

BRITFILMS

BRITISH SCHOOL FILM FESTIVAL

#11 - 2017/2018

Study Guide

A MONSTER CALLS

A MONSTER CALLS

German certification	minimum age 12 recommended for 12 years and older
Language	English with German subtitles
Country, Year	USA/Spain/Great Britain 2016
Running time	109 min.
Directed by	J.A. Bayona
Starring	Lewis MacDougall (Conor), Felicity Jones (Conor's mother Lizzie), Sigourney Weaver (Conor's grandmother), Toby Kebbell (Conor's father), Liam Neeson (Monster) and others

What A MONSTER CALLS is about

It's always the same nightmare waking Conor up at night. The earth trembles, a church collapses, the ground rips open. And he is unable to save his mother from falling to her death. Outside of his dreams, the 12-year-old boy feels equally helpless. His mother is battling cancer and has to leave for a hospital, leaving Conor to move in with his grandmother, whom Conor doesn't like at all. Something strange happens to Conor in the following days. The old yew tree in front of his window comes alive. The frightening tree monster promises to tell Conor three stories with Conor telling the fourth. For a long time, the boy does not understand the purpose behind this. But at least it seems like the giant tree understands Conor and his constant fits of rage and anger very well.

A MONSTER CALLS is an equally gloomy and touching drama, using a fantastical setting to tell us a story about the difficult process of letting go, all the while taking its young protagonist very seriously. Conor clings on to the lie that everything will be fine, secretly hoping for the death of his mother and for his predicament to be over. He reacts to his own helplessness and guilt with surges of irrepressible rage. The film accompanies the boy in a remarkably sensitive way as he learns to reconcile his contradictory feelings, accept reality and say good-bye. The monster, with its design mirroring horror elements, represents Conor's repressed fears and is at the same furious and very compassionate.

The following worksheets deal with

- Conor's feelings, his problems and the source of his anger
- Conor's expectations from the monster and how it helps him grow stronger by confronting his contradictory feelings and his grief
- how the monster was designed and how the film manages to make it appear both terrifying and sympathetic simply by showing its eyes
- Conor's contradictory wishes and feelings

Publishing information

Publisher:
AG Kino – Gilde deutscher Filmkunsttheater
Rankestraße 31
10789 Berlin

Author:
Stefan Stiletto
stiletto@filme-schoener-sehen.de

Photo credits: Entertainment One UK Ltd

(All the stills are from the DVD of A MONSTER CALLS, published in Great Britain by Entertainment One UK Ltd. They serve as image quotations, to enable study of the film's content, and not as illustrations.)

Conor

How does Conor feel at the beginning of the film? Write down what he thinks about the following characters:

About his mother	
About his father	
About his grandmother	
About his classmate Harry	

Conor’s rage

Discuss: Why is Conor so angry? Do his outbursts help him?

Conor destroys a lot of things during the film. Using the following images, describe the connection that is established between Conor and the monster.



1



2



3



4

Conor and the monster

Describe...

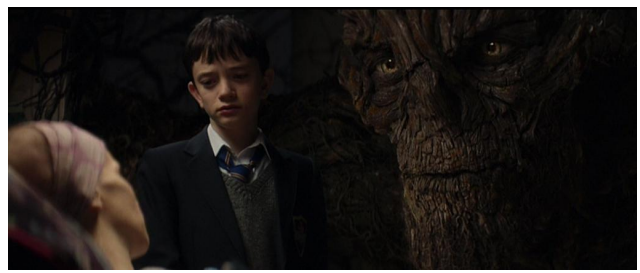
... what Conor expects from the monster
... what the monster offers him
... how Conor reacts to that
... why the monster ends up helping him regardless

Terrifying or friendly?

Examine the following images. Which image makes the monster seem terrifying? Which makes it look friendly? How are those impressions created?



1



2

And what do you think about the monster? Discuss how the monster affects you and what you feel about it. Refer to scenes from the film.

Three stories

Recapitulate: What connects the three stories that the monster tells Conor?

The story of the prince who murders his girlfriend, blames his hated stepmother and ends up being celebrated as king.



The story of the disagreeable apothecary who doesn't cure the priest's daughters because the priest refuses to think about anything except his personal gain.



The story about the invisible man who does not want to remain invisible, but ends up even more lonely after becoming visible.



What is Conor supposed to learn from these stories? How do they relate to his mother's sickness?

Contradictory feelings and wishes

Describe the conflicting feelings and desires that plague Connor.

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Subsequently, discuss the meaning of the monster's following line:

Humans are complicated beasts. You believe comforting lies by knowing full well the painful truth that make those lies necessary.