

Mary and Max.



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O 'HARA



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Introduction > *Mary and Max* is an animated feature film from the creators of the Academy Award-winning short animation *Harvie Krumpet* (Adam Elliot, 2003). This is Adam Elliot's first full-length feature film. Like *Harvie*, it is an animated film with claymation characters. However, unlike many animated feature films, it is minimal in its use of colour and the action does not revolve around kooky creatures with human voices and super skills. *Mary and Max* is about the lives of two people who become pen pals, from opposite sides of the world. Like *Harvie Krumpet*, *Mary and Max* is innocent but not naive, as it takes us on a journey that explores friendship and autism as well as taxidermy, psychiatry, alcoholism, where babies come from, obesity, kleptomania, sexual difference, trust, copulating dogs, religious difference, agoraphobia and much more.

Synopsis

THIS IS A TALE of pen-friendship between two very different people – Mary Dinkle, a chubby, lonely eight-year-old girl living in the suburbs of Melbourne, and Max Horowitz, a 44-year-old, severely obese, Jewish man with Asperger's Syndrome living in the chaos of New York. The film chronicles Mary's trip from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, and Max's passage from middle to old age. Spanning twenty years and two continents, it explores a bond that survives much more than the average friendship's ups and downs.

Curriculum Links

Mary and Max recently screened

at the Berlin Film festival in the Generation14+ section aimed at teenagers where it was awarded the Jury Special Mention. However, this is not a film written specifically for a young audience. It is both fascinating and engaging in the way it tells the story of the friendship between these two people and would have wide appeal. It is both very funny and poignant. Many of the themes explored in the film – bullying, being different, loneliness, longing for connectedness and understanding – would appeal to students. At the same time, the extraordinary technical challenges of making a claymation animated film, where everything is hand-made and there is no use of computer generated imagery (CGI), now commonly used in films such as *Toy Story* (John Las-

eter, 1995) and *WALL·E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), will be something that many students will find fascinating.

It would be enjoyed by middle and senior secondary students as well as tertiary students studying film. *Mary and Max* would be relevant in the following curriculum areas:

- English – telling stories, particularly biographies, and narrative construction.
- Media and Film Studies – exploring ways of telling a story through animation and developing an understanding of the medium chosen.
- Cultural Studies – understanding how people lived in an earlier period of the twentieth century through the detailed



worlds created of their daily lives.

- Values Education (and related subject areas) – looking at different kinds of friendships and how they are tested and nurtured. Exploring themes of loneliness, difference, loyalty and acceptance.
- Art and Design – exploring the creative challenges of building complex worlds with clay figures and artefacts and looking at how limited colour palettes can be used effectively in animation.

Advice to Teachers: as the film includes some challenging issues such as alcoholism, agoraphobia, depression, anxiety and suicide, teachers are advised to watch the film before showing it to younger students.

Teachers could select from the student activities in this guide that would most interest their students and best address their particular curriculum area. Apart from film study questions, they include several hands-on activities related to model-making and animating, as well as a quiz about the film.

About the Filmmakers

Adam Elliot wrote, directed and designed *Mary and Max*. An independent filmmaker from Melbourne, Elliot came to international attention in 2004 when he won the Oscar for Best Short



Animated Film for *Harvie Krumpet*. His films are described as clay animation or 'claymation' and his characters, sets and props are all hand-constructed.

In 1996, Adam studied animation at the Victorian College of the Arts where he made his film *Uncle*. After graduating he completed the other parts of this trilogy, *Cousin* (1998) and *Brother* (1999). In 2003, he completed the half-hour claymation *Harvie Krumpet*, narrated by Geoffrey Rush and produced by Melanie Coombs. Apart from winning an Academy Award in 2004, *Harvie* was included in the 2006 Annecy International Festival's Top 100 animated films of all time. All Elliot's films focus on 'difference' with compassion, humour and pathos. He is the official patron of The Other Film Festival, Australia's only disabled film festival.

