

# **Spirited Away Film Summary**

## **Spirited Away by Hayao Miyazaki**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Spirited Away Film Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Context.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Summary and Analysis.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Style and Cinematography.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Symbols.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Essay Questions.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>

## Context

*Spirited Away* is an animated Japanese film. When viewers first meet the main character, Chihiro, she and her family are moving to a new town. They are running late, so her father decides to take a shortcut. As with most shortcuts, this one just gets them lost. They find an abandoned building, and her parents decide to explore despite Chihiro's feelings that all is not quite right.

The family ends up entering a magical spirit world where her parents are turned into pigs for their gluttony, and Chihiro must save them. She makes her way into the world with help from Haku. Eventually, she is given the chance to save him, herself and her parents. When they can finally go home, her parents don't even remember the lost time.

Hayao Miyazaki is one of the best animation directors in Japan. Although many of his films are popular in Japan, few are known in the United States. Some of the more popular films have been *Warriors of the Wind* (1984), *Crimson Pig* (1992), *Princess Monoke* (1997) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004).

Hayao Miyazaki is the primary reason that the United States and the rest of the world have come to love Japanese anime. He has been introduced in large part due to the efforts of the Walt Disney Company to highlight these films. In 1997, *Mononoke-hime* received the Japanese equivalent of an Oscar for Best Film. It was the highest grossing Japanese film in Japan's history at the time of its release. The praise skyrocketed Miyazaki to even greater popularity and fame. Although he has claimed to have produced his last film, anime buffs everywhere hope that he will continue his work.

*Spirited Away* won the Oscar for Best Animated Feature for Hayao Miyazaki. The film also won numerous awards at the Mainichi Film Concours, a Japanese award ceremony similar to the American Academy Awards: Best Animated Film for Hayao Miyazaki; Best Director for Hayao Miyazaki; Best Film for Hayao Miyazaki; Best Music Score for Joe Hisaishi; and the Reader's Choice Award for Best Film for Hayao Miyazaki.



## Summary and Analysis

As *Spirited Away* opens, Chihiro reads a note from her best friend Lily, who wishes her well as she moves to the suburbs. While in the car, Chihiro's parents talk about how small their new town is and try to get Chihiro excited about her new school. Chihiro is depressed to realize that her first bouquet of flowers is a good-bye present. Although her mother tries to convince her that moving to a new place is an adventure, Chihiro sulks in the back of the car.

The family is close to their new home, but Chihiro's father decides to take a shortcut down a lonely dirt road so that they can get to their new home faster. Although his wife tries to convince him to take the normal way, Chihiro's father like many men decides to try the shortcut. As they drive into a dark forest, Chihiro asks about small stones lining the sides of the road. Her mother tells her that they are shrines, and some people believe that spirits live inside of them.

In the woods, Chihiro tells her dad that she thinks they're lost, but he refuses to listen. As they speed through the trees, they finally come to a dead end at an old building. Chihiro's father decides to investigate and finds that the building is fake, made of plaster. The wind begins to pull them in, and Chihiro tries to convince her parents not to go inside. She doesn't want to stand outside alone in the scary place either, so she finally follows her parents down the darkened entryway.

The family finally enters a huge room with benches. They hear a sound like a train and go to find out where the noise is coming from. Out behind the room, there are several old ramshackle buildings. Chihiro's father believes that this is an abandoned theme park, and he continues investigating despite Chihiro's protests. The wind becomes even stronger, and the building sounds like they're moaning.

The family smells food, and they decide to find something to eat. They enter a series of streets and find one lined with restaurants. One of them has hot food, and though they can't find anyone, they begin to eat. Chihiro refuses to try the food, but her parents eat their fill. Chihiro walks away in frustration and discovers that the building they were in is actually a bathhouse, and smoke is coming out of the stack. She sees a train below the bridge, and suddenly she is surprised by a young boy named Haku. He tells her that she must get across the river before it gets dark.

