *Pierre* or *In the Night Kitchen*.

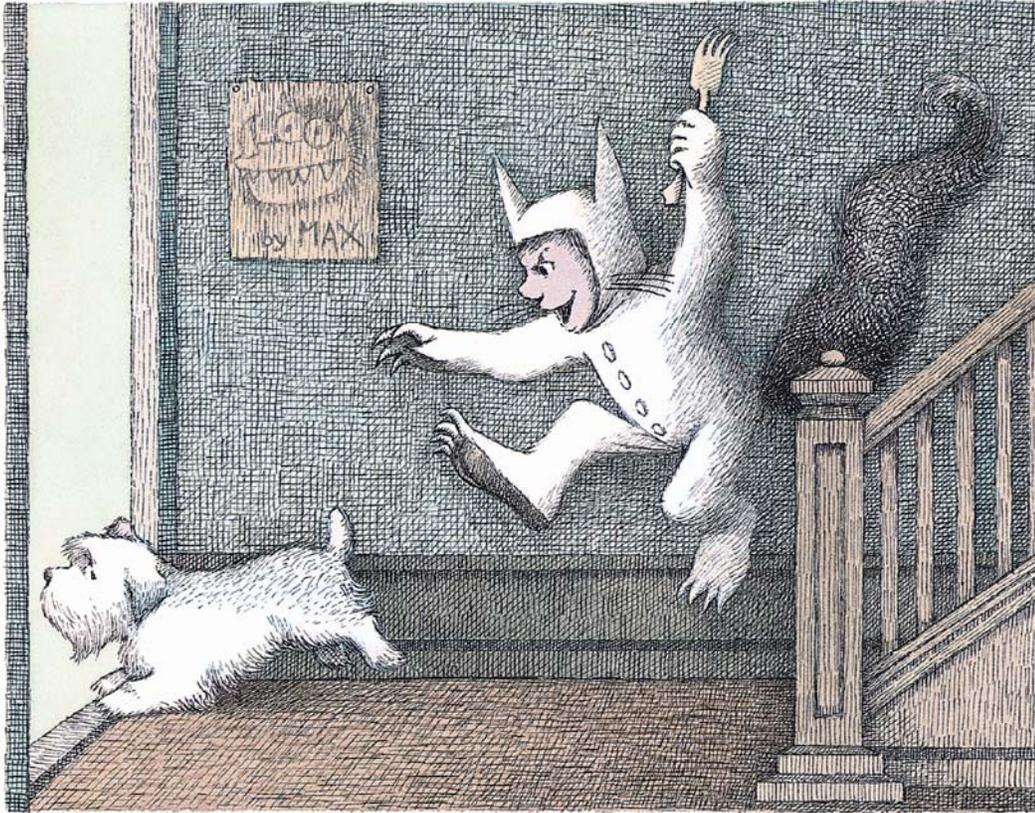
- Partner with several classmates and give voices to the characters in the book.
- Discuss how this adds to your enjoyment and appreciation of the book.

C. Analyzing Book Illustrations and Film Scenes: Focusing on the Book

(Strand 2: Visual Literacy)

Students can bring a lot of insight into analyzing the book's illustrations. As a third grader in a Bronx, New York public school noted, "The pictures grow as Max's imagination grows." Here are prompts for analyzing some of the illustrations.

For each of the following six images allow students time to quietly examine the illustrations before discussing the bulleted items.



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- Look at Max's artwork on the wall. Is it a self-portrait? Explain.
- How could it serve as a foreshadowing technique?
- Notice that this illustration is larger than the image on the preceding page and the illustrations continue to grow larger up to, and including, the "Wild Rumpus" scenes. Why do you think Sendak does this?



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- Discuss this image in terms of primary colors, use of space and emotional quality.
- How has the portrayal of Max changed?
- Compare the illustration above to the next illustration in the book and to the illustration of Max returning home. Discuss Max's attitude, and his expression. Discuss the use of crosshatching, the color palette and mood.



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- Max arrives in the place where the Wild Things are. Do they appear to be scary? What is Max's reaction to the Wild Things? Who is more scared?
- Examine the patterns. How do they change in the next few illustrations?
- Look at the depiction of the moon and how it illuminates the setting. Discuss the way it changes in the next few illustrations.