Melanie Coombs produced the film through her Production Com-



pany, Melodrama Pictures. Here is part of her producer's statement.

I see the pattern in all of Adam's work is about accepting difference ... I first wanted to work with Adam after seeing Cousin [one of his earlier short films]. I'd never seen such an honest film about disability. Not only did the film clearly articulate what Cerebral Palsy seemed like to him as a child but also how difference can be confusing and difficult to deal with. And I think this is the crux of what Adam says in his work.



Coombs also produced *Harvie Krumpet*. While she has worked closely with Elliot for many years, Melanie also produces other films through her production company, including *The Fabric of a Dream: the Fletcher Jones Story* (Dennis K. Smith, 2007) and *The Funk* (Cris Jones, 2008)

Cast

The cast of voices includes Toni Collette (Mary), Phillip Seymour Hoffman (Max), Barry Humphries (The Narrator), Bethany Whitmore as the young Mary and Eric Bana (Damien)

(A detailed crew list can be accessed at <<http://www.maryandmax.com/downloads/pdf/USpresskit.pdf>>.)

Student Activity – Before watching *Mary and Max*

These are suggested discussion areas and activities. Teachers may choose to work through some or all of them with their students as orientation activities before watching *Mary and Max*. However, they are not essential pre-viewing for enjoying the film.

- 1 Conduct a discussion with students about what they know about animated films and what they think about them. Most students are likely to have seen at least some of the more recent mainstream animated features and others may have a particular interest in Manga/anime films, a sub-branch of the animated

genre based on Japanese comic books.

- 2 Do you think animated films are specifically created for a young audience?
- 3 Are you aware of any animated films made for an older audience?
- 4 What expectations do you have of animated films?
- 5 Can you recall seeing any films that employ some animated sequences as part of the film's story? Why might a director choose to include some animated sequences?
- 6 There's always something to learn from a director's earlier work. Elliot's earlier films, including *Harvie Krumpet*, can be watched on DVD. The *Harvie Krumpet* DVD is widely available from both video shops and libraries and can be



purchased through Madman Films or via <<http://www.harviekrumpet.com>>. This DVD is a most valuable resource for introducing Elliot and his filmmaking process to students (and it's not long!). It includes not only all his earlier short films but several entertaining and interesting extras where Elliot takes us through the making of *Harvie* and we learn about claymation. It would be an excellent DVD to show students before watching *Mary and Max*.

7 While watching these earlier films, and when you watch *Mary and Max*, think about why the director has chosen to tell his stories through the medium of animation.

Student Activity – After Watching *Mary and Max*

STUDENT ACTIVITY 1: Making the film – Time, skills and patience

Stop Motion Claymation

This time-intensive technique of filmmaking involves creating,

Mary and Max Fact Box (or, as Harvie Krumpet would say, FAKTS)

212 hand-made puppets from polymers, clays, plastics and metals, each one about 30cm or a foot tall.

133 separate sets

475 miniature props from a wine glass to a fully functioning Underwood typewriter

1026 different character mouths. (Max alone had more than thirty)

394 individual eye pupils, the size of a ladybird

147 tailor-made costumes (and Max only wears tracksuits)

Mary's wedding dress is based on Lady Di's dress

808 miniature Earl Grey tea bag boxes hand-cut, folded, glued, wrapped and air-brushed

12 litres of water-based sex lube for tears and jungle rivers

5236 muffins eaten by director during 57-week film shoot

Production crew of **50** working together to produce about two and a half minutes of animation a week. Each of the **6** animators created **4** seconds a day on average.

animating and photographing clay and/or plasticine models – figures and objects – positioned in a series of minute moves. As in any other film, the characters are arranged on a set with lights and cameras. But in stop-motion animation, there are twelve moves for every second of film, while film normally runs at twenty-four frames per second. As the Fact Box on the left indicates, as with many 'hand-made' enterprises, this is expensive and slow to produce.

