

# **The Green Mile Film Summary**

## **The Green Mile by Frank Darabont**

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## Context

What do you get when you combine the supernatural ideas of Stephen King, life on Death Row and an amazing cast of actors? *The Green Mile*. The story is that of Paul Edgecomb's experience working on Death Row, where he comes face to face with the supernatural in the form of John Coffey and his healing powers.

Paul begins telling his story to his friend Elaine while in a nursing home. He tells of his experience working on Death Row and how John was wrongly accused of a horrible crime. John heals both Paul and the Warden's wife while administering justice to a few other people. John, at one point, has to transfer some of his power to Paul, and now Paul is 108 years old with no hope of dying anytime soon. John's kindness and power is inspiring to viewers.

Frank Darabont has directed only a few films, but each has been a tremendous success. He directed *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *The Majestic* (2001) and *Fahrenheit 451* (2005). Darabont often adapts Stephen King's novels for film.

Tom Hanks was already a huge star by the time he landed the role of Forrest in *Forrest Gump*. After playing Kip Wilson in the television series *Bosom Buddies*, Hanks began to land roles in films. His best-known early work is his role as Rick Gassko in *Bachelor Party* (1984). He also garnered fame with *Money Pit* (1986), *Big* (1988), *Turner & Hooch* (1989), *A League of Their Own* (1992) and *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993). *The Green Mile* was a new area for Hanks, and his performance is exceptional.

Michael Clarke Duncan plays the role of the gentle giant, John Coffey. Although he had a few small parts and an impressive role in *Armageddon* (1998), *The Green Mile* was really the breakthrough performance for Duncan. Since then he has appeared in *The Whole Nine Yards* (2000), *The Scorpion King* (2002) and *The Island* (2005).

*The Green Mile* received great critical acclaim. It was nominated for four Academy Awards: Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Michael Clarke Duncan; Best Picture for David Valdes and Frank Darabont; Best Sound for Robert J. Litt, Elliot Tyson, Michael Herbick and Willie D. Burton; and Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material Previously Produced or Published for Frank Darabont. The Golden Globes also nominated Michael Clarke Duncan for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in a Motion Picture.



## Summary and Analysis

As *The Green Mile* begins, a group of farmers holding guns walks through a field, while dogs bark in the background. One of them finds a piece of cloth on a bush and yells to the others. The men begin to run, and people yell, "Katie," while someone tells another farmer not to make any noise.

Elsewhere, an old man, Paul Edgecomb, wakes up in his own bedroom and crawls out of bed. He goes and gets ready before walking through the nursing home and greeting his neighbors at breakfast. After making eyes at a lady, Elaine Connelly, he asks for cold bread as the server warns him not to get caught when he goes walking every day. The server asks about the walks, and the man says that he just likes to walk.

Later Paul puts on a bright red raincoat and goes for his walk in the rain. He finally arrives outside an old house. At the nursing home, the rest of the people watch *Jerry Springer*. Some of the men complain, while the women enjoy the show. Elaine begins to question Paul's silence and chides him for tiring himself out with his daily walks. He says that he just didn't sleep well because of his dreams. One of the men finally changes the television to a Fred Astaire film where he sings, "When we're dancing cheek to cheek." Paul begins to cry, and everyone watches as he and Elaine leave the room.

That night, Paul and Elaine, who he calls Ellie, eat together silently while he tells her that sometimes the past just catches up with him. She asks if it was the movie, and he says that he hasn't talked about these things for over sixty years. She encourages him, and he finally begins his story about being a prison guard on Death Row during the Depression; he supervised the executions. Usually Death Row is called the "Last Mile," but they called theirs "The Green Mile" because of the faded lime green tile. They named the electric chair "Sparky." Then, the audience begins to see Paul's story.

In 1935, Paul has a painful urinary infection, and it is also the year of John Coffey and the two dead girls. The audience is transported to the past, where we see the men working on the chain gang outside the prison. On Death Row, they get a call that a new inmate is coming. Paul is having trouble going to the bathroom, so they have to wait on him. They suggest that he should have taken the day off to see the doctor, but he says he couldn't with a new arrival coming in.

The truck that the inmate is brought in on is riding on its axles. The men can't figure out what's wrong until the inmate gets out, and suddenly the truck springs back up into the normal position. One of the guards comes in and warns Paul about the size of the inmate. On the way in, they keep yelling, "Dead Man Walking!"

Finally, Paul tells Percy, the man who's yelling, to shut up, and the audience sees that the new inmate, John Coffey, is a giant. Paul asks John if he's going to have trouble, but John seems to be a quiet giant who is very respectful of Paul. Paul sends Percy away,



and he breaks a man's finger on his way out. Paul kicks Percy out of his area and promises to get the finger looked at.