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- Note the facial expressions and body language of the Wild Things. Develop a personality for each one.



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- After the three “Wild Rumpus” scenes the illustrations get progressively smaller (with the exception of the last page). Why do you think Sendak did that?
- Describe what Max is thinking and feeling.
- How do you think the Wild Things feel?



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- The final illustration is a full page. Why do you think Sendak drew it without the white borders you see in other depictions of Max in his room?
- What is Sendak telling us by putting Max's supper on the table?

D. Analyzing Book Illustrations and Film Scenes: Focusing on the Film

(Strand 2: Visual Literacy)

1. Using all seven stills discuss:

- The framing of each scene
- The color palette used
- The emotional quality of the scenes
- The connections among the characters
- The use of lighting to heighten the drama

2. After viewing the film discuss:

- The introduction of new characters
- The addition of new scenes



(L-r) Carol with MAX RECORDS as Max in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where The Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Picture



MAX RECORDS as Max in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where The Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures

Photo by Matt Nettheim



MAX RECORDS as Max with the "Wild Things" in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where The Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

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(L-r)MAX RECORDS as Max with Carol in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where The Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

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MAX RECORDS as Max in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where The Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

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MAX RECORDS as Max (foreground) with Carol in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where The Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures



(L-r) MAX RECORDS as Max with KW in Warner Bros. Pictures', Legendary Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' "Where The Wild Things Are," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

E. Making Connections between the Book and the Film

(Strand 2: Visual Literacy; Strand 5: Careers and Lifelong Learning)

For this section for film references you may use stills from the film, video trailers and/or the film.

1. Just as Maurice Sendak has thoughtfully illustrated his book, the film's director, Spike Jonze has given considerable attention to every frame of the movie. Look carefully to discover the richness of the illustrations in the book and the scenes from the film. Here are some guiding questions. Where applicable, you may wish to chart student comparisons.
 - What words would you use to describe the depiction of Max on various pages of the book and in different scenes in the film?
 - What do we learn about Max from the illustrations in the book and from the scenes in the film?
 - Where do you detect a change in Max's emotions in both the book and the film?
 - If you agree that the Wild Things aren't particularly scary, why aren't they? In their appearance and language, how has Sendak softened them? How does this compare to their depiction in the film?
2. Both the author and the director make artistic choices. Chart the comparisons between the book and the film: Sample:

Book	Film
Color Palette: Muted and natural: gray, ocher, brown, violet and blue-green	Color Palette: Murky and naturalistic
Crosshatchings: Creates gradations of light and dark, which implies texture and contour.	Lighting: Heightens the drama.

- Do Sendak's illustrations inform the style of the film? Where in the film do we see evidence of this?
- How has Spike Jonze created the mood and feel of the film to capture the essence of the book?

F. Wrapping It All Up

(Strand 2: Visual Literacy; Strand 3: Making Connections -to other art disciplines and other curriculum areas; Strand 5: Careers and Lifelong Learning)

Viewing the film becomes a deeper experience once students analyze language and images, characterization, and themes. This should be followed by a re-read of the book and a discussion comparing the two art forms.

The following are questions and statements to revisit at the end of the unit.

- How did the book influence your viewing of the film?
- How did the film inform your understanding of the book?
- What was the film able to depict that was not shown in the book?
- Describe how the film is an adaptation of the story.
- How does your experience as a viewer differ from your experience as a reader?
- The presence of grown ups is only implied in the book; how does the addition of adults alter your interpretation and reaction to the story?
- Compare the mood of the book to the mood of the film.
- In the featurette Maurice Sendak says of the film, “There will be controversy about this.” Why do you think the author feels this way? <http://wherethewildthingsare.warnerbros.com>

V. Worksheets

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Character:

Physical Description:

Personality Traits:

Charting Comparisons

	<i>Where the Wild Things Are:</i> The Book	<i>Where the Wild Things Are:</i> The Film
List the Characters		
Describe the Color Palette in Comparable Book and Film Images		
Sounds	<i>I hear these sounds in my head as I read:</i>	<i>I hear these sounds in the film:</i>
Name the different emotions presented		
Sequence the Scenes		

VI: Bibliography

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Sendak, Maurice. Where the Wild Things Are. New York. Harper Collins, 1963.
His mother as punishment for misbehaving sends Max to his room without supper. His imagination transforms his room and sends him on an adventure where he encounters the Wild Things.