The making of the sometimes multiples of the 'puppets' of the characters and the creation of all the sets and props by hand, based on the writer/artist's drawings and ideas, is very labour-intensive.

There are many stages and tasks involved in making a stop-motion claymation film. While many of these tasks are part of making any feature film, there are particular demands on the creators of an animated film like *Mary and Max*. Here are some of these tasks:

- 1 Conception – researching and conceiving the film
- 2 Funding and budgeting
- 3 Scripting
- 4 Sketches of characters, sets and all props and artefacts (including dogs, cats, birds, blowflies, snails and cockroach)
- 5 Storyboarding
- 6 Model making construction of all characters, sets and props
- 7 Costuming
- 8 Voicing and recording
- 9 Lighting



were involved in the making of this film.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 2: creating and exploring characters

As you watch *Mary and Max*, make notes on what you see of each of the characters in the film. Use the tables on the following two pages – brown for Mary and grey for Max. You may choose to split this viewing activity into two groups, focusing on either Mary or Max and their world. Afterwards, you could share your impressions.

What is ‘ordinary’?
Autobiography and
audience

- Using what we are shown of Mary and Max’s lives in the film (especially through their letters to each other), create an ‘autobiography’ of no more than 300 words for each one. Think carefully about which aspects of their lives they would choose to talk about and reveal. Decide who the audience is for each self-portrait as this often determines what people are prepared to reveal about themselves. Perhaps Max is talking to Dr. Hazelhof or at his Overeaters Anonymous group. Mary might be at a job interview or writing a letter to Damien in New Zealand about the turns and twists her life has taken. Make an oral presentation to others in your group.

- Music choices
 - Getting permissions for the music and use of other material and artefacts that may be copyrighted.
 - Monitoring costs
 - Animating the scenes and characters
 - Filming
 - Editing
 - Preparation of post-production script
 - Marketing and promoting the film
 - Selling the film locally and overseas
 - Responding to press interest and being interviewed.
 - Creating and updating a website about the film.
- Mark with an asterisk or highlight any of these tasks that are particular to creating a claymation film as opposed to a live-action feature.
 - Write beside each one who you think would have particular responsibility for different



areas of the film e.g. producer, director, model maker, animator, etc.

- Considering the multiple tasks involved in creating a film, choose three areas you think would be most interesting to work on.
- You can access the film’s press kit at <<http://www.maryandmax.com/downloads/pdf/USpresskit.pdf>>.

Look at pages 15-24 of the press kit to see just how many people

Mary's World

Character	Appearance and age, including any special characteristics such as any particular physical features and any special smell.	Personal qualities and character	Interests and/or hobbies	Most important moments in the story	Voiced by?
Mary Daisy Dinkle					
Noel Norman Dinkle					
Vera Lorraine Dinkle					
Len Graham Hislop					
Ralph Keith Dinkle					
Damien Cyril					

Max's World

Character	Appearance and age, including any special characteristics such as any particular physical features and any special smell.	Personal qualities and character	Interests and/or hobbies	Most important moments in the story	Voiced by?
Max Jerry Horowitz					
Ivy Ruby Bevan					
Doctor Bernard Hazelhof					
Mister Alfonso Ravioli					
Marjorie Hyacinth Butterworth					



- Many biographical films (or 'biopics', as they are sometimes called) are about famous people and their lives – sportspeople, explorers, criminals and war heroes. However, increasingly, filmmakers are making films about apparently 'ordinary' people who may have no special claim to being well-known or famous, but whose life stories can be quite extraordinary and moving.



Make a list of any 'biographical' films you have seen where the focus is on one or more apparently 'ordinary' individuals and how they respond to what happens in their lives. Discuss what it is about such films that makes them interesting – can anyone's life be interesting depending on the way their story is presented?

Constructing Profiles

- Once you have discussed the main characters and how they are represented, look more closely at the 'secondary' characters who all play a part in each of Mary and Max's worlds.

