



WOLFWALKERS

Ireland, Luxembourg, France 2020 / 103 min.

Animated adventure film, coming-of-age, mix of history and fairy tale

Recommended for age 8 or older

Directors: Tomm Moore, Ross Stewart

Main cast: Honor Kneafsey (Robyn Goodfellow)
Eva Whittaker (Mebh Óg MacTíre)

WOLFWALKERS was nominated at the BAFTA Awards for Best Animated Film, Golden Globe Awards for Best Animated Feature Film and is for the Academy Awards for Best Animated Feature.

Brief description:

In a time of superstition and magic, a young apprentice hunter, Robyn Goodfellow, travels to Ireland with her father to wipe out the last wolf pack. While exploring the forbidden lands outside the city walls, Robyn befriends a free-spirited girl, Mebh, a member of a mysterious tribe rumored to have the ability to transform into wolves by night. As they search for Mebh's missing mother, Robyn uncovers a secret that draws her further into the enchanted world of the Wolfwalkers and risks turning into the very thing her father is tasked to destroy.

Time and place: 1650, so mid-seventeenth century, Kilkenny, Ireland

Trigger:

Environmentalism, wolves, loss/missing of a parent, oppression

The Irish Confederate Wars (or Eleven Years' War)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_Ireland

The character of the Lord Protector is based on the historical figure Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell:

https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cromwellian_conquest_of_Ireland

Beginning/End:

At the beginning, the worlds the two girls live in oppose each other. As the film progresses, the girls move closer together and Robyn decides she belongs to Mebh's world more than to the one she has come from. In the end, things do turn out well, Robyn and her father Bill become part of the pack but they have to leave the woods outside the city and find a new place to live. As Moll and Bill fall in love with each other, Robyn and Mebh become sisters in a patchwork family.

Characters:

On the one side there are the "townies", young **Robyn** and her father **Bill Goodfellow**, who just started their life in Kilkenny. Most of the town people don't like them, because they are new and, making matters worse, they are from England. Bill works as a wolf hunter for the Lord Protector and just wants to protect Robyn, as he promised her mother. Robyn is never allowed to join her father on the hunt, as this would go against the Lord Protector's rules. Instead, she has to work as a housemaid.

Bill is afraid that he won't always be there to help her. Robyn's mother seems to have passed away not too long ago, and the two of them are still in a lot of pain. Robyn is a smart, strong and rebellious girl full of imagination, and a talented storyteller to boot. She is also very good at handling the crossbow and wants to become a wolf hunter, just like her dad. In **Merlin** the falcon, she has a steady companion who serves as a bridge, or a connector, between the two worlds, town and forest. Robyn feels like she doesn't belong in the city and doesn't like how the Lord Protector, and society as a whole, expect her to live her life. She seizes every opportunity to spend time in the woods, where she is free from the expectations of other people.

On the other side there are the mysterious and powerful Wolfwalkers, **Mebh** and her mother **Moll** with their pack of wolves. They live within nature, free from any human made expectations or rules of society. When Mebh and Moll go to sleep, they turn into wolves. When they wake up again, they return to their human form. In both forms, they are the leaders of the wolves and are able to heal others. Mebh is resilient and strong like the nature that surrounds her and fits perfectly into it. She is wild, funny, has a big heart, but can also show her teeth if necessary: "I am not afraid, I'm going to eat them all". For her, the city is a really stinky place, and the only good thing coming from it are the "town tasties" (bread), and of course Robyn, whom she helps reconnect with nature and her transformation into a wolf after an accidental bite.

The **Lord Protector** is the English ruler of the Irish town people. He is very religious and demands that everybody obeys his rules, otherwise they will be punished. He wants to set a warning example by domesticating and killing the wolves. In order to be in control and maintain (his) law and order, he tries to dominate nature and instills fear into people. The rigour, that is prevalent in town, is also visually represented by jagged, angular lines, taking on cage-like shapes.

The character of the Lord Protector was inspired by Oliver Cromwell, and story setting in place and time strongly hints to the Irish Confederate Wars.

The **sheep farmer** has only a small role but symbolizes two important things. For one, he was once saved and healed by Moll and knows about the Wolfwalkers. Secondly, he doesn't believe the Lord Protector will keep the town safe. He even openly makes fun of him, for which he receives a public punishment, because the Lord Protector is afraid that if more people disrespect him like the farmer did, it could lead to a new rebellion. The sheep farmer and Robyn become friends. It is he who after all is said and done is standing in the rain among the people outside the city walls, happily listening to the beautiful howling of the wolves.

Possible questions:

What is the movie about? What topics were addressed?

Who are the main characters in the film? How would you describe them?

Can you describe the two worlds?

What are the differences and the similarities between the two worlds?

How would you describe the relationship between the town people and nature?

What do you know about wolves? How are wolves often portrayed in movies and stories? How does this movie portray them?



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Possible topics to talk about:

Friendship

Getting to know and befriend somebody who at first seems very different to you (because the way you live your life is very different), or lives in a world that you don't know. A friendship with all its ups and downs, learning to trust someone, to forgive, to grow closer. Being part of something—like a pack of wolves or a chosen family.