Chihiro runs and tries to find her parents, but they have turned into pigs. She is shocked by their transformation but still believes that they are her parents. Spirits are beginning to appear in the streets and restaurants as Chihiro sprints toward the river. She falls in and is shocked to see that it is now filled with water.

Looking across the river, Chihiro sees a city of lights and a riverboat coming toward her. She leans down and begins to hope that she will wake up soon from some terrible dream. As she is holding her hands to her face, she realizes that she is now see-through. Spirits come off the riverboat, and she runs away as quickly as she can. Haku



finds her and tells her that he wants to help her. He gives her food from this new world so that she won't disappear.

Haku and Chihiro watch as a bird flies over to look for her, and he tells her that they have to get her out. At first, Chihiro can't move her legs, but Haku says a chant and frees her. Together, they run past barns full of pigs and through the streets. In order to cross the bridge, Chihiro must hold her breath so that no one can see her. Haku is welcomed back from his mission. They are almost across the bridge when a frog stops them, and Chihiro breathes. Everyone sees her, and they run away.

Haku tells Chihiro that in order for her to help her parents, he will have to create a diversion. He gives her directions on where to go to find Kamaji, the head of the boiler room, so that she can demand a job. Without a job there, Yubaba, the witch who rules the bathhouse, will turn her into an animal. Haku tells Chihiro that he's known her since she was very small and that he is her friend.

As Chihiro goes down to the boiler room, she loses her balance at one point and begins to fall down the stairs, screaming. She finally makes it into the boiler room and meets Kamaji, a strange and scary creature. She begs for a job, but he tries to blow her off. By helping one of his little helpers, who looks like a small bug, she ends up causing a lot of problems. The helpers try to hurt themselves so that Chihiro will help them, but Kamaji takes charge again.

After Kamaji tells Chihiro to go away again, a young girl named Lin walks in. She is there to feed Kamaji and his enchanted helpers. Kamaji says that Chihiro is his granddaughter and wants a job there. He tells Lin to take Chihiro to see Yubaba so that she can get a job. Kamaji says that in order for Chihiro to get a job, she must make a deal with Yubaba. Chihiro follows hopefully after Lin and then thanks Kamaji after Lin reminds her of how Kamaji is sticking his neck out for her.

The girls take an elevator up to the top floor to see Yubaba. Lin keeps Chihiro hidden and helps her make her way up to see Yubaba. The doors to Yubaba's rooms open, and Chihiro is pulled inside by a magical force. She is surrounded by bouncing heads that are controlled by Yubaba.

After Chihiro asks for a job, Yubaba literally zips Chihiro's mouth closed with magic. Yubaba tells her that humans always make a mess of things, and Chihiro should be punished just like her parents. Chihiro refuses to tell who helped her and continues to beg for a job. Yubaba flies over and yells at her and refuses to help her. Suddenly, a giant baby foot comes through the door and then kicks Yubaba in the head. Chihiro refuses to leave until she gets a job.

Finally, Yubaba gives Chihiro a contract and tells her not to complain unless she wants to end up in the pigpen. Yubaba then takes Chihiro's name and gives her the new name of Sen. Haku comes in and is told to set up a job for Chihiro. He tells her not to talk to him and to address him as Master Haku.



No one wants to take Chihiro, but Haku promises that Chihiro's smell will go away quickly. Finally, he gives her to Lin, who has been complaining that she needs an assistant. Lin treats Chihiro very nicely and tells her to let her know if she needs anything. Chihiro asks if there aren't two Hakus there, but Lin tells her not to trust anything Haku says since he's Yubaba's henchman. Chihiro falls to the floor and begins to cry.

