

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## The Mosquito Coast (1986)

Peter Weir

### OVERVIEW

**Director** Peter Weir (1944- ) is one of the best-known Australian filmmakers. He participated in what has been called the Australian New Wave in the 1970s, directing distinctive films like *The Cars that Ate Paris* (1974), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and *The Last Wave* (1977) that made use of Australian settings. Weir's global status grew with *Gallipoli* (1981) and *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), the latter of which won an Oscar. Weir then made several Hollywood movies, including the acclaimed *Witness* (1985) and *Dead Poets Society* (1989), both of which also won Oscars. The recipient of numerous awards, Weir began making films less frequently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but has maintained an international reputation.

**Film** *The Mosquito Coast* is based on a novel of the same name written by Paul Theroux and published in 1981. Weir's film is quite faithful to the novel. It tells the story of Allie Fox, an eccentric inventor who suddenly leaves the United States with his wife and four children in order to live more simply in Latin America. The film is narrated by the oldest son, Charlie. The novel was adapted again in the form of a 2021 television series starring Justin Theroux, a nephew of Paul Theroux; the series took more liberties with the source material.

**Background** Weir had begun scouting locations for *The Mosquito Coast* in 1984 but had to quit when financing for the film fell through. He then directed *Witness*. The star of *Witness*, Harrison Ford, wanted to play the lead in *The Mosquito Coast*. With Ford attached, financing was easier to find. Weir and Ford, along with actors Helen Mirren and River Phoenix and a crew composed of professionals from Australia and people with whom Weir had worked on *Witness*, shot *The Mosquito Coast* in Georgia, Baltimore, and Belize. Although the film struggled to find a broad audience or critical approval, Ford defended it, and it received stronger reviews in later years.

### CHARACTERS

Allie Fox – American inventor and handyman

“Mother” Fox – Allie's wife

Charlie Fox – Allie's oldest son, about 14 years old

Jerry Fox – Allie's second son, about 11 years old

April and Clover Fox – Allie's twin daughters and youngest children, about 7 years old

Mr. Haddy – native of Mosquito Coast who helps the Foxes

Francis – native of Mosquito Coast who lives in the Foxes' village

Reverend Spellgood – missionary at Mosquito Coast

Emily Spellgood – Reverend Spellgood's teenage daughter

Mr. Polski – farmer and Allie's boss in the United States

### SYNOPSIS

The Foxes are a Caucasian American family consisting of Allie, his wife (whom everyone calls “Mother”), and their four children: Charlie, Jerry, and twin girls April and Clover. Allie is an inventor and handyman who dropped out of Harvard. He frequently opines on the deterioration of the United States; he particularly objects to rampant consumerism, laziness, and violence. When Allie's boss is dismissive of his latest invention—a non-electric refrigeration machine—Allie decides to pack up the family and leave for “Mosquitia,” a (fictional) Central American country. Mother and the children embrace this adventure despite its abruptness. They are concerned, though, when they arrive at Mosquitia and Allie purchases a

small town, Geronimo, that is little more than a collection of shacks. Still, the Foxes, the few native villagers, and a friend named Mr. Haddy from a nearby village construct a village with functional huts, a greenhouse for growing food, a fish farm, and a water wheel. Allie clashes with Reverend Spellgood, a missionary in Mosquitia whom they had met on the ship from the United States. Allie also frequently clashes with Charlie and Jerry, who sometimes protest the hard work and austere habits that Allie insists on.

Allie builds a much larger refrigeration machine and uses it to provide ice, water, and air conditioning for the village. One day, three armed men appear in Geronimo and demand to stay there. Allie traps them in the cooling machine, but the men shoot holes in it and cause it to explode, which sets off a fire that destroys Geronimo. Instead of accepting Mr. Haddy's offer to join his village, Allie insists that the family will live simply by themselves on the ocean coast. They try to do this, but a flood destroys their hut and they are forced to move again. They come upon Reverend Spellgood's settlement. Allie sets the church on fire, and Reverend Spellgood shoots him. Allie dies, and the rest of the family leaves.

## SCENES

**Thoughts on America** – A man and a young teenage boy ride through town in a pickup truck as the man speaks about how the United States has deteriorated. They go into a hardware store, where the man asks for a length of rubber sealing material but rejects it because he sees that it was made in Japan. He speaks rudely to the clerk. The man and boy, whom he calls Charlie, go to a junkyard, where the man gets the rubber seal he was looking for.

