

## **KIDS FIRST! Film Critics Discussion Guide for The Secret of Moonacre**

*The Secret of Moonacre*, a film adaptation of the novel *The Little White Horse* by Elizabeth Goudge, is the fictional story about 13-year-old Maria Merryweather (Dakota Blue Richards) whose father dies, leaving her orphaned and homeless. She must leave her luxurious home in London to go live with her eccentric uncle Sir Benjamin (Ioan Gruffudd) at the mysterious Moonacre Manor. There, she discovers a magical moonlit world torn apart by an ancient feud and inhabited by outlandish characters and mythical beasts. Now, Maria must unearth the secrets of her family's past in order to fulfill her destiny... all before the 5000th moon rises and Moonacre Manor disappears into the sea forever. Directed by Gabor Csupo, who also directed the *Bridge to Terabithia*, it is filled with magic somewhat like the *Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Golden Compass*.

*The story offers many talking points that a parent, teacher, or other adult can discuss with their child after viewing that will enhance their film experience. We encourage you to "view and review" the film together with your eight to 12-year-old child – the ideal audience age – and then post your review on your social media site so that you can share it with others during our first annual KIDS FIRST! Film Critics' Campaign.*

1. Maria Merryweather's father is killed and his debts have caused the loss of everything he owns. He leaves her nothing but an old book, "*The Ancient Chronicles of Moonacre Valley*." Maria's mother died when she was young so she is now an orphan. She and her governess, Mrs Heliotrope, are sent to live with her uncle, her father's older brother, Sir Benjamin Merryweather who lives at Moonacre Manor.

- *The setting for this film is early 1900s. When Maria is orphaned, she discovers that she is suddenly impoverished and then is sent to live with her uncle who she doesn't even know. Talk about how you would feel if something like that happened to you. Think about who, in your family, would take care of you if something happened to your parents.*

2. Maria's uncle, Sir Benjamin, seems to be rather bad tempered, irritable, and condescending to women. He tells her almost all of the house is off limits to her, warns her never to go into the woods and takes the book from her.

- *Why does the uncle behave so dreadfully? As the film develops, we discover the cause of his behavior - the feud between the Merryweathers and the De Noirs - and his lost love. Talk about why these things affect someone's behavior and whether or not you felt they were realistically portrayed in the film.*

3. From the beginning, Maria notices many strange events taking place. When she asks her uncle about the numerous strange events, he tells to stop asking questions. While chasing after her uncle's dog, she finds the kitchen and the seemingly magical chef who calls her, "Little Princess." He tells her about the contents of her book which her uncle took away. It contains all the secrets of Moonacre, including the clue on how to rescue the family from their curse.

- *What does she learn about her family when she finds the book? Talk about the curse that the Moon Princess put on her father and her bridegroom and why Maria plays a critical role in rescuing the family. This is a pretty big burden for a young woman, and yet not unusual for this type of story. What would you do if you were put into a situation such as this?*

4. The next morning, Maria attempts to run away, but hears a voice calling to her. Following it, she finds a mysterious woman named Loveday who reveals that if the pearls are not returned to the sea, both families will perish. Maria devises a scheme to find the pearls, thinking that each family has one part of the pearls- one the key and the other, the box in which it is kept. However, her theory proves wrong, she is imprisoned by the De Noirs from which she escapes and is rescued by her uncle's dog.

- Why does Maria attempt to run away? What role does Loveday play in the families' tragedies. Talk about how Maria discovers who Loveday really is, what her relationship is with her uncle, and how "pride" is the real curse of the families.

5. In the end, as Maria attempts to return the pearls to the sea and fails, she realizes she must sacrifice herself in order to save the families and throws herself into the ocean.

- What role do the pearls have in saving the family and why does Maria have to return them to the sea? Talk about how mystical elements such as the pearls, the black lion and the unicorn often occur in mythology and why these appeal to us. If you saw any of the movies from the Chronicles of Narnia series, or the Golden Compass, compare how they share similarities with this film.

6. This film is quite beautiful to watch with gorgeous costumes, sets and cinematography. It's cast includes Tim Curry as Coeur De Noir, Natascha McElhone as Loveday, Ioan Gruffudd as Sir Benjamin Merryweather and Dakota Blue Richards (The Golden Compass), as Maria Merryweather.

- Talk about your response to the costumes, sets, cinematography and the actors. Did you enjoy them or not? Tell us why.