Upstairs, Yubaba becomes a bird and flies away while Haku watches. The next morning Chihiro is still crying. Haku then comes in and tells Chihiro to meet him at the bridge so that he can take her to her parents. She climbs out of the room and goes to the boiler room for her shoes. Chihiro arrives at the bridge and walks past a spirit, who then disappears. Haku meets her on the other side and hurries her to the barns, telling her that if they are found there she will be turned into a pig as well. He warns her to only come to the barn with him.

Chihiro watches her parents, but they are sound asleep from eating too much. Haku tells her to look hard so that she can remember who they are, since they don't remember being humans. Haku returns her clothes so that she can get home later. Her card from Lily is there, and she is sad to find out that she almost forgot her name. Yubaba controls them by stealing their names. Haku still can't remember his name. Haku gives her food to help her keep her strength. Chihiro begins to cry again, but Haku continues to console her. He warns her to stay out of trouble until he can see her again. When Chihiro turns around, she sees that Haku has turned into a dragon and is flying away. The spirit from the bridge follows her as she returns to the boiler room. Kamaji wakes up, sees her there and covers her with a blanket.

Outside, a great rainstorm comes as Yubaba is flying toward the city. Chihiro is the youngest of the cleaning girls, and she has the most difficult time trying to do all her duties. As she pours water out the window, she again sees the spirit that has been following her and leaves the door open for it. The spirit enters and disappears. Lin and Chihiro are given the big nasty tub to clean.

Upstairs, Yubaba realizes that something is coming, but she can't figure out who is out in the rain. All the stores and restaurants are closed up, and only one dirty monster-like spirit is in the streets. The foreman won't give Chihiro what she needs, so the spirit helps her. He then receives a call from Yubaba that there is an intruder. Chihiro fills up the big tub with Lin's direction. While working, she sees the spirit behind her again. She slips and hits her head, and the spirit comes and gives her the herbal pills she needed before. While talking to him, Chihiro lets the tub overflow.

Yubaba comes running downstairs and announces that it is a stink spirit. They try to get him in and out as quickly as possible after his bath. Chihiro is told to take the guest to the big bath and care for him. The stink spirit comes in, and Yubaba greets him. Chihiro is covered in slime as the stink spirit gets slime all over the room. Chihiro uses some of the herbal bath tokens so that she can get the stink spirit clean.



Lin finally comes in to help Chihiro, and Chihiro finds that the spirit has a thorn in his side. Everyone helps get the thorn, which turns out to be a bicycle and many other things, out of the spirit's side. By the time they finish pulling, a whole landfill has come out of the spirit's side. The spirit thanks Chihiro, and she has a gift from him. They also find gold among the trash, and the spirit flies out and away. Yubaba hugs Chihiro for making them so rich. Viewers see the spirit that Chihiro let in earlier watching from the corner.

Chihiro asks Lin if she's seen Haku recently. Lin has heard that he does Yubaba's dirty work. There is a full moon on this beautiful night, as the train goes by through the rain. Lin plans to get on the train someday to go away. In her hand, Chihiro holds the piece from the spirit and takes a bit, but it makes her sick.

Late that evening, the frog meets the spirit, who gives him more gold. After tricking the frog, the spirit eats him. The frog's voice talks through the spirit, and the foreman becomes very scared. Chihiro dreams that she is visiting her parents with the gift from the River Spirit, but she cannot recognize them. Everyone is gone when she wakes up, and the town is in chaos when Chihiro goes downstairs. The spirit is the new guest in town and is giving gold away by the handful from his spot in the big tub, but Chihiro decides to go find Haku instead of taking money.

Upstairs, Chihiro wonders where Haku is and becomes worried that she will forget what her parents look like. She then sees a dragon in the water and recognizes Haku. He seems to be chased by birds, and Chihiro yells for Haku to fight them. He is hurt, but Chihiro is able to help him hide inside. She then realizes that the pieces were just paper. Haku is bleeding, and although Chihiro tries to encourage him, he becomes upset.