Choose two people from each of these worlds and write a 'personality' profile for each one in the form of a profile piece for a newspaper

or magazine. (As neither *Facebook* nor *MySpace* were up and running in the 1970s to 1990s, characters such as Ivy or even Damien would be unlikely to construct the kind of online profile you may be more familiar with)

Which aspects of their life will your piece focus on? For example:

- Ivy's activities when she goes on her spending spree
- Dr. Hazelhof and his work
- Grandpoppy Ralph's icebreaking
- Noel Dingle's hobbies
- Damien Popodopoulos' lifestyle change

Creating characters

Many of Adam Elliot's characters have very distinctive and some-

times exaggerated physical features that make them immediately identifiable, such as Mary's birthmark and Max's nose and yarmulke (skull cap) and red pompom.

- Select someone from amongst friends or family, or someone in the public eye, who you could sketch. List several of their most obvious physical features such as their big lips or spiky hair or interesting glasses or long legs and make a drawing of them, exaggerating some of their more obvious features. For instance, Shane Warne has distinctively spiky hair and a round face. Show your sketch to your classmates and see if they recognize this person.
- You could also make a plasticine or clay model of this figure or of their head. This

exercise is more about being observant than creating a photographic likeness. Portrait painters as well as cartoonists and animators use this technique to create likenesses.

Creature Feature

- List the animals, insects, fish and birds that inhabit Max's and Mary's worlds.
- How does each of them:
 - a) Contribute to the development of the plot,
 - b) Enrich each character's world and
 - c) Add to the humour of the film?

There is a long tradition of representing animals in animated films, from Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse to Donkey in the *Shrek* films and Remy the rat in *Ratatouille* (Brad Bird, 2007). They are often **anthropomorphised** (given human characteristics) and sometimes voiced by very recognizable Hollywood stars such as Eddie Murphy and Antonio Banderas.

- Give some examples of animals in animated films where these things happen.
- Do you think such depictions are responding to what people want to see and hear, and especially the younger audiences for whom these films are often intended? What is the particular appeal of 'talking animals'?
- What primary aspects of human life do the many creatures in *Mary and Max* reflect?
- How does the condition of Max's cat and of Mary's rooster mirror and enrich each character's life?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 3: exploring the film's elements

Soundtrack

The soundtrack of this film is complex, multi-layered and subtle. It has three main elements:

- 1) The voices of the characters,



especially Max and Mary's voices, although others do speak, even if it is only one word, like the Homeless Man in New York.

- 2) The musical soundtrack and sound effects.
 - 3) The voice of the narrator.
- Were you conscious of the quite distinctive voices of Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Bethany Whitmore and Toni Collette as the voices of Max and Mary?
 - What difference to the experience of watching this film would it make if there were only visuals with on-screen text to read, but no sound?
 - What do you think the style of Barry Humphries' narration

contributes to this film?

- Did you recognize any of the pieces of music in *Mary and Max*? In what ways does Elliot use both the theme music associated with each main character and the music played at certain emotional moments in the story to heighten mood. Select two scenes during which you were very conscious of the music heard and explain why you think Elliot made these choices.
- Next time you are watching an animated film or television program such as *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy* or *South Park*, turn the sound off and see what difference this makes to your experience.

Setting the Scene – colour and lighting

In any film, colour and lighting are vital to the creation of the story and often determine how we respond to it.

- Choose one of these two aspects of the film and explain to your classmates how it contributes to the finished film.



Colour palette – imagine transposing bright animated feature film colours into this film. How does it change?

Lighting – when is it brightest and when is it quite dim?

Animation

- Why do you think Elliot chooses animation, and particularly this style of animation that uses no CGI to tell his stories?
- What advantages for a filmmaker are there in having animated characters?
- What disadvantages might there be in using animated characters to tell a story?
- In what ways is *Mary and Max* different to other animations you may have seen?
- Are there any animated films or television programs that you think share common elements with Elliot's style of character portrayal and storyline?

