In both compilations the films without commentary are by far the most effective. Noticeably too, voice-over commentary will date a film more readily than the visual footage. The 1974 film, *Wolf Pack*, has some visual elements that give away its vintage, particularly the invasive use of the camera and lights into a whelping den. The commentary, however, combined with the laboriously matched-to-action soundtrack, is what marks the film as belonging to another age. All wolves, pups and adults alike, are "he," with the single exception of a female whelping or rearing young. In preparation for whelping she even "cleans out the den" while "he and the pack look after the food supply." Similarly, the emphasis in the commentary is relentlessly on competition and a Darwinian "struggle for existence." Today, wildlife films often reflect the more recent view of wildlife biologists that co-operation among species members and even between species plays a larger role in enabling creatures to survive and reproduce.

If I were to pick a single short film from these two compilations as being of lasting value in environmental education, I would choose the *Journey of the Blob* from the *Planet Earth* collection. The ten minute film shows how a "blob" introduced into a stream by an experimentally-minded boy travels to the sea, becomes vapour in the atmosphere, then rainfall, travels into the water supply to eventually appear literally in the boy's own backyard when he's filling a paddling pool with a hose. While I think the film would have had more educational value if we had seen the boy flush the blob down the toilet in the opening sequence rather than put it directly into a stream, this film still does a fine job of showing the connectedness of natural systems and could lead to a very productive classroom discussion.

Despite their shortcomings and tendency to soft-centredness, most of the films selected for these two collections can still serve as valuable springboards for discussion if the teacher has a good grasp of ecological principles. But for many viewers, nature will continue to seem remote from everyday experience and disconnected from the consequences of our actions.

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PIGS MIGHT FLY—*BABE*, A FILM ABOUT HIDDEN POTENTIAL

Babe, MCA Productions, 1995.

The movie version of *Babe*, based on the story by Dick King-Smith, is a triumph of the imagination, both in its form and in its content. If the story of a pig who wanted to be a sheepdog and succeeded were not inspirational enough, the clever animals — real and robotic — the brilliant human cast, and the singing mice who move easily from "Blue Moon" to snippets from *Carmen*, remind us that movies can make anything possible.

With a premise like that of E.B. White in *Charlotte's Web*, King-Smith and the screenwriters George Miller and Chris Noonan manage to convince us that

pigs are "for" many more things than ham and bacon. Lines like "What on earth is Hoggett doing with that gun?" are not so different really from "Where's Papa going with that ax?", the line that begins White's novel. Babe, with the help of Fly, a maternal sheepdog, is taught how to make himself indispensable to Farmer Hoggett, variously known as "the Boss" or "the Boss's husband." He achieves this miracle by becoming a "sheep pig," capable of asking sheep nicely to obey him and getting their respect in return. All power structures, including the food chain, are threatened by this kind of conduct.

Like White's story, this one does not deny the "cold facts of nature," but it does bend them a little to accommodate the needs of the star, a.k.a. "the pig of destiny." Some of the supporting cast, it is true, is not so lucky. A duck who wants to be a rooster or, failing that, an alarm clock, becomes a comical sidekick, but not a miraculous hero. Babe, on the other hand, has what it takes. Although he is shocked to discover what really has happened to his family, who he innocently believed had gone away to paradise, he is able to form his own family and to teach them a thing or two as well.

Fly and Mr. Hoggett and the entire viewing audience are, of course, on the side of the miraculous. There are those, however, who prefer things the way they were. One of these characters is Mrs. Hoggett, who tells us that "Pork is a nice sweet meat" and who suggests that Babe might be just the thing for Christmas dinner. From the animals' point of view, though, "Christmas means carnage." We are definitely with them; in fact, one wonders watching the film if we are not creating a generation of determined vegetarians. Besides Mrs. Hoggett, Rex, Fly's mate, a rather macho sheepdog, is keen on maintaining the status quo. He clearly believes that animals must accept their lot in life and be thankful for it. He is so aggressively opposed to Babe's usurping his role as a sheepdog that he very nearly gets "snipped" by his owner. But even Rex and Mrs. Hoggett, by the end of the story, are happy participants in Babe's victory. It seems that the way things are may be challenged by anyone smart enough to be friendly, polite, and useful to someone else. Education can do wonders, too, even if you are, like Babe, labelled as "definitely stupid." We all apparently have things to learn, not the least of which is that we can be helpful to each other.

The movie illustrates that collaborative efforts and imagination can bring a vision to life. Indeed, the animals and the robots are so well integrated that it is hard to know the real from the unreal. *Babe* is a movie that can topple hierarchies. It will make you think about what the real relation between people and animals is, about what any of us is for, about what any of us can do with some imagination and a willingness to co-operate nicely, and about what you plan to have for dinner tonight.

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