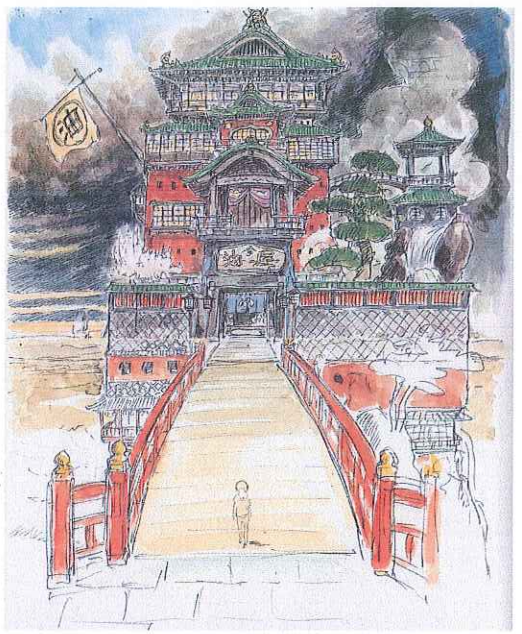




Miyazaki's characters in *My Neighbor Totoro* are some of his most iconic creations.



Redefining *Imagination* As We Know It

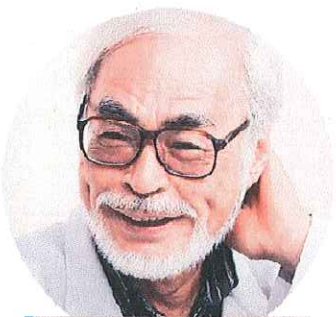
One man builds breathtaking worlds with unprecedented concepts and characters opening new doors in animation and writing.

A Fateful First Encounter

It was the summer after I finished the third grade when I was first shown one of Miyazaki's films. My mom had brought my cousin and I to a local movie rental place (back in the dark ages before Netflix) in hopes we would keep busy. I had my eyes on the prize, *Herbie Fully Loaded*. But my cousin had something different planned. She decided that we would be watching Hayao Miyazaki's, *Spirited Away*.

I was already a little bitter that I was not going to be spending my night watching a movie about a talking car, (what could possibly top that?) but my cousin just had to pick out some weird looking movie from Japan. It ended up being twice as bizarre as I thought it would be. By the end of the movie I was I didn't really know what to think. I wasn't sure if I loved it, or if I was terrified of it. Either way I worried relentlessly about what I would do if my mother turned into a pig for weeks!

It was only when I revisited the film some years later when I could truly appreciate the beauty and concepts within. I instantly fell in love with Miyazaki's films and have watched all of them since. It took some time but I grew a deep appreciation for his fantastical storytelling, unique characters and powerful sense of justice within society and the environment.



Hayao Miyazaki (宮崎 駿)
72 yrs old
film director, animator, manga artist, producer and screenwriter

How He Started Out

Miyazaki was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1941. As a child Miyazaki spent a lot of his time reading manga, which gave him a strong interest in drawing. The key that sparked Miyazaki's interest in animation, however, was the heroine of *The Tale of the White Serpent*. The long lasting impression this character made on Miyazaki may explain why he first decided to often lead to female protagonists. Luckily for Miyazaki, he was able to get a job at Toei Animation and quickly climbed the chain of command through strong leadership skills and innovative thinking.

Miyazaki continued to play more decisive roles in the company such as chief animator, concept artist and scene designer. He soon left Toei Animation to play important roles in the production of several different films for many different companies.

In 1979 he left animation studios altogether in order to begin what would be his first feature film, *The Castle of Cagliostro*. In 1984 Miyazaki's next film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* would be an important introduction to many of the themes and issues that Miyazaki represents throughout his career such as pacifism, feminism, love and human interaction.