Narrative

Simple stories focusing on just a few characters often make the most satisfying films. When the novels of Charles Dickens are adapted for the screen, they often work best as an extended televi-

sion series, as his novels include multiple characters, numerous settings and complex plots. Many were originally written to be serialized in periodical magazines. A feature film, like a short story, needs to be more concentrated and have a focus on fewer characters.

- Describe the plot of *Mary and Max* as briefly and clearly as possible. What does your summary of the plot leave out? (Sometimes it is not so much about the story as the way it is told)
- Is there a climax to this story? Where and when do you think this dramatic highpoint occurs, if there is one? Explain your choice of key moment.
- Construct a simple story about a relationship between two people for pitching to a film production company, providing only a brief outline of the plot and characters. What other information will you include about how you intend to create the story and engage an audience to interest the Production Company in funding your film?

Settings and Period

While the themes of stories are often timeless and universal, the

action happens in places that must be convincingly depicted through the set, costume and production design. This film is set in two different worlds – suburban Australia and big-city New York – during the 1970s through to the 1990s.

- The opening scenes of this film are dense with suburban seventies references that reflect both the style of the period as well as the psychology and values of the characters.

What are some of the artefacts, objects, activities and behaviours shown of people's lives that reflect the period and places in which the film is set? Give some examples of how aspects of these worlds have changed e.g. Do we still see 'politically incorrect' newspaper headlines such as **OBESE RETARDED MAN CRANED OUT!** Would an Overeater's Anonymous group today use posters and signs saying **CHOCOLATE IS NOT A FOOD GROUP** and **GOD HATES FAT PEOPLE**?

- Give some examples of things that have changed very little today, either objects and housing styles and/or social attitudes.

Humour and Tone

As discussed, *Mary and Max* covers subject matter that is serious and potentially bleak at times. The director says that he aimed to use music, verbal humour, and visual gags to balance the pathos.

- Describe any scenes that use slapstick humour to engage us in the drama.
- Irony is a comedic device where the literal meaning is the opposite of what we might expect; for instance when Max writes to Mary that not much has happened since he last wrote, while we know a lot has happened. Give some other examples of the use of irony in this film, in either the narration or how the characters describe things.
- Fatalism suggests that it is pointless to try and avoid events happening to you because 'whatever will be, will be' in the words of the song *Que Sera, Sera*. Is this a philosophy that contributes to the humour in *Mary and Max*?
- Humour can be unkind and black. How do we decide what kind of humour Elliot uses in relation to his characters and their worlds?
- What did you find funny in this film?
- Can humour be country specific, i.e. is there an Australian sense of humour and what does it include? Do parts of this film reflect a particularly Australian sense of humour? If so, what are these elements?
- How did this film make you feel? Choose several words to characterize the tone of this film – affectionate, sad, quirky, depressing, optimistic, gloomy, funny, fatalistic, bleak, upbeat.

Adam Elliot's director's statement

Here is Elliot's director's statement about his film. While *Mary and Max* is the work that expresses his vision and will determine

audience responses, it is always interesting to hear from the person behind the film, particularly when their role as writer, creator and director is so fundamental to the finished product.

- Read through the statement and then discuss how well you think Elliot's intentions have been realized in the film. The bolded sentences may be a good way to focus your discussion.

Mary and Max is my fourth animated film and up until now each of my films has explored the life of a singular person. With Mary and Max I explore two simultaneous biographies. I see this film as the third major artistic leap in the creation of my films over the last ten years.

The trilogy, Uncle, Cousin and Brother, are all very similar in style, structure and delivery. My aim with those films was to tell very droll, minimal and static, short 'mini' biographies that enjoin the audience to see and celebrate the unique qualities of 'ordinary' people.