Paul then turns his attention back to John and asks him to be nice if they take the chains off. Paul introduces himself to John and introduces him to the other guards. John asks if they can leave the light on at night because he gets a little scared in a strange place. John seems quiet and uneducated. Before Paul leaves, they shake hands, and John makes himself comfortable in his cell. John tells Paul that he couldn't help it. He tried to take it back, but it was too late.

Paul and the guards discuss John and his crime. They believe he's retarded, but they think he should die for what he did. As Paul reads, the audience sees the events happening. A farmer is in his barn when he hears a girl scream. He runs into his house and finds his wife and son, who point out clothes and blood and tell him that the girls are missing. The back door is open, and the farmer has his wife call the police and the neighbors. All the men search the fields until they find a doll. They hear a man screaming through the fields and find him covered in blood and holding the bodies of the two little girls. He tells the sheriff that he tried to make it better, but it was too late. Then, John is arrested.

Warden Hal Moores then comes up to Paul and begins to tell him about his wife, Belinda's, sickness. He plans to take her to the doctor to get some tests done for her headaches. Hal gives Paul a DOE (Date of Execution), and then talks to him about ordering Percy Wetmore, the governor's nephew, off the block earlier. The governor called about the incident. Hal has heard that Percy is applying to the mental hospital for better pay, but Paul is skeptical as to why Percy is still there. He believes Percy just wants to see someone die up close.

That night, Paul's wife wakes up to see why he's not in bed. He's astonished by what John did. She tries to convince him to go to the doctor. The next day, the guards watch as a mouse comes up to them. Brutus, known as Brutal, tosses a piece of gum out to it, and then the mouse scampers back to the restraint room. The men go in the room, crowded with items being stored, to catch the mouse, but they can't find it.

The next day, Percy is in there brushing his hair, and he finds the mouse. The mouse comes up to the desk to beg for food. All the men are amazed that the mouse is so brave. They begin to feed the mouse until Percy tries to kill it. The other men ask if he's crazy, while everyone yells at him to stop. He even begins to take everything out of the restraining room to kill the mouse. Later, they make fun of him when he can't find the mouse. Paul tells Percy to think about what he's been doing, and they tell him not to scare everyone. Paul wants him to think of The Green Mile as an ICU rather than a place to yell and scream. Brutal takes Percy by the shirt, and then Percy threatens him with his connections. Paul warns him not to talk to any of the guards that way and asks him to clean the Mile up and get out.

The next day, Arlen Bitterbuck's family is there to see him, since he will be executed the following day. The guards practice the routine on Toot-Toot, the janitor, first. Percy is



there and wants to help, but Paul just tells him to watch. Toot-Toot acts all crazy for the practice, and the men try not to laugh. While there, they see the little mouse visiting. The next day, they have chairs set up for spectators, and they shave the top of Arlen's head for the electrocution. Arlen asks Paul if he might get to go to heaven if he repents enough. Arlen tells Paul about his young wife, who he lived with in the woods and made love with every night. It was his best time. Paul encourages Arlen, and then they put him in the electric chair. They then electrocute him while Percy and many others watch from another room.

Later, Percy harasses the dead man, and Brutal yells at him to get away. Paul talks to Percy about the job at the mental hospital, and Percy begs to take Brutal's spot at the next execution so that he can be close while a man fries. He promises, though, to leave after he is granted his wish; otherwise, he might just stick around.

Paul sits at his desk listening to music one evening when he hears the sound of a man laughing hysterically. They go look at one of the prisoners, Eduard "Del" Delacroix, who has trained the mouse to do tricks. He says that the mouse told him its name is Mr. Jingles, and he asks for a box for the mouse. He's even taught the mouse to play fetch. John says it's just like the mouse is a circus mouse. Percy walks up and suggests that they get a cigar box and a little bit of cotton for the mouse.

The next day, Paul meets with Hal. Hal has been crying, and he mentions that a new prisoner, William "Wild Bill" Wharton, is coming in the next day. The man killed three people, including a pregnant woman. Hal begins to cry again, sits down and tells Paul that Belinda has a brain tumor. He hasn't told her yet that she has one and that they can't operate. He just doesn't know how to tell her she's going to die.

That night, Paul watches his wife sleep and then begins to cringe in terrible pain. He runs outside to try to go to the bathroom, but he's in awful pain. Finally, he just falls to the ground. The next morning, he finally tells her that he's going to the doctor once the new inmate is squared away.

Wild Bill is doped up, and Percy harasses him as they try to get him into uniform. Del tells Paul that he doesn't look good when he arrives, and Paul walks slowly to the phone. John wants to see Paul down at the cell for a minute, but Paul says he has to answer the phone first. Wild Bill finally arrives at The Green Mile, and they almost have to carry him inside. John warns Paul to be careful, and then the audience sees Wild Bill giving a mischievous look as they open the door. He then attacks Percy and the other guard and knees Paul, who was already in pain. Wild Bill tries to strangle one of the guards while Paul holds him at gunpoint. Percy doesn't move, and finally Brutal comes in and knocks out Wild Bill. They thought Wild Bill was doped, and Paul chides them for not asking.