**At home with the Foxes** – The man tinkers with a machine, watched by Charlie and a younger boy. Upstairs, a woman is on the phone, talking to a man she addresses as Mr. Polski, who wants to know where Mr. Fox is because he is supposed to be at work on Mr. Polski's farm.



**New invention** – Mr. Fox and the two boys go to Mr. Polski's farm with the machine. Mr. Fox demonstrates that the machine, which he calls Fat Boy, is an efficient cooling device that can freeze things. He says that he wants to build a large one to be a cooling system for the farm. Mr. Polski rejects this idea, saying that he has an immediate need for a simple cooling system and is not interested in complicated inventions.

**Migrant workers** – As Mr. Fox, Charlie, and Jerry (the younger boy) drive off in the truck, they see migrant workers on the farm. Mr. Fox comments that they came from the jungle but did not understand that they were better off there than in the U.S. He muses, though, that in the jungle, people probably do not yet have adequate refrigeration. Mr. Fox takes Charlie and Jerry to see a dilapidated house where the migrant workers sleep at night.

**Decision to leave** – At the Foxes' house – which we now see includes two very young twin girls – the children sit on the staircase while the sound of talking comes from the kitchen. Charlie sees a map with "La Mosquitia" circled. Mr. Fox asks Charlie to take a letter to Mr. Polski. When he does, we see that it says that Mr. Fox is quitting his job because the family will be moving to the Mosquito Coast.



**Sailing away** – The Foxes pack some things and prepare to leave their house immediately. Mr. and Mrs. Fox call each other "Mother" and "Allie." The family boards a ship leaving the country. On the ship, they meet Reverend Spellgood and his wife and children, who are going to the Mosquito Coast as missionaries. Reverend Spellgood prays before dinner, which prompts ridicule from Allie. The ship's captain is shocked to learn that the Foxes plan not just to visit but to stay in Mosquitia.



**Difficulty connecting** – Reverend Spellgood approaches the Foxes, out on deck in the sunshine, and tries to give them a Bible. Allie mocks him and refuses. Charlie, off by himself looking out at the ocean, is approached by teenage Emily Spellgood. She tries to ask him questions about favorite bands and drive-ins, but he is unable



to answer. They talk about each other's fathers; Charlie says that his is a genius. Emily offers to be his girlfriend.

**New land** – The ship arrives at Mosquitia, greeted by singing native children in white dresses. The Foxes and Spellgoods part ways, heading off smiling in their own directions. Allie speaks to a German man at a bar where locals are singing and dancing. Allie then rushes up to the family's hotel room and announces to Mother that he has purchased the small town of Geronimo.

**Geronimo** – The Foxes ride down a large river in a boat captained by a black man named Mr. Haddy. Eventually they arrive at Geronimo, where a small number of black people are already living in a few shacks. Allie's face falls when he sees it, but then he immediately shouts that it is perfect, while the rest of the family members look on with concern. Allie starts talking about his ideas for building a house and setting up a water wheel, fish farm, and other things.



**Getting to work** – The Foxes, Mr. Haddy, and the local inhabitants work, hacking down jungle plants. Mother and Allie look at each other's disheveled appearance and laugh. The family spends that night in a tent; the kids talk about the fact that they miss their home in America.



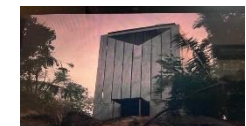
**Village established** – The Foxes and the local inhabitants continue to work at various tasks involving building accommodation, planting crops, and setting up the fish farm and water wheel. Allie talks incessantly about all the bad things going on in America, including excessive consumerism and violence. Charlie, in a voiceover, explains that this goes on for weeks while they set up the town. Mr. Haddy shows up again and is impressed at the progress they have made.



**Missionary** – Reverend Spellgood comes to the Foxes' village. Allie and Reverend Spellgood almost immediately start arguing about religion. Allie suggests that if any of the people in the town want to leave with Reverend Spellgood, they should. No one does.



**Invention 2.0** – Allie and the men of the village work to assemble parts of a very large machine, taller than the surrounding trees. Allie sets the machine running, calling it Fat Boy. He runs inside the machine, then runs out with a snowball. Different parts of the machine also produce cold water, ice, and air conditioning (through a tube that runs to the Foxes' house). "It's not a miracle, it's thermodynamics!" Allie says when he sees some people praying. He announces that he came to this place in order to produce ice.