VII. Webography

Official Warner Brothers Site

<http://wherethewildthingsare.warnerbros.com>

Trailers, featurette (interview with Maurice Sendak), synopsis

About.Com: Children's Books

<http://childrensbooks.about.com/cs/picturebooks/fr/wildthings.htm>

Synopsis of story

American Master For Teachers PBS

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/education/lesson8_overview.html

PBS site complete with lesson plans incorporating Where the Wild Things Are

Apple.Com

<http://www.apple.com/trailers/wb/wherethewildthingsare/>

Two different trailers for the film

Internet Movie Data Base

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0386117/trivia>

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The Jewish Museum

<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa307.htm>

Exhibition of the art of Maurice Sendak at the Jewish Museum, New York City

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NPR radio broadcast interview with Maurice Sendak (Click on LISTEN)

Terrible Yellow Eyes

<http://www.terribleyelloweyes.com/>

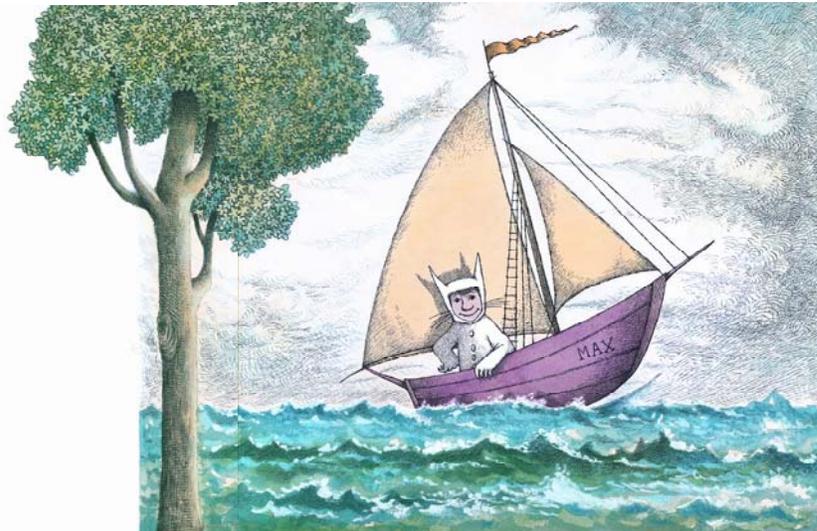
A collection of works by contemporary artists inspired by *Where the Wild Things Are*

Where the Wild Things Are

Images from the Book



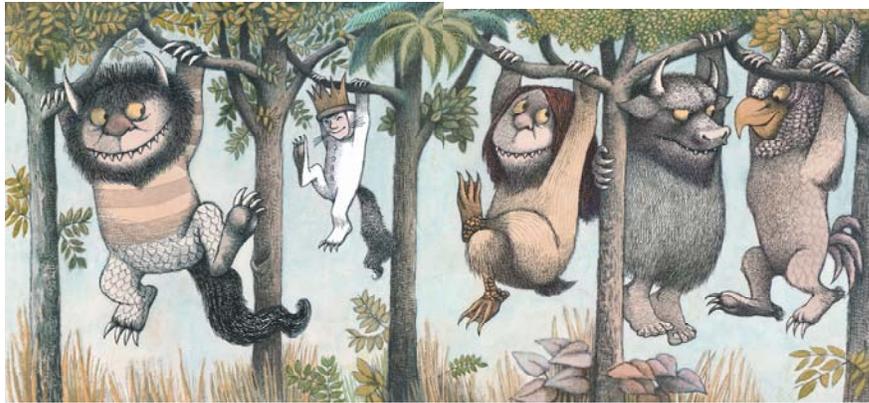
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Where the Wild Things Are

Images from the Film



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