Paul sends everyone else on errands while he waits, in pain, for them to come back. Paul then sinks to the floor, and John asks to see him again. Paul says it's not a good time, but John insists on talking to him. Finally Paul makes his way down there, and John asks him to come closer. Del tells him not to move, but Paul tells him to mind his



own business. John says he just wants to help, and he yanks Paul to the bars and grabs his private parts. As Del screams, Paul can't move. The light seems to get brighter. Paul yells; Del screams. Finally, John lets loose. Paul falls to the ground and tells Del to shut up. John begins to cough, and then thousands of small, bug-like insects fly out of his mouth. Paul asks what John did, and John says he just took it back. John's tired now, though, so he lies down to sleep. Paul stands up, feels fine and even goes to the bathroom and urinates without pain.

At home that night, Paul tells his wife that he's feeling better and that the doctor didn't say a whole lot. Then, he walks up behind her and begins undressing her and kissing her. The audience later hears them upstairs having sex both during the night and the next morning. Paul's wife asks him how he was able to go four times in one night again. He tells her the truth about yesterday's experience. Then, Paul calls in sick. His wife walks up and asks him if he's sure what he's doing, but he goes ahead.

Later that afternoon, Paul shows up at the house of the lawyer who represented John Coffey. He asks if John has ever done anything like that before. They don't believe that anyone would have noticed him during the Depression, with everyone moving from town to town. The lawyer says he believes that John is guilty given the circumstances, even though Paul feels that there's no violence in John. The lawyer then begins to tell a story about a sweet dog they once had. He says that you have a dog you love and never have to find out if it loves you or not. He then calls his son over and shows Paul the eye that the dog attacked. One day it just happened, and John might have had the same experience. He felt bad later, but those girls were still raped and murdered. The lawyer reminds Paul not to turn his back on a man like John, because in the end he'll get bit.

Del and his mouse watch as Paul comes in with cornbread for John. His wife wanted to thank him for helping Paul. John asks if his wife was pleased, and Paul responds, "Several times." John takes the cornbread, and then he shares some with Del and the mouse, Mr. Jingles, but not Wild Bill, who starts rudely yelling. Paul warns him to keep a civil tongue on his block, and then Wild Bill spits in his face. Paul forgives him, but that's the only chance he's got. Wild Bill then urinates on the Warden as he walks by. They decide to clean out the restraining room so that they can put Wild Bill in it. The Warden hoses him down, and the guards put him in a straightjacket. Wild Bill pitches a fit, and they toss him in the restraining room.

When the guards open the door the next morning, Wild Bill promises that he's learned his lesson and that he'll be good from now on. A few days later, though, he convinces Toot-Toot to give him a moonpie. He eats it, and then he spits it all over Brutal. Once again, Wild Bill is in the restraining room.

The next morning, Del and his mouse are invited to perform for some politicians, or at least that's what Paul tells him. Del asks if his pardon is coming, and they tell him that maybe it will someday. Today, though, he has to go perform for the crowd. In the other room, a plumber can't understand why he has to be so dressed up for this event. While Del goes inside, Paul and the others go prepare for the execution. They just don't want Del to know what's coming. Percy is preparing for his role in the execution, but he is a



little nervous. When Del gets back from his performance, Percy congratulates him, and they begin laughing together. Percy yells "Boo!" as a joke, and Del falls back and hits his head. Wild Bill then pulls Percy back against the bars and begins to molest him. After Paul pulls his gun, Wild Bill lets him go. Percy then urinates on himself, and Bill and Del make fun of him. Brutal tells everyone to shut up, and Percy stops crying, warns them never to speak of it to anyone and threatens them with being fired. Paul reassures him that "what happens on the Mile, stays on the Mile."

Paul tells Del that there's a little boy who might love to have a pet mouse. Del is worried, but Paul promises to take him. Finally, Brutal offers to take Mr. Jingles down to Mouseville. Paul and Brutal discuss it, and Del finally agrees. Del accidentally lets the toy roll out onto the Mile, and when Mr. Jingles follows it, Percy stomps on the mouse. John tells them to give the mouse to him, because there might still be time. Paul picks up the mouse and hands it to John while Del begs John to help. Brutal and the others watch as the tail begins moving and a light begins coming from the little mouse. Once again, John coughs until things start to come out of his mouth and float out into the air. John then puts the mouse on the ground to return to Del who cries and kisses it. When they ask what John did, he says he helped the mouse so that it could live in the mouse city. Paul and Brutal find Percy and tell him that the mouse is still alive. Paul wants a promise that if Percy gets to be up front during Del's execution, he'll put in for the transfer. Finally, Percy agrees.