Harvie Krumpet, the next film, was a much longer and thorough exploration of a person's life. The production values were much higher, the animation more dynamic, and the plot structure more complex. With Harvie I again aimed to maintain the simplicity of my visual style and again chose deliberately to maintain the single narrator delivering the narrative. And again the story explored themes of difference and acceptance.

With Mary and Max, I hope I've maintained my visual style, but deliver the story in a more dynamic way to ensure it maintains the audience's interest over the longer duration. This film again explores our desires for acceptance and love, no matter how different we are! There is still a narrator, the wonderful Barry Humphries, but to this I've added the voices of the two leads, Mary



(Toni Collette) and Max (Philip Seymour Hoffman).

*I have always avoided too much self-analysis for fear of making my work too prescribed and constructed. I write from the heart, with a desire for compassionate connection with audiences. **I do not write for a specific niche audience, but rather try to tell stories that are universal.** I imagine that I am telling the story of someone's life to a very large group of very diverse people from many various countries around an enormous camp fire. **I try to keep everyone engaged by peppering the story with moments of humour and melancholy. I attempt to mix and balance comedy and tragedy; humour and pathos in a rhythmic and potent manner.** With each film I try and arouse ALL the senses; not just the ears and eyes! I see that my job is to 'nourish the audience in a compost of sensory stimulation'.*

I have found it very hard to compare Mary and Max to other films. I can't find anything 'animated' that is similar. In fact I find more similarities with 'live action' films than animated ones, (84 Charring Cross Road [David Hugh Jones, 1987], About Schmidt [Alexander Payne, 2002]).

My creative storytelling

influences are mainly from other art forms. I am inspired by portrait photographers Dianne Arbus and Richard Avedon. Charles Dickens, Barry Humphries, Michael Leunig and Harper Lee are other people I also draw huge inspiration from.

I treat each new film as a blank canvas that I try to fill with original, potent and often taboo content. I really hope and feel that Mary and Max will push the boundaries and present to the audience something refreshing and different that the animation world has not yet served up.

The film has many dark moments. There is a lot of 'black' amongst the colour palette to heighten the mood of the story. There are two simultaneous worlds represented; Mary's Australian Suburban world, and Max's New York City Urban world. Mary's world is in a sepia palette and Max's in tones of black, white and grey. **I always try to keep the variety of colours to a minimum; this ensures the visual style is strong and acts as a point of difference to the 'wacky', 'zany', 'colour' filled world of most animated films.**

Finally, Mary and Max has far more dynamic camera moves than in my previous films, as a result of working with our Cinematographer Gerald Thompson who is also a motion control expert.

Why this story ...

Max is based on my penfriend in New York whom I have been writing to for twenty years. He is such an interesting person and the creation of this film will be a testimony to him and the archetypal underdog that so many audiences around the world engage with. He, like Max, has Aspergers and I have spent a long time researching this syndrome. My aim is to not just enlighten the world to Aspies, but to demystify the many misconceptions others have about these peo-

ple, (even the so called experts).

A lot of people say they often feel different; that they don't fit in. I am one of those people. Even with all the success, acknowledgement and acceptance that has been derived from my films; I often still feel alone and not in tune with the rest of the world. I often feel sad, persecuted and unsure about things. I truly empathise with the lost and disregarded, marginalised and melancholic. I am drawn to these people and their stories; I cannot help it. **I find people so fascinating; from the ordinary to the truly odd. These are the people I relate to; these are the people whose stories I want to hear and want to see on the big screen.** And I KNOW audiences also want to hear these stories of difference; thousands of people all over the world have told me so over the last decade. I have a box in my hallway that contains the hundreds of press clippings, emails, and letters I have received in regards to my work. Nearly every single day we receive fan mail; much of which arrived way before the Academy Award came our way. We receive moving letters from people with Tourettes Syndrome, Alzheimer's and depression. These letters are from the young and old, from Sweden to Tokyo, from people who've watched the films on the big screen, on an airline, at a film festival, on the internet and even on their phone. They all say similar things; that they were affected in some way watching my film/s. For some it has been life changing; for others it simply added a bit of relief to their day.