Haku flies inside the top window, and she follows him, followed by one piece of paper so that he will not bleed to death. Everyone is giving the spirit a performance when Chihiro breaks in. He gives her a huge handful of gold but she tries to refuse. The spirit drops the gold and looks upset by her rejection. The others swarm to gather the gold.

Chihiro bravely climbs up to the top window to check on Haku. When she is climbing up the ladder, Yubaba flies in from a trip somewhere. Chihiro hides, and the little piece of paper helps her to break in a window. She ends up in a large playroom and hears Yubaba talk about what pitiful guests they attract and how Haku will be dead very soon.

Yubaba checks on the baby and wakes it, but she gets it to go back to sleep. Chihiro talks to the baby, who believes that she is a bad germ from outside. The baby has never left the room before, and he demands that she stay and play. She scares the baby with germs and runs out to find Haku.

The little Yubaba bird attacks Chihiro, and then the baby walks into the room. The little piece of paper turns into Yubaba and tells the baby to shut up. It shrinks both the bird and the baby and tells Chihiro that she is Zeniba, Yubaba's twin sister. She has come to retrieve her magic seal that Haku stole. Haku hits the piece of paper and breaks Zeniba into two pieces. Then, they begin to fall through the floor and down to the boiler room.



Kamaji says that Haku seems to be bleeding from the inside. She makes him eat the gift from the River Spirit so that he can be healed. Chihiro forces him to swallow even when he fights, and he spits out a golden seal and a little bug that Chihiro tries to kill. She finally smashes it with her foot. Haku changes back into a boy, but he is still gravely ill from Zeniba's magic.

Kamaji tells Chihiro that Haku showed up out of nowhere just like she did. Kamaji tried to warn him about taking the job, but Haku had no home to return to. He came under Yubaba's spell. Chihiro offers to return the seal and apologize so that she can save Haku. Kamaji knows how to get there but warns her that she'll have to make it back on her own.

Lin comes inside looking for Chihiro. Yubaba is furious since No-Face says that Chihiro let him into the bathhouse. No-Face has already eaten three people. Kamaji gives Chihiro the train tickets so that she can get to Swamp Bottom. Chihiro tells Haku that she'll be back soon. Lin asks what is going on, and Kamaji tells her that it's something she wouldn't recognize - love.

Chihiro goes upstairs to see Yubaba and No-Face. Yubaba tells Chihiro to suck up and get as much money as possible. Chihiro asks to leave so that she can help her friend. No-Face says that he is very lonely, and he wants her. He gives her a lot of gold, and she is afraid that he'll eat her. She gives him the rest of the River God's gift first, and he becomes very sick. As he runs out, he throws up everywhere. Chihiro leads him out of the bathhouse as quickly as she can, and he finally throws up the other two people. No-Face is angry with Chihiro for making him sick.

Outside, Lin helps Chihiro get away. Chihiro thinks that No-Face goes crazy in the bathhouse, and she calls to him to follow them out. Lin takes Chihiro part of the way to the station and makes her promise to come back. Lin threatens No-Face with big trouble if he hurts Chihiro. The train finally comes, and Chihiro and No-Face get on the train. They sit quietly on the train as they speed toward their destination. Finally, they arrive at Swamp Bottom as the only two left on the train.

Down in the boiler room, both Haku and Kamaji are asleep. Haku wakes up Kamaji and asks about Chihiro. Haku remembers hearing Chihiro's voice. Zeniba's spell was broken by Chihiro's love. Upstairs, Yubaba talks to the others about Chihiro. Haku tells her that her baby has been replaced. Yubaba begins searching for her baby, and Haku tells her that Zeniba has the baby.

Yubaba realizes that Haku will get the baby back for a price. Haku wants Chihiro's contract torn up and her and her parents returned to their world. Yubaba agrees as long as she can give Chihiro one final test, but if she fails she will become Yubaba's forever.