Soon after, on a dark, stormy night, it's time for Del's execution. Del is playing with Mr. Jingles when they come to get him for the execution. Del puts Mr. Jingles on Paul's shoulder and asks him to keep it safe. Paul points out that he can't have a mouse on his shoulder right now. John offers to take care of it during the execution, and Del agrees. Finally, Del is executed. While Del begins to die, John holds the mouse and shakes. Finally, the mouse flies out of his hands. The sponge was dry, and everyone can smell the terrible scent of burning flesh as the light bulbs begin to burst. Paul attacks Percy and forces him to watch as Del catches on fire and finally dies.

After the execution, the Warden yells at everyone for the mistake that was made. The smell is horrible, and dozens of people got sick in the viewing room. Paul points out that it was a success since Del is dead, and then Hal begins to question Percy, who admits that he forgot to make sure the sponge was wet. Paul then announces that Percy's moving on the next day. Paul goes upstairs and checks on John, who says he could hear it even in the block. He believes that Del was the lucky one. Mr. Jingles ran away, and John doesn't believe that he'll be back, since he felt the pain through John.

A few days later, Paul and Jan visit Hal and Belinda. Belinda's having a good day right now; sometimes she isn't herself when she's not doing well. Paul lies awake that night thinking, and Jan can't sleep either. She finally asks what Paul is thinking, and he tells her that he loves her. They have the other guards over for dinner the next day, and John talks to them about what happened on The Green Mile. He tells him that John healed him as well. Paul suggests that they should take John to Belinda so that she can be healed. Harry points out that John is a murderer, and Paul says he doesn't believe that. He actually thinks that John is innocent. Finally, they agree to the plan.





Soon after, the men get ready for their plan. They bring wine to drink, and Wild Bill asks for some. They drug his cup and give him some. A few minutes later, Wild Bill passes out. The guys then talk about whether they're going to do it, and John then says that it would be just fine. He would like to take a ride. They then go put Percy in a straightjacket as payback. He screams like a girl, but he finally gives in and begs them not to put him in with Wild Bill. They stuff his mouth full of paper, tape it closed and lock him in the restraining room.

After the guards put together their plan, they get John and leave. Wild Bill wakes up, grabs onto John and asks where he's going. John starts to shake, and John says that Wild Bill's a bad man. Finally, Paul removes Wild Bill's hand, and then Bill passes out. When they go outside, John points to the stairs and says he sees Ms. Kathy, the lady in the rocking chair. As they walk through a field, John picks up some grass, smells it and holds it out for the others to smell.

After John and the guards get into a car, Paul asks John if he knows where they're taking him. He says that it's to help a lady. When they ask him how he knew, he says he doesn't know and that he's never known much of anything. Finally, they arrive at Hal's house. Someone is still awake. Hal comes outside with a gun, and Paul tells him who's there. John gets off the truck, and Hal threatens to shoot. Suddenly, Belinda begins to yell, and Paul explains that Hal just has to trust him. John walks up the steps, and as Belinda screams and cusses for everyone to go away, John says he just wants to help. Hal says no one can help and tells Paul he doesn't want John up there, but they hold him back.

John tells them to be quiet and goes upstairs to see Belinda. She is obviously very ill and scared, but John kneels quietly by her bed. She asks who hurt him so badly after she notices the scars. He doesn't remember who hurt him, and he gives her his name when she asks. John then tells her that he sees it and tells her to be still and quiet. He puts his mouth on hers, and a light appears. As everyone watches, John takes away the cancer.

In that moment, the clock face cracks and the house shakes. Then, John coughs again and falls to the floor. Hal goes over to Belinda, and she asks how she got there. The last thing she remembers is when they went to the hospital in Vicksburg. John finally stands up, unable to get the illness out. When he tells his name, she remembers that, and then she goes to him and says she dreamed of him. They were wandering in the dark together, and they found each other. Then, Belinda gives him her necklace to wear so that he will stay safe. She puts the necklace on him, and he thanks her. She thanks him and hugs him. Finally, they drag John back to the truck, where he lies down. Brutal tells Paul that he swallowed the stuff for a reason and that he will probably die in just a few days.

Back at the cellblock, John lies down, and they report what happened. They then go inside the restraining room to talk to Percy. They take the tape off his mouth, and then he begins yelling. Paul hits him and tells him to shut up and then tells him that if Percy doesn't leave, they'll have him beaten because they know people too. They take off the



straightjacket and let him go. Brutal tells Paul that eventually Percy will talk. John then grabs Percy by the throat, and the other men try to save him. John pulls Percy closer and then lets all the cancer go into him. Then, John falls to the ground.

Paul pulls Percy away from the cell and tries to talk to him. He walks a few steps. Then he passes Wild Bill's cell, looks in, pulls a gun and shoots Wild Bill. The guards hold him down as Bill dies. Then, Percy lets all the bug-like creatures out of his mouth. Paul walks over to John, who says he punished both the bad men. When Bill grabbed John's arm, John saw everything Bill had done. John then has Paul take his hand to show him what happened. Paul agrees, and John gives part of himself to Paul. Paul sees the two little girls jumping rope and eating dinner as their dad works outside. Then, the girls run past Wild Bill, who is painting the barn. He eats dinner with the family, and later he sneaks inside and makes the little girls be quiet. Paul sees how Bill killed the two little girls, and John tells him that it's that way everyday, all over the world.

