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Phantom Tollbooth Documentary Premieres at New Yorker Festival

“The Phantom Tollbooth: Beyond Expectations,” a new documentary about the classic children’s book by Brooklyn-based filmmaker Hannah Jayanti, playfully explores the creation, creators, lasting impact and enduring relevance of one of the most universally beloved children’s books of our time.

The film had its world premiere at [The New Yorker Festival](#) on Sunday, Oct. 6. After the sold-out screening, the audience was treated to a discussion with the book’s author, Norton Juster, illustrator Jules Feiffer and New Yorker writer Adam Gopnik.

Through interviews, animation and archival materials, “Beyond Expectations” traces the friendship between author Juster and Pulitzer Prize-winning artist Feiffer, and the wit and wisdom of the novel over half a century. From its opening sequence, featuring actor [David Hyde Pierce](#), the film introduces viewers to the hilarious world and deeper themes of The Phantom Tollbooth. Discover Norton Juster’s word play, watch Jules Feiffer draw Tollbooth protagonist Milo, hear children’s author and illustrator [Eric Carle](#) reflect on the creative process and [Adam Gopnik](#) share what makes the book a classic.

Historian [Leonard Marcus](#), author of The Annotated Phantom Tollbooth, places the book – which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011 – within a historical, cultural and literary context, while legendary Random House editorial director [Jason Epstein](#) reveals that he published the book against the judgment of others in the business who predicted the book would fail because its vocabulary was thought to be too difficult for children. In spite of these forecasts, the book triumphed, has sold some 4 million copies and been translated into 20 languages.

“Conceived in Brooklyn during the Cold War 1950s, The Phantom Tollbooth is about much more than a bored little boy who travels through a tollbooth to the Lands Beyond to rescue princesses named Rhyme and Reason,” said Brooklyn-based filmmaker Jayanti. “In addition to capturing the playfulness of the book, the film illuminates its more serious themes, such as the value of learning, the state of children’s literature, the creative journey and the importance of the written word.”

Jayanti wrote the film with Janice L. Kaplan, who also was its producer. Jeremy Haik served as director of photography. Eleanor Stewart provided stop motion animation, which is narrated by David Hyde Pierce. “Milo’s Song” was written and performed by [Grammy award-winning musician Bill Harley](#). Additional music was provided by [Devendra Banhart](#), [The Penguin Cafe Orchestra](#) and [ARMS](#).

“The Phantom Tollbooth: Beyond Expectations” was funded entirely [by hundreds of Kickstarter contributors \(over 2 succesful campaigns\)](#) and is being distributed independently and directly to our audience. To purchase the film or arrange for a screening, [visit www.phantomtollboothdoc.com](http://www.phantomtollboothdoc.com).

To arrange an interview with Jayanti, review the film or request high-resolution stills, contact Janice Kaplan, JaniceLKaplan@JaniceLKaplan.com. For more information, visit www.phantomtollboothdoc.com. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) (@TollboothDoc).