**Carrying ice** – Allie learns of the existence of a native tribe nearby that has had almost no contact with outsiders and thus has never seen ice. He helms an expedition, including Charlie, Jerry, and a few local men, to take a few blocks of ice to them. The walk through the jungle is difficult, and they realize they will have to spend the night out there. Jerry asks where they will sleep, prompting a tirade from Allie about people who want to sleep in hotels with TVs and jukeboxes. He tells Jerry to be a man, and Jerry starts to cry. Charlie tries to comfort him. Allie ridicules them both and tells them not to make a fire because it will melt the ice.



**Ice melted** – In the morning, they find the native tribe, armed with spears. Allie cautiously walks among the tribe members, saying he has a present. But when he opens the bag, all the ice has melted. "Go away," one of the tribe members says, in English. Charlie points out to his father that he sees a white man in the tribal village. As Allie goes to talk to this man, Charlie tries to explain the benefits of ice to the villagers.



**Bad signs** – They leave. Allie tells the others that the white man they saw was a captive, along with two others. When they get back to Geronimo, they see religious flyers on the ground. Mother tells them that Reverend Spellgood came by and persuaded some of the locals to go with him.

**Invasion** – One of the locals, Francis, gathers tomatoes in the greenhouse. He realizes that some of the tomatoes have been destroyed. Soon three armed men appear; one of them is the white man they saw with the tribe. Allie asks where they are going and encourages them to take his boat; they say that they like it here in Geronimo. Allie says that they cannot stay because the houses are infested with ants. They say they want to stay anyway and look around.



**Not leaving** – Allie, Charlie, and others knock down a building and burn furniture and bedding, claiming to be trying to get to the root of the ant infestation. But the three armed men do not leave. At nightfall, Allie takes them to the “bunkhouse,” which is actually the inside of Fat Boy, to sleep.

**Plot backfires** – In the dark, Allie wakes Charlie and tells him he needs his help. They walk toward Fat Boy. Allie tells Charlie to climb up to the roof and shove in a piece of wood that will block a vent. Charlie is very doubtful, but he obeys and succeeds. Meanwhile, Allie bars the door to the place where the intruders are sleeping. Then he sets the machine going, which involves setting a fire. Charlie is horrified to realize what is happening, but Allie tells him not to pity those men. The men, shouting from inside the machine as they realize it is burning, shoot holes in it with their guns. This causes the machine to explode and sets the whole village on fire.



**Abandoning Geronimo** – In the morning, the Foxes leave the original villagers, going off on the river in a small boat. Mr. Haddy is with them. They arrive at the coast. The children shout, “Let’s go home!” but Allie says, “Everything we need is here. We can live simply.” He tells his family that they cannot go back to the United States because it has been destroyed by a nuclear disaster. Mr. Haddy tries to get them to go to his place, but Allie refuses.



**Beachfront hut** – The Foxes build a hut. Mr. Haddy comes back some days later to check on them, to the delight of everyone but Allie. Mr. Haddy says he has brought food, to which Allie responds, “Why? Do I look hungry?” Mr. Haddy says that they are living too close to the water and may be in trouble in a storm. Allie calls Mr. Haddy a savage and says he has no vision.



**Help** – At night, the Foxes are in their hut while rain pours. Mr. Haddy suddenly appears; he surreptitiously wakes Charlie and says he has brought a container of gas so that they can power their boat. He tells Charlie not to tell his father who brought these things, since doing so would probably make him refuse to use them. Mr. Haddy slips away, undetected by Allie.

**Flooded** – By morning, the storm has intensified, and the ocean has indeed flooded the hut. As wind and rain increase, Allie tries to use a rope to drag the boat to the new shore. The boat, with all the other Foxes in it, almost capsizes multiple times. Charlie produces the gas container and says he found it; Allie uses them, and they manage to get the boat running properly. Mother suggests that they go to Mr. Haddy’s, but Allie refuses.



**Breaking point** – The weather having calmed, the Foxes go upriver in the boat. Allie tells Mother not to give the children too much coconut, since they cannot be sure when they will be able to get more food. He smiles. Allie then has to dive into the river in search of something that dropped overboard. He disappears for a very long time. Mother begins to scream “I can’t stand this!” and to cry. The boys agree that they should go find Mr. Haddy. Then Allie appears and calls them all traitors.



