

# Harold and the Purple Crayon (2024)



Harold, Moose & young Mel on one of their many adventures. (c) Columbia Pictures

Director Carlos Saldanha's adaptation of the beloved 1955 children's classic by Crockett Johnson gives us the adult version of the original series about a four-year old and his magical purple crayon who lives inside a book. We see Harold at four just in an opening section, animated by hand in a style much like that of the original picture book. I suspect some fans might wish that the film had continued in that form, but it doesn't, within a few minutes changing to live motion enhanced by animation whenever the grown-up Harold draws with his purple crayon.

A narrator tells us that when Harold has grown up the voice that Harold had talked with, called "the old man," mysteriously disappears. Considering the "old man" his father, Harold (Zachary Levi) decides to go into the real world to look for him. He draws a door and through it enters the real world. One of his companions, Moose (Lil Rel Howery), follows him, but the other, Porcupine (Tanya Reynolds), is left behind for a short period.

With his crayon Harold draws a bicycle and he and Moose cycle down a street, with Harold clothed in a sort of blue jumpsuit.

Moose is now a Black human.

On that same street widowed mother Terri (Zoey Deschane) with her son is driving toward them. Distracted, she doesn't see them until too late, knocking the pair off the bike. For an instant the alarmed Moose is turned back into a moose. The alarmed mother gets out to make sure the two are not injured. Then while she looks at the puncture in her tire, Harold draws a new one. Terri seeks to dismiss the strangers, but Mel convinces her to put them up for the night. The boy sneaks out of his room to talk with Harold, and they bond so well that Harold breaks off part of his crayon and gives it to the boy.

The next day instead of going to school, Mel joins with Harold and Moose in the search for Harold's father. They go to the library where they meet Gary Natwick (Jemaine Clement), a librarian who is vainly trying to promote his mediocre, complicated fantasy novel. He, of course, becomes the villain. There follows a series of madcap adventures that probably will engage young viewers but left me somewhat unimpressed. The one good thing I want to note is that despite the major change of focusing on Harold as an adult, rather than a four-year-old, the filmmakers do not resort to fabricating a romance between Harold and Terri. I will give them credit for that.

The various items that Harold draws with his purple crayon are fun—the already mentioned spare tire and the two-seater bike, plus pies and ice cream, skateboards and roller skates, a gleaming propeller plane, a giant lock and wrecking ball, a griffin, and a spider-fly with vicious teeth. This is a film that promotes the value of imagination, so by all means parents should go with their child and enjoy. However, this will not replace the 2001 13-episode HBO series of the same name. This time I use a quote from Joni Mitchell's great song "Both Sides Now" instead of a Scripture to illustrate how the vivid imagination of a child fades as we grow older. This film suggests that Harold has been able to hold onto that imagination, perhaps due to his purple crayon. Maybe this

film can get us to think about our imagination and our need for a purple crayon. Have you found yours, or have those clouds that we used to enjoy so much, now become “just another show”?

*This review will be in the September issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.*