

# Ponyo on the Cliff

*Gake no Ue no Ponyo*, 2008, Japan



## Film Overview

Ponyo is a young fish-girl who loves to explore, but her father, a great wizard of the sea, fears the chaos her untamed powers could unleash upon the world. He's right to worry, since she, like every young undomesticated child, is an elemental force of nature who has little respect for the boundaries that grownups take so seriously. She escapes and meets up with a young boy named Sôsuke whose imagination at least is a match for her magical powers - and it is love at first sight. Not romantic love but something more innocent and pure - like the youthful love of nature. Unbeknownst to Sôsuke, Ponyo is a magic fish who has decided that she wants to live with

Sôsuke and the other humans. Unfortunately, Ponyo's decision to give up her underwater life creates a crack in an ancient magic spell, and places the world in danger, upsetting the delicate balance of nature and triggers a gigantic storm. Only Ponyo's mother, a beautiful sea goddess, can restore nature's balance and make Ponyo's dreams come true. Ponyo will delight your family with its magnificent animation and timeless story. – Adapted from *Amazon.com* and *AnimeNewsNetwork.com*

Hayao Miyazaki is a prominent Japanese filmmaker of many popular animated feature films. He is also a co-founder of Studio Ghibli, an animation studio and production company. In 2006, Time Magazine voted Miyazaki one of the most influential Asians of the past 60 years. In 2005, he was named one of the Time 100 Most Influential People.



## Cultural Notes

- ***The Little Mermaid*** *Ponyo* is based off of the famous Hans Christian Anderson story *The Little Mermaid*, a tale of a mermaid wanting to visit the surface world once she turns fifteen. Once on the surface world, she falls in love with a human prince and makes a deal with a Sea Witch in order to be human so the prince may fall in love with her. If the prince marries another, then the day after the wedding the mermaid will dissolve into sea foam. The prince does end up marrying another woman, to the dismay of the mermaid, but she is given the chance to become a mermaid again, but in order to do so, she must murder the prince and his new bride. He is not able to bring herself to commit the murderous deed, and instead dissolves, but into an air spirit that will have the chance to eventually enter the Kingdom of Heaven (a European morality tale having Christian elements, especially a Danish one, is not uncommon). Disney took the essentials of this story, but creating a happier ending through their 1989 animated film adaptation with the same name as the original story. *Ponyo* keeps the essentials, but reworks the mythology to be more child-friendly, modern, and fantastical. Ponyo is the daughter of a human warlock who lives underwater and a goddess of the sea. She goes to the surface world, but makes it through her own sheer effort and willpower, causing a fantastical storm (and fantastical animation) to happen in the process. The real obstacle they encounter in the film is the upsetting Ponyo's becoming a human has caused to the natural environment, causing the sea to submerge most of the town Sôsuke lives in. When Sôsuke meets Ponyo's mother and tells her that he can love Ponyo, the balance of nature is restored and Ponyo is allowed to become a human.
- **The Setting** The setting is never explicitly stated, but it is a seaside town. However, the location of the setting isn't so much what matters as it is the changes the setting goes through. At the beginning of the film, we are introduced to a normal seaside town, but as the story progresses, the town becomes inundated with more sea water and tsunamis, until totally recreating the setting altogether. In one long, memorable scene from the film, Ponyo and Sôsuke go out in their boat and come upon a natural sea habitat inhabited by prehistoric fish, such as relicanth, etc.
- **Environmentalism** "In synchronisation with a fluid animation that allows the impossible to transform Ponyo from fish to human, the film transpires to taking on magical tones and developing a fairytale ecosystem unlike anything else. Ponyo's expressive emotions show themselves in the weather and stormy seas. Ancient fish swim by flooded neighbourhoods while transforming jellyfish progress into a new natural seeming



atmosphere that is neither under the waves nor above them. An overall suggestion of the singular natural world is provoked from the narrative that gives a strong feeling of the world being one entity with all the inhabitants living together. Rapturous scenery envelopes all scenes in a diverse and recognisable background, that converges for a few terms into complete fantasy.” -  
<http://nextprojection.com/2013/12/27/tiffs-spirited-away-films-studio-ghibli-review-ponyo-2008/>