Chihiro and No-Face finally arrive at the correct stop. They get off the train and go to find Zeniba, but the baby, which has been turned into a mouse by Zeniba, seems to know the way and leads them. A small lantern leads them to Zeniba's door.





Chihiro, No-Face and the baby enter. Zeniba kindly invites them in and makes them tea. Chihiro returns the gold seal and apologizes for Haku. Chihiro apologizes for squashing the slug, but Zeniba reveals that the bug was in Haku so that Yubaba could control him. Zeniba tells Chihiro that only true love could break the spell on the seal. Chihiro also asks her to change the bird and baby back, but Zeniba says that the spell wore off long ago. Both refuse to change back.

Zeniba sits down and tells Chihiro how much she dislikes her sister. Zeniba apologizes for Yubaba turning her parents into pigs. Chihiro is on her own to help Haku and her parents. Chihiro admits that she feels like she's met Haku before but that it was a long time ago. Zeniba tells her that you never really forget anyone; sometimes it just takes a while for memories to return. While Chihiro tries to remember, Zeniba and the others make something for Chihiro.

Chihiro begins to cry because she can't remember her name anymore. Zeniba tells her to wait a little longer and gives her a sparkling hairband that will protect her, since her friends wove it for her. A moment later, Haku arrives at the door. Zeniba forgives Haku for stealing and requires him to care for Chihiro. Zeniba asks No-Face to stay with her and help her at home. Then Chihiro climbs onto Haku's back, and they fly away.

While Chihiro and Haku are flying, Chihiro tells Haku that when she was little she dropped her shoe into a river. When she tried to get it back, she fell in, but the water carried her back to shore. She thinks Haku was the one who saved her, and his real name is Kuako River. Haku becomes a boy again and remembers his name. He was the River Spirit, but now that the river is an apartment building, he can't find his way back home. They fly together back to Yubaba's.

Lin and the others are excited to see Haku and Chihiro return. Yubaba is so excited to see the baby back, and Haku reminds her of her promise to return Chihiro to the human world. Yubaba reminds him that she gets to test Chihiro one last time. The baby tries to convince Yubaba not to test Chihiro because they had such a good time, and he threatens to not like Yubaba anymore if she makes Chihiro cry. Chihiro speaks up and says that she wants to take the test.

Yubaba leads Chihiro to a group of pigs and asks Chihiro which are her parents. She's got one try, and if she gets it right, they can all go home. Chihiro says that there must have been a mistake because none of them are her parents. The contract disappears into thin air, and Yubaba lets her go. Haku tells her that her parents woke up on the human side of the river. Chihiro is not able to look back until she reaches the other side of the tunnel, but Haku cannot go with her any further.

Haku plans to tell Yubaba that he will no longer be her apprentice since he now has his name back. He promises to see Chihiro again sometime. She finally sees her parents at the entry, and they warn her not to run off like that anymore. Then, Chihiro almost looks back, but she continues to run through the tunnel. Finally, Chihiro does look back after she's reached the other side. Her parents are shocked to find their car dusty, and they hurry to get to their new home.



# Characters

## Chihiro/Sen voiced by Rumi Horagi

### Description

Chihiro is a young girl who has to move to a new city at the beginning of the film. After her father takes a shortcut, they get lost in a dangerous spirit world. Her parents are turned to pigs there, and she is left alone to save both them and herself.

Chihiro meets Haku, who happily tries to help her save them. She trusts him even though he works for the evil Yubaba. Chihiro's optimism and perseverance help her get Kamaji's help so she can find a job with Yubaba. These characteristics also cause Lin to take pity on her and help her.

Chihiro's love for her parents and later for Haku allows her to save them all. She frees Haku from Yubaba's spell and goes on a difficult journey so that she can deliver what Yubaba wants as payment. She discovers that she also receives a gift and is able to find her parents.