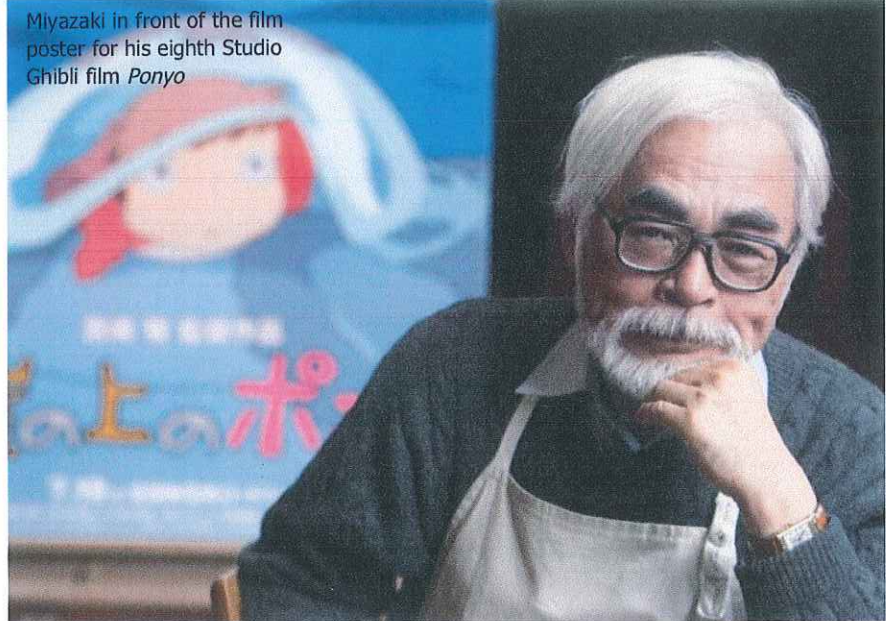
A Global Icon Created

In June of 1985 Miyazaki started up his own animation studio called *Studio Ghibli*. Within the next three years he released movies such as *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service* all of which would become instant classics. Many critics say the closest comparison we have in North America to Studio Ghibli would be the work by Walt Disney Animation Studios along with Pixar.

Continued next page

Miyazaki is often referred to as one of the greatest animation directors of all time. Many critically acclaimed artists in America including Pete Docter, director of films *Up* and *Monsters, Inc.*, Glen Keane, animator of films such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin* and *Tangled* and Bryan Konietzko, creator of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* have all praised Miyazaki for his work and described him as an influence on their own work.

Although Miyazaki is constantly commended for his art he has mentioned that he believes that his godlike status may end up stifling rather than encouraging the exploration of creativity and development of a younger artists personal style.



Miyazaki in front of the film poster for his eighth Studio Ghibli film *Ponyo*

His Innovative Writing Style

Miyazaki has always been very resolute in his own attempt to incorporate recurring themes, motifs and values into his films. Many of these themes are very rare to see in this medium and are often subject to questioning. In answer to so many people inquiring about his active feminism he stated, "I find that women are all too often portrayed as weak, helpless, or in need of rescuing. Many of my movies have strong female leads- brave, self-sufficient girls that don't need to think twice about fighting for what they believe in with all their heart. They'll need a friend, or a supporter, but never a savior. Any woman is just as capable of being a hero as any man." Miyazaki changed the default dynamic of romance between male and female leads. He has stated that he always resented it and believes rather than romance, he believes the two should mutually inspire each other to live- and that will be the key to portraying a true expression of love. Along with strong heroines, there are many side characters and corporations that often go against traditional gender stereotypes in his films. Such include all-female factories, a matriarchal bathhouse, artists, pirate captains and industrialists.

One of his most notable reoccurring character dynamics that differ from almost all mainstream media is the lack of traditional good vs. evil. In Miyazaki's films he creates characters that are dynamic, capable of change and that have redeeming qualities. He has explained that he creates this dynamic because in his view, the world is much more complicated than just good vs. evil and must be re-examined and represented through media. Although he sometimes feels pessimistic about the world, he prefers to show children through his films a positive view of the world.