Later, investigators take photographs and try to talk to Percy. Hal tells Paul that he'll cover for him as much as possible, but he wants to know if it has anything to do with what happened at the house. Paul says no, and then viewers see Percy in a robe and slippers being escorted into a room at the mental institution.

That evening, Paul sits silently when Jan walks in to sit with him. She asks if Hal can help stop John's execution. Paul tells Jan that this is the first time he's felt in danger of hell for doing something wrong. She encourages him to talk to John and find out what he wants. Paul and Brutal talk to John a couple days before to ask about his last requests. He asks for mashed potatoes and gravy and Jan's cornbread. John doesn't want a preacher, but he asks Paul to say a prayer. Paul then wants to ask John something, but John tells him he doesn't have to. Paul then asks if John wants to try to escape, and John asks why he'd be so foolish. Paul admits that he doesn't want to stand before God and answer why he killed a true miracle. He doesn't feel comfortable saying that it was his job. John tells him to explain to God that he was doing a favor, since John is ready for it to be over because he's tired of feeling all the pain of the world. There's just too much.

Brutal says that there must be something they can do for John. John says that he's always wanted to see a movie show. Together, the guards and John watch the Fred Astaire film that the older Paul saw at the beginning of the film. John thinks Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are just like angels up in heaven.

Back on the cellblock, the guards go to get John. Paul takes the necklace for now, and John tells them that he dreamed of Del's mouse now living in Mouseville with little children, including the two little girls. They had fun laughing together. In the viewing room, the farmer and his wife watch the execution. John tells Paul that there are lots of people there who hate him, and he can feel it as the farmer yells at him. Paul tells him to feel how the guards feel, since they don't hate him. He nods that he can feel it.

The guards strap John in and have to hide their tears. The farmer's wife yells at him again, and John apologizes for what he has done as a way of making the family feel



better. John asks them not to put the hood over his head because he's afraid of the dark. John cries as they prepare the sponge and the headpiece. As everyone watches, Paul doesn't give the order at first. Brutal reminds him, but he shakes John's hand first. Then, they flip the switch, and John dies. After John's death, Paul puts Belinda's necklace back on John, and they cover him with a sheet.

The audience is transferred back to the present, where Paul tells Elaine that this was his last execution because it was just too brutal. Instead, he moved to a boys' correctional facility. Paul doesn't think she believes him, but she says it's quite a story. She doesn't understand, though, how he could have had a grown son in 1935. The math doesn't work out. John invites her for a walk, and they return to the house where he was earlier.

Inside, Paul shows Elaine a little old mouse. Mr. Jingles wakes up and then performs his old trick slowly. Although it's not quite Mouseville, Mr. Jingles has a place to live. Paul thinks that when they electrocuted Del and things went badly, a part of the magic in John leaked into Mr. Jingles. Paul then tells her that a part of the power that worked through John went into him when he got that memory from John about Wild Bill. He was infected with life and is now 108 years old. He was forty-four when John walked down The Green Mile.

Paul asks Elaine not to blame John, since he couldn't help what happened. Paul has lived to see many amazing things, but he's also had to see everyone die through the years, including his wife and children. He'll even watch Elaine die someday, too. He believes this is his punishment for letting John die. Paul's sure that he'll die someday, but he knows that it will be a long time. He already wishes that he would die soon.

The scene reverts to the past, as Paul walks around the cellblock and listens to the stereo. Mr. Jingles comes out, and Paul feeds him. Paul thinks of the future, about death and the people he loved, as he lies in bed at night. He thinks of everyone walking their own Green Mile in their own time. Most nights he stays awake, though, thinking one thought: "If he could make a mouse live so long, how long do I have?" Although everyone has a death to give, sometimes his Green Mile seems so very long.



# Characters

## Paul Edgecomb, played by Tom Hanks and Dabbs Greer (Old Paul)

### Description

Audience members first meet Paul later in life, when he is 108 years old, as he lives in a nursing home. Paul tries to explain to Ellie why he's upset, so he tells her a mystical story of his younger life. Later, viewers see the old Paul struggling as all his family and all his friends die before him while he remains because of John's power.

Paul is a kind man who works on Death Row at a prison. He loves his wife and tries to do right by everyone. He has worked with many prisoners over the years but none as unusual as John Coffey. Paul has to lead the other guards as they deal with cruel men like Wild Bill and idiots like Percy Wetmore.

Paul always tries to set a good example for everyone. When he realizes that John is not guilty, he is torn by having to send him to the electric chair. He cannot imagine having to face God knowing that he killed an innocent man. After that day, Paul changes to a new job and never looks back.