### Analysis

Chihiro has a great and sacrificial love. She refuses to leave her parents alone in the spirit world because she believes that she can save them. When she is finally stuck there, she makes the best of the situation and keeps looking for an opportunity to save her family. She also saves Haku, who has been put under an evil spell by Yubaba. He was a River Spirit and once saved her, and now she has the opportunity to return the favor. Chihiro is kind to everyone. Even when Kamaji and Lin are mean to her, she tries to be kind to them. She realizes that this is the right thing to do, and it's the only chance she really has to survive.

## Haku voiced by Miyu Irino

### Description

Haku is a River Spirit who has been put under an evil spell and has to work for Yubaba. After Chihiro's parents change into pigs, he finds her and decides to help her. He sends her to Kamaji so that she can get a job rather than be turned into a pig. Haku is able to fly, and Chihiro begins to suspect him when she finds that he is so closely connected to Yubaba. She doesn't believe that he can have her best interests in mind, but she eventually learns to trust him. She also discovers a secret. Yubaba has Haku in her control through a seal that Chihiro is able to break. He barter with Yubaba on Chihiro's behalf so that she can save her parents.



## **Analysis**

Haku's goodness exudes even when he is under the witch's evil spell. He refuses to give up his ideals and hopes while working for Yubaba, even though he must do what she says. When Zeniba almost kills him, he is saved by Chihiro. Haku also shows Chihiro his goodness on numerous occasions. He first saves her while he's a River Spirit and then later when she needs to be freed from Yubaba's spell as well. Haku tries to be kind to others during this time, but Yubaba's spell keeps him from it. Instead, he is seen as just another terrible oppressor by most people.

## **Yubaba voiced by Mari Natsuki**

### **Description**

Yubaba is the cruel leader of the spirit world. She forces people to work for her and then treats them terribly. She is primarily interested in owning people and making money. Everyone is scared of her, but Chihiro is willing to stand up to her so that she can save her parents.

### **Analysis**

Yubaba's attitude is one of "The world belongs to me, and I will treat everyone however I wish." Yubaba is a terrifying presence, but Chihiro takes a stand and defeats her because of her love for her parents.

## **Zeniba voiced by Mari Natsuki**

### **Description**

Zeniba is Yubaba's twin sister. Unlike Yubaba, Zeniba is kind and caring. She is happy to help Chihiro save herself and her parents.

### **Analysis**

Zeniba is the opposite of Yubaba, a literary foil to her twin. Her kindness helps to highlight once again Yubaba's cruelty.



## **Lin voiced by Yumi Tamai**

### **Description**

Lin is a girl who lives in the house. She meets Chihiro when Kamaji asks her to take Chihiro up to Yubaba. Lin and Chihiro end up working together, and Lin works to protect the little girl from getting into trouble.

### **Analysis**

Lin shows great kindness by taking Chihiro under her wing. She wants to keep Chihiro safe, as she is in constant danger of being turned into a pig.

## **Kamaji voiced by Bunta Sugawara**

### **Description**

Kamaji is a strange creature that works in the boiler room. Haku sends Chihiro to Kamaji so that he can get her a job. Otherwise, Chihiro would either be killed or turned into a pig and would have no chance to save her parents. Although Kamaji is at first annoyed by Chihiro and angry that she is present, he finally agrees to help her. He sends her with Lin so that she can get a job with him. She is not very good at her job, so she is sent to a new job.

### **Analysis**

Kamaji is a kind creature even though he seems rather odd. He is more than happy to help Chihiro, especially after he realizes that otherwise he will be sending her to her death. Kamaji proves to be useful several times during Chihiro's adventure, and without him the story would end much differently and much more quickly.

## **Chihiro's Father voiced by Takashi Naitf**

### **Description**

Chihiro's father wants to take a shortcut to their new home and goes down an abandoned road to an old building. Chihiro's father is clueless about the strange feelings Chihiro gets when they go near the building. Inside the area, he eats all the food he can find and turns into a pig along with his wife. When Chihiro frees them, they don't remember any of the time they missed.