**Spellgood's mission** – As the Foxes proceed along the river, they hear the sound of singing and realize they have arrived at Reverend Spellgood's settlement. "They could help us!" Mother says. Allie says they do not need help, but he moors the boat and announces his intention of going to knock Spellgood's block off. "Look at these toys!" the twin girls say as they walk through the settlement. They discover that people are sitting in the church watching a video of Reverend Spellgood. Some of these people used to live in Geronimo. "Brainwashed," Allie says.



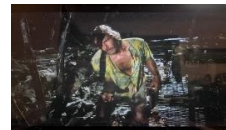
**Seeking help** – The Foxes go back to their boat. But that night, Charlie and Jerry sneak back onshore and find Reverend Spellgood's house. Through the window, they get the attention of Emily, who comes outside to talk to them. "What happened to you?" she asks. They explain their situation; she agrees to help, and she confirms that America has not in fact blown up.



**Plans to escape** – Jerry and Charlie go back toward the boat; they run into Mother, and it turns out that none of them knows where Allie is. Jerry tells Mother that Allie lied about America being destroyed, and Charlie tells her that they are planning to leave with the help of the Spellgoods' jeep. They ask her get the twins and to come with them, but she says she cannot leave Allie. Suddenly the three of them notice flames; Allie has set Reverend Spellgood's church on fire.



**Stopped** – Allie reappears at the boat holding a container of gas. Charlie says they are not going with him. Allie lashes out at Mother, saying she has always been against him. The Foxes, minus Allie, walk away from the boat; in trying to follow them, Allie is shot by Reverend Spellgood.



**Allie's death** – The next morning, the Foxes are in the boat, heading toward the ocean. Allie lies on the bottom of the boat as Mother tends his wounds. Allie says that he cannot move, and that people probably should be hairier and walk on all fours in order to be better protected from attack. Charlie cries. In a voiceover, Charlie says, "Once I had believed in Father, and the world had seemed small and old. Now he was gone, and I wasn't afraid to love him anymore. And the world seemed limitless."



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Allie Fox** Allie is an inventor and handyman living in the U.S. with his wife and four children. He is fed up with the consumerism and lack of self-reliance in the modern American lifestyle. He decides to move his family to a remote part of Central America where they can live more simply.

*Intelligent* – Allie is a Harvard dropout who comes up with functional inventions on a regular basis. He has a strong understanding of mechanics and science. In addition, as his conversations with Reverend Spellgood reveal, he can quote the Bible from memory.

*Obsessive* – Allie rails against the problems with contemporary American life throughout the film, at length. These speeches are sometimes addressed to villagers in Geronimo, who have never gone to the U.S. and likely never will. Meanwhile, Allie is obsessed with the plan to have the family live off the land without help from others, and he insists on sticking to this plan even when it is obviously not feasible.

*Narcissistic* – Though he claims to be an outside-the-box thinker, Allie never tries to learn from anyone else (like the villagers already living in Geronimo). He never asks the villagers or his family for their opinions on anything. His wife and children's homesickness and physical danger are of no concern to him.

**Charlie Fox** At fourteen, Charlie is Allie's oldest child. He gets along well with his parents and younger siblings, especially his brother, Jerry. He idolizes his father but struggles to live up to his expectations and is concerned about his treatment of Jerry.

*Intelligent* – Like his father, Charlie is clearly intelligent; he learns quickly, and he is capable of acquiring the survival skills Allie is trying to teach him. In one scene, Allie sneers that Charlie is not capable of building a lean-to, but another character counters, "Charlie knows how to do it."

*Loving* – Charlie obviously loves everyone in his family. He is devoted to his father. He calls his father a genius and always obeys him, until near the end of the film. Charlie is visibly sad and reluctant when he finally defies his father. Meanwhile, Charlie comforts Jerry when Allie has been insulting him; Charlie helps his mother and sisters as well.

*Brave* – Charlie displays bravery in the earlier parts of the film by doing the difficult and sometimes dangerous things his father asks of him. But Charlie also demonstrates bravery later in contriving and beginning to execute a plan to escape (and help his mother and siblings escape) his father.

**"Mother" Fox** Allie's wife is universally addressed as "Mother"; her given name is never stated. She behaves affectionately toward Allie and toward their four children, and all of them behave affectionately toward her. She enjoys Allie's spirit of adventure, but she worries about the children's well-being and does not want to remain forever outside the U.S.

*Loyal* – "Mother" is very loyal to Allie, rarely raising objections to his decisions and ideas. She offers no opposition to Allie's decision that they should all go to Mosquitia. She often speaks in favor of Allie's perspective in conversations with the children or with native villagers. Even when Charlie and Jerry announce their plans to escape, she says she cannot leave Allie.