### Analysis

Paul's character is that of a smart man who comes face to face with the supernatural. He is generally a very realistic man, but when he is faced with the obvious powers that John possesses, he is forced to believe.

Paul tries to do the right thing throughout the film. Even though Percy is a conceited brat, Paul protects him as well as he can. He also tries to get rid of Percy to protect the men in the block, as well as the guards. After Percy's terrible mistake, Paul has no problem removing him.

## John Coffey, played by Michael Clarke Duncan

### Description

John Coffey is a mysterious, magical man with the power of faith healing. He is accused of raping and murdering two little girls after he is found holding their bloody bodies and weeping. As a large black man, he is given no opportunity to defend himself and is considered guilty automatically.



When John comes on to the block, the guards are at first scared of him until they discover that he is more like a big teddy bear - scared of the dark and thankful for everything. He heals Paul of his urinary infection, and from that point, Paul tries to find out the truth behind John's story.

After John learns the truth about the girls by holding onto Wild Bill, he gives a bit of himself to Paul so that he can know the truth as well. Little does John know that this will give Paul a very long life. John is finally put in the electric chair, and he feels that it is a favor since he is tired of having to move from town to town without a friend in the world.

## **Analysis**

John is a special person in the world. He has the supernatural power of healing. It's easy for people to assume that he's perfect, but he's not. Instead, he has a special gift that he uses to help others. John is in many ways a Christ figure. He humbly brings a miraculous presence to the world, and he works to heal and save others, while he himself is persecuted. In the end, he is executed for his gifts.

Sometimes, though, even John gets out of control. When he sees how terrible Percy and Wild Bill are, he uses Belinda's cancer so that they will both be punished. Wild Bill is murdered by Percy, while Percy is put in the mental institution for life.

John's life has been hard, and he has been forced to move from place to place for a very, very long time. He feels that his death is a gift since unless he is murdered by the electric chair it might take years, even centuries, for him to die naturally.

## **Brutus "Brutal" Howell, played by David Morse**

### **Description**

Brutal is one of the guards on the block. He has been working with Paul for years, and he absolutely despises Percy. Brutal often has to be held in check when he runs into Percy, but he is a good guard who honestly cares about the men.

### **Analysis**

Brutal is a kind man with a bit of a temper. After Percy almost lets him get killed, he understandably holds a grudge. Brutal is amazed by John's power, and he is one of the only people who witnesses what happens with Belinda and all the events that come after. When John is put in the electric chair, Brutal can barely contain his emotion, but he does hold it in for the group.



## **Jan Edgecomb, played by Bonnie Hunt**

### **Description**

Jan is Paul's loving wife. She backs him up through everything, even when things are strained in their relationship or when his work makes his life a challenge. She is good friends with Hal's wife, Belinda, and supports Paul's idea to try to save her.

### **Analysis**

Jan is the ideal wife. She is supportive and loving and very excited when Paul's urinary infection is healed. Additionally, she cares for her friends and is supportive of Paul's idea to save Belinda.

## **Warden Hal Moores, played by James Cromwell**

### **Description**

Warden Hal Moores is Paul's boss and good friend. Over the years, the two men and their spouses have grown very close. Hal's wife has a brain tumor, and he is terrified that she is about to die. When Paul shows up with John, Hal is terrified, but when Belinda is healed, he is forced to be awed and grateful.

### **Analysis**

Hal is a very respectable, responsible man. He respects Paul but is confused when Paul shows up with John. After Belinda is healed, Hal also believes in John's power, but they are still forced to carry out John's punishment.

## **Percy Wetmore, played by Doug Hutchison**

### **Description**

Percy has family in the government, so he is able to get any job he wants. When he comes to work on Paul's block, Paul is extremely angry because Percy is rude and unfeeling. Percy is always causing trouble with all the prisoners and almost gets everyone killed when he brings Wild Bill inside.

Percy knows very little about anything. After all his horrible actions, he messes up Del's execution and causes lots of problems for the prison. John decides that both he and Wild Bill need to be punished, so he gives Belinda's brain cancer to Percy, who kills Wild Bill before going insane.



## Analysis

Percy is a conceited jerk. He is never kind to anyone, and he kills Mr. Jingles just out of spite. Paul tries to get rid of him, but Percy's family connections make him too powerful. He wants to be up close when someone is executed before he transfers. When he finally gets the chance, he botches the execution.

## Eduard Delacroix, played by Michael Jeter

### Description

Eduard Delacroix, better known in the film as Del, is a somewhat crazy old man on Death Row. The little mouse becomes Del's friend, and he names him Mr. Jingles. Del loves to show everyone the tricks that Mr. Jingles can do, and before he dies, they put together a group to watch. After Percy kills Mr. Jingles, everyone is able to see John's power. Del is mostly worried about Mr. Jingles' welfare after he dies, so John offers to take care of him, and as Del dies, John accidentally gives Mr. Jingles some of his power to make the mouse live at least until the end of the film.