## **Analysis**

Chihiro's father has the ignorance of adulthood. He is unable to sense the supernatural as Chihiro can. Thus, both he and his family suffer because he is adventurous and wants to explore the area.

## **Chihiro's Mother voiced by Yasuko Sawaguchi**

### **Description**

Along with Chihiro's father, her mother is clueless to the spirit world and the hidden world of childhood, and she is turned into a pig.

### **Analysis**

Neither Chihiro's mother nor father can sense the evil in the area, and they eat the food without ever considering that it doesn't belong to them. They are punished for it, but in the end of the story they are unaware of anything that has happened.



# Themes

## Power of Love

*Spirited Away* is the story of real love. Chihiro's love for those around her brings joy to their lives and saves everyone. She feels like she is doing the natural thing, but so many people don't know that kind of love. Chihiro first shows her love by being willing to sacrifice herself to save her parents. She stays in this terrible place to find a solution. She also treats everyone with kindness and respect while there. Although she does make some mistakes, her kindness eventually wins her a few friends.

When Haku's seal opens, it is only because Chihiro loves him so much. Her love saves him from the terrible hold Yubaba has over him. He is finally free, and he chooses to help her as well so that she and her family can return to their normal lives. In the end, her love conquers all her problems. In fact, she is only able to help her parents because her love allows her to recognize them.

## Sacrifice

When Chihiro's parents are turned into pigs, she realizes that she must save them. After she talks to Haku, she learns what she must do. She must sacrifice herself until she finds a solution. Although the prospect of speaking with Yubaba and working there is terrifying, Chihiro knows that she must do whatever it takes to save her parents.

Chihiro makes the ultimate sacrifice by staying in the spirit world. She is mistreated and threatened constantly, but she can't bear to consider deserting her parents. Her sacrifice is based on love. Chihiro also sacrifices to help Haku. She puts herself in grave danger so that she can save his life. After all his help, she loves him and can think of no other option than to care for him as he has cared for her.

## Friendship

Friendship keeps the soul alive. Even when locked in the terror of the spirit world, Chihiro is able to remain optimistic because of her strong friendships with others. She is kind to everyone, so she eventually wins over both Kamaji and Lin. Haku proves to be the best friend to Chihiro. When she is lost at first, he keeps her hidden and tells her how to find a job. Although he cannot help her completely because of Yubaba's control over him, he shows himself to be a loyal friend, and she repays the favor later by setting him free from Yubaba's control.

# Style and Cinematography

Hayao Miyazaki is considered the premier Japanese anime artist. He has created dozens of brilliant films, and the Disney Company has made it their goal to make sure he is known around the world. His art has its own unique look that makes him a master of the genre.

*Spirited Away* is a whimsical, dramatic film. The art is unusual and creates an entirely different world for viewers. Although people are much the same in the human and spirit worlds, the landscape differs enough to make the spirit world seem like a fantasy. The dramatic moments in the film are marked by greater darkness that gives a sense of mystery and fear.

The music in the film also adds to the mood. Viewers are able to tell what the characters are thinking and feeling by the music playing in the background. It generally fits in with the story as well. While good things are happening, beautiful music plays, and suspenseful notes are heard when there is fear in Chihiro.



# Motifs

## Light and Dark

Light and dark are major issues in the spirit world. When there is light outside, the world completely disappears from human vision, but as the night comes, one suddenly sees the world of the spirit. The bathhouse is completely obvious. The darkness helps the spirits hide their existence and their motivations. Yubaba is able to keep everyone under control simply because the darkness covers the truth of the situation. Times are dangerous in the spirit world, and Chihiro has to be especially careful not to get trapped there forever. Instead, she must do everything Yubaba and the others ask so that she can save her parents, or she too may be changed into a pig.