Many of Miyazaki's films often deal with the issue of environmentalism, especially in the context of critiquing development, pollution and industry. Many characters in his films are affected by pollution and development in a negative way. In films *Princess Mononoke* and *Castle in the Sky* the issue of earths fragility is a much more prominent issue within the film and is shown to be very vulnerable to the destruction of earth due to human greed. It is worth noting that Miyazaki himself has claimed that he finds modern culture "thin and shallow" and "not entirely joked" looked forward to an apocalyptic age where "wild green grasses take over. Although he personally feels this way about society and culture, he still believes that adults should not "impose their vision of the world on children."



Princess Mononoke

An example of one of Miyazaki's strong female leads, San. Known as Princess Mononoke is a 17-year-old girl who was raised by wolves and became princess of spirits and forests.

Always End with a Bang

Due to the fact that Miyazaki has such a strong sense of justice and is not thwarted by the thoughts of others, he is sometimes critiqued for the themes his films posses. After the release of *Kaze Tachinu*, which held a strong anti-war message he received approval as well as negative criticism with some even calling him a "traitor" saying he was "anti-Japanese." This is because Miyazaki's final film is about a young man who designs planes during WWII, making reference to planes used in the final year of the War in the Pacific, a touchy subject for Japanese nationalists. Miyazaki has expressed his opinion on politics several times in the past openly criticizing the Japanese constitution. Much of where the controversy over *Kaze Tachinu* stems from Miyazaki's statement that proper compensation should be given to comfort women (women and girls forced into a prostitution corps in Japan during WWII). Although this is quite a controversial topic, Miyazaki still believes that this issue should not be brushed aside.

After over 50 years in the animation industry Hayao Miyazaki made the announcement that he was retiring on September 6, 2013. Although he has announced he would retire several times he assures that he is "quite serious" this time and that he wants to make room for the careers of prospective young artists. Although retired from Studio Ghibli, Miyazaki is still working on writing manga and fellow Ghibli founders and friends of his have stated that they don't believe his retirement will be permanent. For now, he plans on working on the Studio Ghibli museum, which he jokingly commented, "I might even become an exhibit myself!"

Alexandra Champagne

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Feature Article Considerations

Topic: Hayao Miyazaki

Subtopics:

- His influence on other western animators (including Pixar etc)
- His writing style and how he redefined basic protagonist character development and storyline
- How he integrates themes of environmentalism, pacifism and feminism into his work and the impact it causes

Target Audience:

Teens and young adults who are interested in film and animation

Type of magazine(s) it would appear in:

An animation magazine

What useful information will you be providing?

How Hayao impacted animation industry and what he did differently from others / the key to his success

Potential visual ideas:

Character design photos
pictures of the animation
pictures of Hayao

Redefining Imagination
as we know it

Writing Variables

Central Idea: An article to learn about Hayao Miyazaki and his impact on the animation industry.

Form: Article

Purpose: To give a brief description of Hayao Miyazaki's career and his impact on the film and animation industry.

Audience: People in their late teens to early 40's who are interested in 2D animation or film in general.

Context: To be put in a magazine for entertainment (Such as O magazine)

Explain specific connections among your writing variables: Through the use of article formation I am able to use visual keys such as photos and colors in order to grab reader's attention. I am also able to space out my paragraphs and use personal anecdotes, which allow me to explain Hayao Miyazaki's career in a less linear order than an essay. It allows me to use subtexts in order to separate different parts of his career and impact on film, which enables me to keep my descriptions concise, brief and organized. Through use of photos, colors and titles I will be able to grab younger readers attention as well as keep slightly older readers interested as they go on. Because it is in article formation I am able to use personal reference to the subject of my text, which will allow readers to better connect to my article and feel a more personal and relatable connection to the text. Because they are interested in 2D animation and film the article form is also the best choice because it allows them to see concept art throughout my article which will allow them to connect visually to my article, which is important because most people who are interested in art and film are often more likely to be interested in something if there are visual aspects of it. It will be easy for these people to find my article, as they will be able to find it in entertainment magazines, which they will easily be able to purchase at any local bookstore or convenience store, which people of this age range will go to often.