### Analysis

Del is a kind man who has done something horrible in his past. Although he can be ornery at times, all the guards really like him. Once he has Mr. Jingles, Del is no longer so lonely. He finally has a friend. When Del dies, everything goes horribly wrong, and he screams in pain and terror.

## "Wild Bill" Wharton, played by Sam Rockwell

### Description

"Wild Bill" is definitely wild. He decided at a young age to make his name as an accomplished criminal who has committed some of the most appalling crimes in the South. He is sent to Paul's prison because of all the problems he has caused elsewhere.

Everyone on the cellblock hates Wild Bill. When he first arrives, he pretends to be drugged and then attacks Percy and the other guards. Percy shows his weakness in this moment, and no one, especially Wild Bill, retains any respect for him thereafter.

Wild Bill is cruel to everyone. John decides to punish both him and Percy after he visits Belinda. After Percy contracts brain cancer for a moment, he shoots and kills Wild Bill before going insane.



## **Analysis**

Wild Bill is mentally unstable. He kills people for the thrill of it, caring little for well being or how their families might feel. Of all his terrible actions, the worst is the rape and murder of the two little girls, a crime that John is accused of when he tries to heal them.

Wild Bill's hatred and anger stand in sharp contrast to John's goodness and kindness. Where John hasn't a mean bone in his body, Wild Bill focuses all his energy on hurting others. His pride causes him to do terrible things simply so that everyone will know him. Pride can destroy, and it destroys Wild Bill's sanity and his future.

## **Arlen Bitterbuck, played by Graham Greene**

### **Description**

Arlen Bitterbuck is an inmate on Death Row. He is the first of the group to die, but before he does, he asks important questions about what happens after death and whether repentance is enough if you have committed a really terrible crime.

### **Analysis**

Arlen's main purpose in the film is to show viewers how an execution is supposed to happen. Otherwise, we have nothing with which to compare Del's botched execution. Arlen also asks important questions about life that help the viewer to focus on the deeper issues at hand during an execution.

## **Elaine Connelly, played by Eva Brent**

### **Description**

Elaine is Paul's friend in the nursing home. He has just met her in the last few years and shares his story with her.

### **Analysis**

Elaine serves as a means to tell Paul's story. Also, her death shows the tragedy that Paul constantly has to live through because he holds part of John inside him.



# Themes

## Supernatural Powers in the World

While most people do not believe in the supernatural, a story like *The Green Mile* taps into viewers basic desires for something beyond our everyday lives, making us give into the desire to suspend disbelief if only for a few hours. The audience sees special people who have powers and feelings unlike those of normal people. Viewers also see the lasting impact that those people make on the rest of the world. Interpreted on a broader level, the supernatural powers in *The Green Mile* can be construed as the human powers to give joy and spiritual or emotional healing to others. The supernatural is a metaphor for the spiritual reality of human experience.

John Coffey is a special man. He has the power of faith healing, and he shares it with those he meets. John's powers are first seen on the cellblock when he heals Paul of his terrible urinary infection. John also shows his abilities when he brings Mr. Jingles back to life.

John's powers are also used to save Belinda. She is about to die of a brain tumor, when Paul and the others take him to heal her. Afterwards, John decides to promote justice by giving the cancer to Percy, who then kills the terrible Wild Bill before losing his mind. John uses his supernatural gift to bestow both kindness and justice. Viewers' desire to believe that such things might exist stems from a desire for tangible kindness and justice in the world.

## Kindness Is Stronger than Hatred

On Death Row, there is, not surprisingly, a lot of hatred. Wild Bill has made a career out of trying to commit some of the worst crimes in the South, and he has been very successful. Percy has always received everything because of his family connections, and he has no intention of working for anything. He hates everyone for no reason at all.

Although at points the hatred on Death Row seems poised to take over everything, John's kindness and love wins out. He influences everyone around him to a better life, except for those, like Wild Bill and Percy, who have no hope left for a better life.

## Justice of the Death Penalty

Having spent years working on Death Row, both Paul and Brutal are accustomed to their inmates being electrocuted. They are kind to the men, but they feel like the men are getting what they deserve. Never in all their years have they felt that someone was not guilty of the crime for which they were being punished.

When John appears on the scene, Paul and Brutal start questioning the fairness of the death penalty. They cannot believe that this kind, innocent man is going to be killed for a crime that another inmate actually committed. They even offer to set John free so that he can escape the punishment.

As Paul and Brutal question the death penalty for John, they in some ways question it for everyone. If John isn't guilty, then how many other people are tried and unfairly found guilty? The film brings up the question of whether any man has the right to take another man's life, even if it is the law. Viewers are asked to make their own decisions in part based on John.