## Journey

When Chihiro's family moves to a new home she has no idea what a major journey she is embarking upon. Rather than just moving to a new city, she gets lost in a spirit world where she has little hope of freeing herself or her parents. As Chihiro makes her journey from her world into the spirit world, she learns of the dislike that stands between the two worlds. She also learns that true friends are more important than anything else in life, as she receives help from Haku, Kamaji and Lin.

Chihiro's final journey takes her to the home of friends. She meets Zeniba, Yubaba's twin sister, a kind woman who helps Chihiro survive the rest of the journey. The headband she makes for Chihiro helps protect Chihiro and gives her wisdom when dealing with Yubaba and choosing her parents.

## The Spirit World

The spirit world has been a point of interest for people for centuries. Hayao Miyazaki uses this interest to bring people to his film. Viewers are drawn in by the life of the spirit world, and children are fascinated by the mysterious magical side of life. The spirit world also brings viewers to a place where they expect things to be better. In reality, though, the spirit world of this film is just like the human world with loves, hates and challenges. Our notions of a perfect world of spirits is replaced by a dose of our own reality.

The spirit world also offers a place where Chihiro can learn and grow independent of her parents. Since her mother and father become pigs because of their gluttony, she is forced to figure out things on her own. Her ingenuity and bravery are shown in full force through her sacrifices and honesty.





# Symbols

## The Pigs

At Yubaba's bathhouse, there are hundreds of pigs that are all humans, who have been captured by the spell because of their gluttony. Yubaba has no problem with the way they have been treated, as she feels that it is their own fault for trespassing and being willing to eat the food of others unasked.

The pigs in the pens, as well as Chihiro's father and mother specifically, represent the dangers of worldly appetites and ignorance. They have all given in to their passions, and these have caused them to lose both their self-respect and their freedom. From the experience of seeing her parents and the pigs, Chihiro learns that prudence, balance and wisdom are needed in order to lead a happy, successful life. She will go on to live a life of fullness and beauty because of the lessons she has learned.

## The Sealed Scrolls

When Chihiro and all other workers are hired by Yubaba, they are required to sign away their names to her. They then take the names that she gives them and forget their own. Without their names, they lose their freedom. The idea of keeping your name is important in many cultures. Your name is your identity. It gives you hope and a purpose that you cannot deny. Chihiro is lost once she loses her name, but she is committed to remembering it someday, as she focuses for now on saving her parents.

Once Chihiro helps break Haku's seal, the River Spirit is free from Yubaba's grasp. He can no longer be forced to take her orders or give up his own desires and way of life. Thus, he can stand up for Chihiro and help save her and her parents from the spirit world.

## Chihiro's New Hairband

Chihiro's last mission is to go to Zeniba and retrieve something for Yubaba. Chihiro bravely agrees so that she can save her parents. While there, Chihiro learns much about the spirit world and life from Zeniba. Zeniba also offers to make her a hairband with the help of the baby. Zeniba tells her that it will keep her safe.

The hairband represents the love of friends. Zeniba is trying to show Chihiro that friends can save her and their love will protect her. As Chihiro leaves, viewers see the band sparkle in the light and know that she will have a safe journey back to the bathhouse.

Once Chihiro returns to the bathhouse, though, Yubaba tries to trick her into choosing the wrong pigs. As Chihiro tries to make her decision, the hairband begins to sparkle in the sun. Viewers realize that the wisdom and love of her friends will help her. Apparently

it works, as she realizes that her parents aren't in the group, and she is able to defeat Yubaba and save them all.



## Essay Questions

Why is Chihiro upset at the beginning of the film?

What does the family find at the end of their "shortcut?"

Describe what happens to Chihiro's parents.

Who helps Chihiro find a job? Why?

Who is Yubaba?

What will happen to Chihiro if Yubaba gets upset with her?

Why doesn't Chihiro leave when things get hard?

How does Chihiro save Haku?

What is Chihiro required to do before she can have a chance at freedom?

How does Chihiro know who her parents are?