*Adventurous* – "Mother" is quite willing to pack a few items and dash off to a foreign country. She often smiles while working with Allie. She tries to instill adventurousness in the children as well; when Jerry expresses a fear that something bad is about to happen, she suggests that maybe what is about to happen will be good.

*Weak* – "Mother" says things in Allie's absence that reveal her awareness that the children are unhappy and that some of Allie's ideas are terrible. In spite of this awareness, she consistently acquiesces to Allie's plans instead of standing up to him. This weakness contrasts with Charlie and Jerry's ability to defy Allie.

**Mr. Haddy** Mr. Haddy earns his living by using his boat to ferry goods and people along the river that flows to the Mosquito Coast. He lives not in Geronimo but in a coastal village somewhat nearby. He delivers goods to the Foxes and follows the ups and downs of their attempt to establish a new society.

*Generous* – Mr. Haddy goes out of his way to help the Foxes, despite sometimes being the target of insults from Allie. He brings them goods, and he offers them lodging in his village after Geronimo is destroyed. At risk to his own safety, he comes to the Foxes' hut in a storm to bring necessary supplies.

*Defiant* – Allie repeatedly rebuffs Mr. Haddy's offers of help. But Mr. Haddy perseveres and defies Allie, continuing to bring goods that "Mother" and the children are happy to receive. He even delivers some important items secretly to Charlie and tells him to keep their provenance a secret so that Allie will not throw them away.

## THEMES

**Family** The Foxes are a close-knit family. During the part of the movie that takes place in the U.S., we see the Foxes spending a great deal of time with each other, and no time with friends outside the family. Charlie and Jerry sometimes accompany Allie when he works. After they move to Mosquitia, the whole family works on setting up the new village. Even the very young twin girls are put to work; while one of them is pedaling to operate the washing machine that Allie made with parts from a bicycle, he passes by

and says to her, “Don’t just sit there, honey – pedal!” Despite his narcissism, Allie obviously sees the family as a unit: it means as much to him that his children live simply and inventively as that he does himself. Family loyalty is clearly important to all of them: Allie expects that everyone will be loyal to him as head of the family, and they all agree, until finally Charlie and Jerry are driven past the point of endurance and defy Allie. Although Allie sometimes speaks very insultingly to his sons, most of the time all members of the Fox family behave affectionately toward one another.

**Social organization** The question of how best to organize a society is central to *The Mosquito Coast*. Allie holds the firm opinion that contemporary American society is terrible because it encourages laziness and waste. However, his ideal alternative is not quite the “living close to nature” ideal that one might expect. The town of Geronimo as rebuilt by Allie is full of inventions like ceiling fans and washing machines—and, of course, “Fat Boy,” the massive refrigeration machine that provides cold water, ice, and air conditioning. The only difference is that Allie invented these things and used locally available materials to build them. Allie’s ideal society is also essentially a dictatorship. Though Allie claims to be open to criticism from the villagers, no villager ever ventures an objection, and whenever his wife or children raise objections, he rebuffs, ridicules, and sometimes punishes them. Allie is positive that his way is the right way. All villagers share the work and share the rewards, which prompts Reverend Spellgood’s accusation that they are communists. But Allie thinks that all the decisions should be made by him because he has the most knowledge; ultimately, Allie’s society fails because he is unwilling to listen to other people.

**Loyalty** Allie expects complete loyalty from his family. He defines this loyalty not only as obedience but also as a complete embrace of all of Allie’s ideas. In other words, it is not enough for his wife and children to do as he says; they are also supposed to agree with him on every aspect of his worldview. When Allie disappears for a while near the end of the film and then overhears the rest of the family making a plan to go off without him, he says, “You’re all traitors!” Allie seems to be a bit paranoid, as well. When “Mother” finally does appear to be leaving him, he says that she has always been against him—a statement that is obviously untrue, given that “Mother” has shown far more loyalty to Allie throughout the film than any other character, and far more than most people probably would show to a spouse who puts them and their children through so much suffering. Charlie is also very loyal to Allie, calling him a “genius” and doing just about everything Allie asks him to, even when it means risking his own safety and being an accessory to murder. Finally, though, the loyalty runs out, and the other Foxes plan to leave Allie; they only stay with him in the end because he has received an obviously fatal wound.