## Style and Cinematography

The cinematography in *The Green Mile* is spectacular. The film is shot in such a way that it almost seems like a fairy story, but viewers are also drawn back to reality by the gritty way of life in the cell block and the dangers the men face.

There are several times where the camera either pans or shoots a close up to make a point or add emphasis. For example, when John heals Paul, viewers are suddenly up close and personal with the situation so that we not only know exactly what is going on but also so that we realize the importance of the situation.

Stylistically, this film is one in a million. Director Frank Darabont makes sure that his film has the mystical properties of any Stephen King novel while he also makes it seem as if this story could just possibly be true. Although we realize that this could not happen in the real world, it sparks a hope in viewers that such goodness could actually exist.

# Motifs

## Supernatural Forces

Supernatural forces play a major role in *The Green Mile*. John's powers affect not only his life but also the lives of those around him. He always tries to use his powers for good, even though his intentions can be misconstrued. This is the reason he ends up on The Green Mile in the first place.

As with so many Stephen King novels and films, *The Green Mile* explores the realm of the supernatural and opens the possibility that such forces may exist in our world. As John continues healing people, viewers sense a desire for a person in the world with these same powers.

The supernatural forces run through the story from beginning to end. From the moment John heals Paul, the events fall one on top of the other. John heals Belinda as well before punishing Wild Bill and Percy. In the end, he gives long life to both Paul and Mr. Jingles after transferring just a smidgen of his power to them.

## Prison

Films about prison always seem to differ widely from true reports about prison. Generally, this results in films that show only the best possible situations. *The Green Mile* is no exception. One reason is that, although the prison setting is a tool to tell the story, it is no way the focus of the tale.

The prison setting is a way to keep all the main characters together while the story is happening. In order for viewers to truly see the impact of John's power and the importance of the events, they must all take place within the same group of people, and life on Death Row ensures that this happens. Death Row also offers itself as a metaphor for life. We are all condemned to die at the end of our life's journey, but *The Green Mile* offers a hope for healing and perhaps, if John is interpreted as a Savior, eternal life.

## Executions

Three executions take place during the film. In the first, Arlen is electrocuted. In this scene, the audience learns how the executions are supposed to work, and we are exposed to some of the thoughts a prisoner might think before his execution.

The second execution is Del's. Here, viewers see how incompetent Percy is. Not only is he cruel, but he is also stupid. Instead of easing the pain of inevitable death, he worsens it. By messing up the execution, there is a good reason to get rid of him at last. Also, after this incident, John is able to punish Percy before he leaves.

Finally, John is executed. This is the most heartbreaking execution of all. After all that he has done for others, it breaks the hearts of the characters and viewers alike to see John go in such a terrible way. His execution may go off without a hitch, but the prison guards are changed forever.



# Symbols

## Mr. Jingles

Mr. Jingles is the tiny mouse that joins the group on The Green Mile. At first the guards try to kill him, but then everyone becomes rather fond of the friendly little mouse. Eventually Del takes him in as a pet. Mr. Jingles symbolizes the loneliness that the men feel on the Mile. They are even willing to take in a mouse.

Only Percy still holds a grudge against the mouse, and one day he steps on it. After Percy steps on Mr. Jingles, John uses his powers to save the tiny mouse. Later, when Del is killed, John takes care of the mouse, and a little of his power transfers into it.

In later years, Mr. Jingles represents the possibility of immortality. The little mouse has lived for many years, and after over half a century, he is finally showing signs of true aging. With just that little bit of power, Mr. Jingles has stayed alive for years, and Paul can only imagine how long he will live, since he received even greater power from John.

## The Light

Each time John heals someone or something, a bright light exudes from him. The person is then completely healed with no negative side effects whatsoever. John's powers are similar to those that have been told about in myth, legend and religion for centuries. He is a faith healer.

The light that comes from John is symbolic of the goodness of heart needed for his powers. Light and goodness are related in religion and myth, and John's light shows his goodness. The light also represents John as a Savior figure. He is coming in and showing the light to everyone else through his kindness and his good works.

## The Green Mile

The Green Mile is so named because the floor is an ugly lime green color. The men on Death Row have nothing beautiful around them, not even the floor. The Mile also symbolizes the short distance the men (and on some level, all men) have until they are condemned to die.

The men on the Mile know that their time is short, and most act accordingly. They become more docile and kind to one another as they wait for death, which is why Wild Bill stands out in such stark contrast to the others. Compared to the quiet men and John who is pure good, Wild Bill seems to represent pure evil.



## Essay Questions

Why does Paul tell his story?

What is wrong with Paul when viewers first meet him on Death Row?

Why is Death Row called The Green Mile?

What is unusual about John when he first arrives?

Why does Percy have his job?

What power does John have, and how did that cause him to be convicted?

How does John transfer his power to Mr. Jingles and Paul?

What happens after John helps Belinda?

How does John help Paul feel better about the death penalty?

Who does Elaine meet at the end of the film?