

# THE PHOENIX

The ancient myth of the phoenix - the magical bird with the miraculous power of self-regeneration - is reborn with a modern twist in this animated adaptation of a story by Sylvia Townsend Warner.

Lord Strawberry, owner of the world's finest collection of birds, is determined to add the exotic phoenix to his aviary. Many imitations come his way until, at last, he finds the coveted bird in the deserts of Arabia and proudly takes it home.

But, alas, Lord Strawberry dies and the phoenix must be sold. Auctioned to the avaricious proprietor of Poldero's Wizard and Wonderland, the sublimely plumed bird becomes the highlight of the circus side-show. People throng to visit it at first, but soon abandon the quiet bird for the livelier antics of the gum-chewing baboons. Mr. Poldero is outraged... until he discovers the phoenix's amazing ability to arise, renewed, from the ashes of its own nest. Then he plots another, far more spectacular, way to make his star attraction pay.

Vividly colored images and evocative original music capture the pulsating atmosphere of the fairground as events build to their fateful climax. This spirited satire of human foibles, with its timely message about our treatment of nature's creatures, will appeal to young people and adults alike.

**Director:** Gayle Thomas  
**Producers:** Bill Pettigrew, Gayle Thomas  
**Narrator:** Lister Sinclair

**10 minutes 35 seconds**  
**Order number: C 9190 138**



This video is also suitable for the deaf and hard of hearing.  
Closed-captioned. A decoder is required.



**VHS**  
113C  
9190 138



# THE PHOENIX



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# THE PHOENIX

This dramatic tale of the mythical phoenix has a modern twist! Sought after for its beauty and uniqueness, the unsuspecting creature is plucked from its native Arabian desert to complete Lord Strawberry's collection of exotic birds. But when the collector dies, the phoenix is cast adrift amid the popular tumult of Poldero's Wizard and Wonderland.

Mr. Poldero counts on the exotic bird to draw in crowds, and at first is pleased with his bargain. The phoenix is quiet and undemanding, and people flock to see it, although it performs no tricks. Yet the day comes when the public abandons the phoenix for more sensational fare. The circus owner, feeling cheated, vows to bring his patrons back in even greater numbers! Discovering the magical creature's miraculous ability to transform itself, he plots another, far more spectacular, way to make his star attraction pay.

Excitement rises to fever pitch as posters and newspapers entice all comers to the show of a lifetime! Mr. Poldero signs a contract for the film rights; hawkers do a brisk trade in phoenix replicas. When at last the great day arrives, thousands of sensation-seeking spectators mill around the phoenix's cage as the loudspeaker announces "the moment the world has breathlessly awaited...."

This multi-layered story may be appreciated on many levels: as a simple but absorbing narrative, a satire of human greed, a classical confrontation between good and evil, or an allegorical tale of our misunderstanding and abuse of the environment.

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## SUBJECT AREAS

Language Arts; Environmental Science; EMR (ethics, moral education and religion)

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did Lord Strawberry and Mr. Poldero want the phoenix? What does their behavior show about human nature?
2. Why do Mr. Poldero's plans backfire? What happens to the phoenix at the end?
3. "The truth was that the phoenix was a mythical bird and never existed at all." Do the main characters in the film believe this statement? Do you, in the context of the story? How does it relate to the film's ending?
4. In what ways does the plot of this story differ from the ancient myth of the phoenix? Can you think of any other legends or beliefs in which death is followed by rebirth?
5. The exotic bird in the story was taken from its own environment and put in a cage to satisfy human curiosity and greed. Should nature's creatures be treated this way? Why or why not?

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



Artist and film animator Gayle Thomas was born in Montreal. She spent a year at the city's Ecole des Beaux-Arts before studying drafting, and then completing a degree in Fine Arts at Concordia University, where she specialized in painting and art education.

Since joining the National Film Board of Canada in 1970, Ms. Thomas has contributed to many films, animating and directing six of her own. Her influences have included poetry, fables, and stories, and each film has employed a different animation technique. *It's Snow* (1974) captures the airy magic of snowflakes with color cut-out animation. *Klaxon* (1977) is based on the poem by Canadian poet James Reaney. *The Magic Flute* (1977), a children's story, shows that things can be good or evil depending on how they are used. *A Sufi Tale* (1980) is based on a Persian fable in which the inhabitants of a village learn to overcome their fear of the unknown, while *The Boy and the Snow Goose* (1984) tells the tale of a young boy who becomes friends with an injured bird that he nurses back to health.

Gayle Thomas was drawn to Sylvia Townsend Warner's story of the phoenix because she "could see its visual possibilities." The images in **The Phoenix** were created with wax crayon on opal glass, a technique which lends itself to a brilliance of color and a fluidity of movement.

Director/Animator  
**Gayle Thomas**

Additional Camera  
**Pierre Landry**

Narrator  
**Lister Sinclair**

Voices  
**Brian George**  
**Susan Glover**  
**David Francis**

Music and Sound Track  
**Normand Roger**

In collaboration with  
**Denis Chartrand**

Re-recording  
**Jean-Pierre Joutel**  
**Shelley Craig**

Co-producers  
**Bill Pettigrew**  
**Gayle Thomas**

Executive Producers  
**Douglas MacDonald**  
**Barrie Angus McLean**

Adapted from a short story by  
**Sylvia Townsend Warner.**



# ACTRA

Produced and distributed by  
**National Film Board**  
**of Canada**

Color  
**10 minutes 35 seconds**

Order number:  
**C 0190 138 (film)**  
**C 9190 138 (video)**

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