

The Watery Death of Childhood: Exploring the Frozen Fields, Stormy Seas, and Placid Pools of *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Moonrise Kingdom*

Imagine a film opening onto snowy landscape as a boy gently swings on a play set. This is not the beginning of one film; it could be *Super 8* (2011), *Let Me In* (2010), or *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007). If a boy is carving out an igloo that will soon be destroyed, it is the second scene of *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009). Now imagine a homey scene as a girl gazes out a window at a rainstorm. This is the opening of *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012). Water plays an integral role in the openings of these contemporary films, but it takes different forms for different genders. This pattern continues as the narratives of these last two films unfold. Max, the male protagonist in *Wild Things*, sails smoothly across the sea, but as he nears his destination, rough waters almost capsize his tiny craft. In *Moonrise Kingdom*, when the female lead, Suzy, runs away with a male companion, she hikes through a wilderness before seeking refuge at a refreshing lagoon. Max completes his adventure by sailing home across glassy seas, while Suzy ends her escapades by almost drowning in a roaring flood. The only role water plays in the closing moments of either film is through its representation in a painting of Suzy's lagoon. The range of water forms throughout these films raises compelling questions. How do these various states of water function in the narratives, and do they correlate with gender? How might Max's frozen igloo mark the death of his childhood, and the warm, yonic lagoon mark the death of Suzy's? How do the films associate water with the children's transitions into new life stages? In this presentation, I will analyze the icy crystals, placid pools, and turbulent tides of these recent films and examine how they correlate with gender. Ultimately, I will discuss what the depiction of these water forms suggest about our current concepts of childhood.