For example, just last week I received a phone call from a woman who said her best friend chose to watch Harvie Krumpet over and over in her final hours before she died from cancer. I am moved to tears so often and am constantly reminded of the power of storytelling. I feel very humbled by people's responses and feel so lucky I have the ability and opportunity to keep

making a difference in people's lives.

I'm not making films to elicit these reactions; it is real, unasked for and still happening to me every day. I often say If I could I would make my films for free; no amount of money could ever buy the feeling of sitting with an audience watching something you have given your heart and soul to; knowing that you are not just entertaining them, but also nourishing and moving them. I learnt a while back, that to have a positive effect on your fellow human beings is such a wonderful feeling and opportunity.

So, who knows, maybe the reason I make my films is purely selfish? Either way there is nothing else I am particularly good at and so for the time being moving blobs of plasticine around in a slow and expensive manner seems my lot for now.

– Adam Elliot

STUDENT ACTIVITY 4: reviewing the film

Here are excerpts from three reviews of *Mary and Max* that appeared after it was screened at film festivals at Sundance in America, Berlin in Germany and in Australia. While most reviews have been very positive and enthusiastic, the reviewer from American *Variety* magazine had a different take. The film opens nationally in Australian cinemas on 9 April.

- 1 It's not often that an Australian film opens a major international film festival, but I can think of very few films more deserving than Adam Elliot's *Mary and Max* of opening Sundance. Fiercely independent and intensely personal, this is an emotionally affecting tale of friendship that just happens to be created entirely out of clay. It's without doubt the first very good

Australian film of 2009.

The film was recently selected to screen in the Berlinale's Generation program in the 14+ category, and while it is loaded with references to sex and adult themes such as alcoholism and depression, I would recommend it to parents of kids of a mature disposition and curious outlook, whatever the final rating slapped on it by the classification board.

– Matt Ravier, *Inside Film*, 12 February 2009, <<http://www.infilm.com.au/?p=745>>

- 2 Maudlin sentiment, miserablist humour and scatological sight gags are affectionately but awkwardly molded together in the Australian Claymation feature *Mary and Max*. A glum tale of friendship between two very unlikely pen pals ... the film has its share of deadpan amusements, but its combo of mordant whimsy and tearjerker moments winds up curdling in an unappetising fashion ... it's possible to admire the singular eccentricity of Elliot's bleak comic vision from a distance, even when it overstates its welcome and becomes less amusing than flat-out grotesque.

– Justin Chang, *Variety*, 15 January 2009, <http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_review&reviewid=VE1117939351&categoryid=1263>.

- 3 Unlike most animated movies made in the studio system, *Mary and Max* tells a story that no studio would touch. Also, it never walks the trouble-free path. It would have been very easy for the film to be safe and offer happy answers to life's difficult issues ... but that's not this film. Instead, Mary and Max tells the unusual story of two people from very different backgrounds that find one another. And once they do, each is able to make the other's life better.

– Steve Weintraub, *Collider*, 25 January 2009, <<http://www.collider.com/entertainment/news/article.asp/aid/10616/tcid/1>>.



- Which of these reviews (if any) reflect some of your views about *Mary and Max*? In the next section you can write your own review.
- Do you read or listen to movie reviews in the media or on online sites, or do you rely on other advice such as reports of friends to decide whether to go and see a film?

Extension questions and activities

Choose one of the activities below for discussion, to write about or to explore the film further.

- Create a poster to promote the film. You can choose an image from the film from the *Mary and Max* website at <<http://www.maryandmax.com>>, the C.I.A. (Cinema Intelligence Agency) website at <<http://thecia.com.au/reviews/m/mary-and-max.shtml>> or from <<http://www.ropeofsilicon.com/movie/mary-and-max/stills>>. Annotate your poster, explaining your design choices, font (or hand-drawn), image(s) selected, text (if any) used. Who is the intended audience? Where will the poster be displayed – cinema foyers, billboards, newspapers and magazines?
- Write a short story or poem

about an unusual friendship between two people. Decide whether it will be told from the position of a narrator or from one of the characters, or by a friend of one of the two people.

