

Literary Critique of *Jumanji*

- ① Imagine playing a board game about traveling through a jungle. It seems like any other game, until suddenly, each description in the game becomes real. You have to face wild animals, and a monsoon, and other jungle situations. Sounds exciting, right? This premise of the book *Jumanji*, written and illustrated by Chris Van Allsburg, certainly has the potential for a thrilling adventure. However, the actual story and its grayscale illustrations fall flat. Mr. Van Allsburg lists the events without allowing for enough suspense to build and then ends the story too quickly and anti-climatically.
- ② In the book, two siblings named Peter and Judy are left home while their parents attend an opera. Bored with their own toys, the children venture outside and find a board game under a tree. Initially, the game seems intriguing. Why did someone leave it in the park? And why did someone leave a note on the game saying, “fun for some but not for all. P.S. Read instructions carefully”? However, the suspense that Mr. Van Allsburg builds prior to the start of the game is followed by rushed events within the game itself.
- ③ When the game begins, Peter’s first play results in a “lion attack.” And then the children are shocked to see that a real lion has appeared in the house. With each play, another

Begin the **introduction** with information to hook the audience. Then name the book, its author, and its illustrator.

State a **claim**—your main opinion about the book.

Support your claim with **reasons** and **evidence**.

MINI LESSON

Capitalize the names of people and specific places as well as important words in titles.



Juan Manuel Moreno

action in the game comes to life. There are monkeys in the kitchen, a monsoon, a lost tour guide, sleeping sickness, rhinos, a python, and lava and smoke from a volcano. Although these ideas sound scary and exhilarating, each one is given so little time in the book it is as if Mr. Van Allsburg is just ticking off a checklist instead of fully developing the plot.

- ④ Similarly, even though the illustrations are very detailed, their grayscale appearance adds little to the bare descriptions. A real jungle is colorful and lively, and bright colors would have likely made the illustrations much more engaging. Perhaps then readers could also get a better sense of the urgency the characters feel.
- ⑤ The closing events especially leave the reader disappointed. The game cannot end until a player reaches Jumanji, the golden city in the game. Judy needs to roll a 12 to reach the city. Conveniently, she rolls just that. She says “Jumanji” and everything returns to normal. Readers don’t even get a glimpse of the magical city or what makes it special. Peter and Judy return the game to the park, and later they see a pair of neighbors carrying the game with them.
- ⑥ To echo the note about the game, *Jumanji*, the book, is fun for some but not for all. The book is thought to be a classic and some readers will enjoy it, partly for its unique concept. But many other readers will likely feel that it could benefit from more detailed action, colorful illustrations, and a more satisfying ending.

Include details about any illustrations in your reasons and evidence.

End with a **recommendation** telling why people may or may not like the book.



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