“There are two of us now!”

Fear

What does fear do to a person?

How does the Lord Protector use fear to his advantage?

What can we do to handle our own fear?

Bill and Robyn talk about fear:

Bill: "We must do what we are told to!"

Robyn: "Why? But why father?"

Bill: "Because I am afraid! I am afraid that I am not always there to protect you and that one day you are going to end up in a cage."

Robyn: "But I am already in a cage!"

There is also the moment of conflict when Robyn tries to do what Wolf Moll told her—get Mebh to leave the forest and go to a safe place. She tries to send Mebh away to protect her. Here, she acts strictly out of fear, just like her father tends to do at times.

The city stands for oppression, the forest stands for freedom. Robyn talks about the expectations of society and the feeling of living in a cage. Bill has to learn to let go if he doesn't want to lose his daughter. He has to accept her brave personality, her need for independence, and also accept the fact that she won't take the safe route.

In the final fight, he is the one that defeats the Lord Protector, who chooses to fall into the abyss instead of being bitten by the wolf.

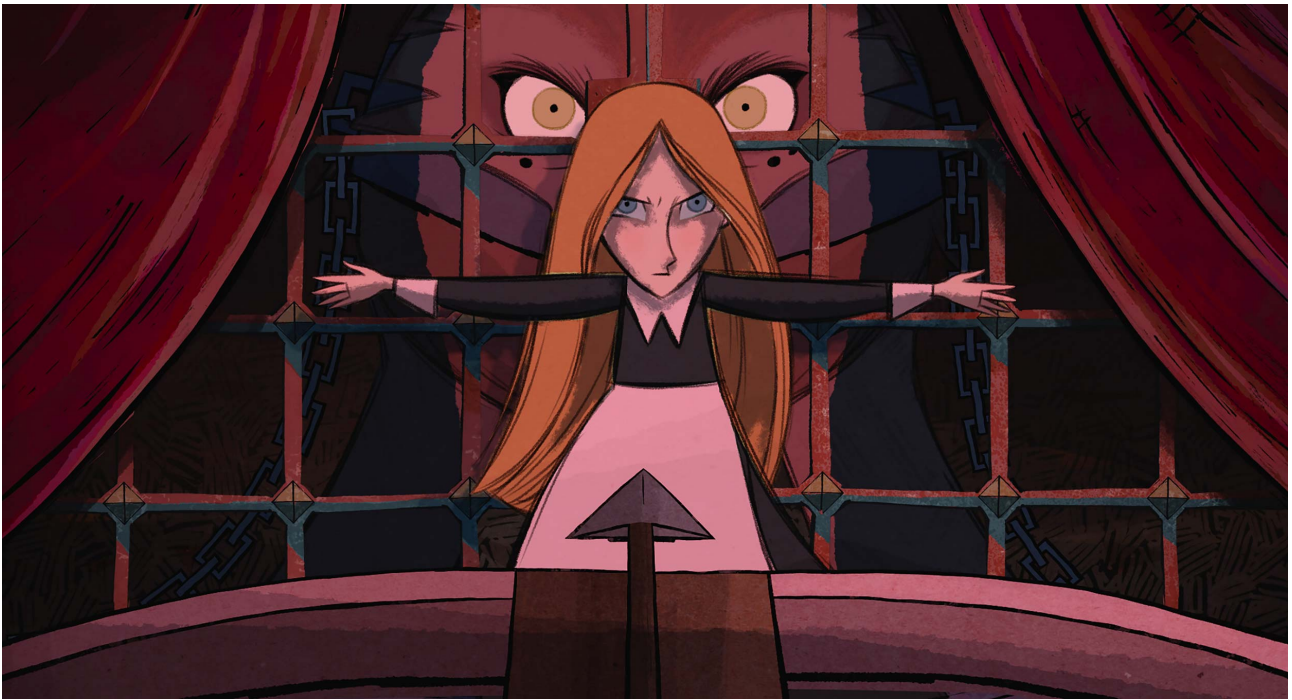
Environmental issues:

The conflict between the Lord Protector and the Wolfwalkers is a strong symbol for how people try to turn the "wild" nature and the creatures living in it into something they can manage and exploit. Wolves are commonly used as the "bad" figures in a lot of children's stories, fairy tales and legends. To this day, people are afraid of the sheep-killing, children-eating evil wolf – an image that has been fictionally created. As a matter of fact, wolves are very social animals. They are important for maintaining the natural balance of a forest by eating old and weak animals. They stay away from humans as long as their natural habitat is intact (like most animals). It is nice to watch a movie where the wolves are finally the good guys.

Missing, losing and saving a parent

Both Mebh and Robyn want to save their parents in their own ways. Mebh never gives up fighting for her wolf mum, even if it is Robyn who frees her from the cage. It is Mebh's courage that inspires Robyn to do what she thinks is right, even if it means to take a stand against her dad. Later on it is Mebh who understands that she is not strong enough alone and needs the help of the pack, including Robyn and Bill, in order to heal her mum, which in turn means to save the forest as well.

Robyn saves her dad by showing him that it is possible to overcome one's fear and to do the right thing, even if you are afraid. Finally, she welcomes him into the wolf pack, her chosen family.