- Write a sequence of letters or email correspondence between two people of different ages from different countries.
- Using one of the animation programs online, or PowerPoint, or a video camera, create a very short animated film about a character either you or one of your classmates has created. (Given how time-intensive such work is, this may best be attempted by media and film students who already have some experience with using animating techniques)
- 'God gave us our relatives. Thank God we can choose our friends.'

– Ethel Mumford

How does *Mary and Max* illustrate the truth of this statement, which appears on screen at the beginning and end of the film?

- 'Adult animation is a contradiction in terms.' Discuss in relation to *Mary and Max*.
- Write a review of *Mary and Max* for either (a) the cinema review pages of a newspaper or (b) a specialist cinema magazine. Think about the focus of your piece, which will depend on the

anticipated audience for your review.

The Mary and Max Quiz

- 1 In which Melbourne suburb does Mary Dinkle live?
- 2 What is Mary's favourite colour?
- 3 What are the names of the two Chihuahua dogs?
- 4 What is Mary's Grandpoppy Ralph's hobby?
- 5 What is Max's favourite food?
- 6 What is Mary's favourite food?
- 7 What is Vera Dinkle's preferred drink?
- 8 Where does Vera put the chocolate crackles to cook?
- 9 Name Max's three goals in life.
- 10 What is one of the titles of the books Mister Ravioli reads in the corner of Max's apartment?
- 11 Name the bully at Mary's school.
- 12 What does Max find in the soup his neighbour Ivy brings him?
- 13 Why is Max's cat called Hal?
- 14 Who smells like lemon dish-washing liquid?
- 15 How does Vera Dinkle die?
- 16 What three things does Max's neighbour Ivy do with the money she is given?
- 17 Who is described as smelling like liquorice and old books?
- 18 What is the make of Max's typewriter?
- 19 Name four gifts Mary and Max

- send to each other.
- 20 What music is played at Mary's wedding to Damien?
(You'll have to re-watch the film or do this quiz in a group to get all the correct answers)
- When you've completed this twenty question quiz, devise five more questions of your own.

References and resources

Harvie Krumpet DVD from Madman Entertainment
<http://www.maryandmax.com>
The film's official website which is as quirky and creative as the film and has links to the American Press Kit
<http://www.harviekrumpet.com/hpresskit.pdf>
Harvie Krumpet Press Kit
<http://www.oscars.org/education-outreach/teachersguide/animation/index.html>
A resource from The Academy of Motion Pictures website guiding teachers and students through the processes of developing animations with an emphasis on hands-on activities.
http://www.dvd.net.au/review.cgi?review_id=3865
Read an excellent review of the *Harvie Krumpet* DVD and its extras.
<http://www.collider.com/>

entertainment/news/article.asp/aid/10616/tcid/1
Collider film website which includes a preview and other clips from *Mary and Max* as well as a review of the film.
http://au.rottentomatoes.com/m/mary_and_max/
Summaries of reviews with links to each one.
<http://media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.com/2008/10/new-animated-film-stars-character-with.html>
A website that explores media images of disability. Read Elliot's thoughts about his latest film.
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enough-rope/transcripts/s1153948.htm>
Read a transcript of Andrew Denton's *Enough Rope* interview with Adam Elliot from 2004 after Elliot had won the Oscar for *Harvie Krumpet*.
Australian Animation Showcase – an ATOM study guide by Jo Flack. This guide to three recent Australian animated films and their approaches includes Elliot's award-winning *Harvie Krumpet*. Available from <<http://www.metromagazine.com.au/studyguides>>.

(All websites accessed 6 March 2009.)

Marguerite O'Hara is a Melbourne-based writer.



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editor@atom.org.au

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