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Artwork and animation of WOLFWALKERS

There are 2D or 3D animated films, but often a mix of both techniques are utilized. In WOLFWALKERS, a 2.5D Animation mix was used: (3D) digital animation techniques provide the foundation of the movie, whereas 6,000 hand-drawn paintings (2D) created by nine animators form the surface that you can eventually see, and give it its very charming handmade look.

The frame rate is only twelve images per second, unlike the 24 that are normally used in film. But each of these images come with a nice watercolour look, with black outlines that change with the emotions of the character. The stronger their emotions, the thicker the lines get. Irish woodblock print technique was used as well.

The two main locations in the film are drawn very differently. The town appears grayish, neatly structured, with lots of geometrical lines, and the characters also tend to have hard edges. In the woods, everything is organic and colorful. The brush strokes are joyful, dynamic, and rough. The styles of the town and the woods blend together in the countryside around the city, giving the movie a coherent style.

For more information check out the making of: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOU4K4cV-Dk>

Still not enough? Listen to the Wolf Walkers team chatting about making the movie:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIRqP20reY8>

And the interview with the directors:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eAWr6r5HLs>

Possible questions:

Can you describe the style of the film?

What kind of drawing styles can you spot? (watercolor technique)

What are the differences in drawing styles between the main locations?

Which main colors are used? Is there a difference in the town and the forest?

What basic shapes are predominantly used in the town? (angular, square shapes, castle, staircase)

What about in the woods? (rounder, squiggly lines)

Camera angles and perspectives:

At times a split screen is used to show things that happen simultaneously.

Note: Low angle shot of Lord Protector, distance shot of town, two perspectives at the same time in the same picture, e.g. high angle shot framed by side view of nature.

Possible questions:

What did you notice about how the camera was capturing the different worlds and figures?

How does the camera perspective change when they transform into wolves?

What was the special view during Robyn's first transformation?

Colours:

green (forest, clothes), yellow (hair, forest) vs blue and gray (town), there is a special visual representation of the wolves' sense of smell, the woods are much more colorful compared to the town.

Music:

Irish music, Bruno Coulais and the folk band Kíla, provided the film's original score. Norwegian singer-songwriter Aurora contributed to the soundtrack with a re-recorded version of her single "Running with the Wolves".

About the phenomenon of shape shifters:

Shape shifters are a common figure in many stories and fairy tales from around the globe. Most known in Europe are perhaps myths of werewolves and vampires. But there are a lot more, like Japanese stories about people turning into foxes, or South American tales about men who turn into big wild cats.

Over time, different monsters have been popular, they are often a reflection of people's wishes or fears, as individuals or in society.

Shape shifters are especially popular in coming-of-age stories for young audiences. Adolescence is an important period in life where never-known powers are gained (and body hair grows), which translates into stories about shape shifters and their adventures (like wolf Robyn, who grows stronger and therefore is able to jump over the abyss).

Possible questions:

What do you know about shape shifters?

What kind of shape shifters do you know?

What do you think does shape shifting stand for?

How is the ability to shape shift into a wolf transmitted in Wolf Walkers?

Answer: Through a bite but because Mebh and Moll both can do it, it might also be hereditary.

The Bites

Both of the bites (Mebh biting Robyn, Moll biting Bill) are unintentional.

Bite 01: Wolf Mebh bites Robyn while trying to free her from a trap, Robyn does not realize that the wolf is trying to help her and thinks it is an attack—she tries to fight wolf Mebh—and thereby the bite happens.

Bite 02: Moll bites Bill while trying to protect Mebh from him.

Possible questions:

How did the humans turn into wolfwalkers?

How do the bites happen?

What is changing? (like the possibility to see smells, turning into wolves when they sleep)

Hair and its symbols:

Both pairs of families have rare hair colors. Bill and Robyn have blond hair, Moll and Mebh have big and long, voluminous red hair. As Robyn and Mebh get closer to each other there is a bonding moment between them, where Robyn very casually brushes through Mebh's wild hair, who seems to enjoy this. It calms her down and she later tells her sleeping mum about it. Robyn also puts a flower in Mebh's hair, which is something her father used to do. Mebh keeps the flower until the moment in the castle where she feels betrayed by Robyn because she tries to send her away.

The hair and general appearance of Robyn changes a lot during the film.

When Robyn gets into her role as the hunter, she puts on the hood of her cloak to kind of mask herself and the fact that she is a girl doing things that are not accepted in a society where all the women have to wear linen caps, making them all look alike. These caps represent the stereotypical role of a woman (a caregiver, responsible for the household) in the patriarchy established by the Lord Protector.

Whenever Bill is in a good mood, he puts flowers in his daughter's hair, but when he is afraid, he puts the maid hat on her. This in a way symbolizes their obedience towards the Lord Protector.

When Robyn at last decides to do the thing she feels is right and ignores what others think or do (by taking a stand against her father to save the Wolf Moll) she wears her hair loose for the first time, making it flutter in the wind.

Possible questions:

Did you notice something about the hair of the girls?

What could the hair stand for in different scenes?