**Modernity** Allie frequently holds forth on the problems with American society. The problems he identifies are problems of modernity: too much luxury, laziness, excessive consumerism, out-of-control spending on social services, a broken criminal justice system. What triggers Allie’s decision to leave the U.S. is the muted reaction of his boss, Mr. Polski, to the cooling system he invents. Allie wants to live in a place where people will be impressed by something like refrigeration because they do not already have it, and Mosquitia appeals to Allie because it seems to belong to an earlier phase of history. The film does not show any scenes of the Fox children in school in the U.S., but after they move to Mosquitia and are engaged in building their new village, Allie comments that *this* is the education all Americans should get: learning how to survive in the wilderness and build things, not learning how to fingerpaint and memorizing state capitals. By contrast, the other members of the Fox family miss the accoutrements of modernity: the children exclaim upon the modern toys they see at Reverend Spellgood’s settlement, for example.

**Religion** The presence of Reverend Spellgood as a character ensures that religion is a theme in *The Mosquito Coast*. Reverend Spellgood is a pastor and a missionary, with a church in Baltimore and a church in Mosquitia. He promotes a rather modern brand of Christianity: he compares prayer to making a phone call, hands out a version of the Bible written in a modern rather than archaic translation, and teaches his parishioners songs with lyrics like “What do you think about Jesus? He’s all right!” But he also rebukes a native character he sees at Geronimo for not attending church in a long time. Allie, meanwhile, completely scorns religion, as he tells Reverend Spellgood every time he sees him. Allie is particularly annoyed by the hubris behind Reverend Spellgood’s insistence that everything he does is a direct expression of the will of God. At the same time, Allie never considers the possibility that religion might be helpful or preferable to anyone. He burns down Reverend Spellgood’s church for no reason other than his dislike for the man and disagreement with his philosophy. Still, Allie can quote the Bible from memory, and

Charlie in voiceover states that Allie believes that God created the world and that it is man's job to improve upon it.

**Vision** Allie sees himself as a visionary. "You have no vision" is his ultimate insult. Indeed, Allie considers things that almost no one else would, like packing up his American family and striking out for a remote land. Allie is an inventor, and as far as we see in the film, all of his inventions work. Whenever there is a setback, Allie refuses to acknowledge it as such, immediately reframing the situation as one of freedom or opportunity for change. However, Allie's vision is limited by his hubris and his refusal to listen to the opinions or ideas of other people. It seems never to occur to him, for instance, to ask the natives of Geronimo what their way of living in that place has been. When "Mother" asks him if they might take Mr. Haddy up on his offer to go live in his village, Allie replies, "What? And live like savages?" He wants to live in the jungle with minimal comforts and conveniences, but he is completely uninterested in learning about other people's ways of doing exactly that. He is also unable to see problems right in front of him, such as Jerry's increasing anguish over Allie's treatment of him.

**Invention** The very first thing we learn about Allie is that he is an inventor, who already has several patents. Similarly, the first thing we see Allie do is come up with yet another invention, and a functional one at that. It bothers Allie that his boss, Mr. Polski, is not particularly impressed with his invention of the refrigeration machine. Allie decides to go to Mosquitia partly because he believes that people there would be more impressed by and appreciative of that invention and others like it. He turns out to be right about this. Living in Mosquitia also affords Allie the opportunity to develop other inventions, such as a type of ceiling fan, because the modern American versions of these things are not available there. More broadly, Allie sees himself as an "inventor" of a different way of life for himself and his family, separate from the norms and expectations of American society. But Allie's inventiveness is limited to his preexisting worldview. He never asks anyone else for ideas or even listens when they are offered. Allie is only interested in innovations that he comes up with himself.

**Nature** *The Mosquito Coast* takes its modern American characters into a remote setting in which they must live face-to-face with nature, in the form of the Central American jungle with all its overgrown plants, rushing water, and heat. However, Allie does not seem to be interested in increasing his and his family's proximity to nature *per se*; rather, he simply wants to take them away from modern conveniences and modern society. Nature, for Allie, is essentially the absence of these things; he likes living in the wilderness because it offers the opportunity for invention and for feats of self-deprivation and valor, not because he sees any value in communing with nature for its own sake. This attitude is at odds with many films and literary works (including Weir's earlier *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*), in which characters from modern industrial society are brought into direct contact with nature and are transformed by the encounter. Those earlier films portray nature as a beautiful and dangerously sublime entity that can produce an existential crisis in the modern human being. *The Mosquito Coast* focuses only on the practical demands that life in the wilderness places on the characters (such as cutting down trees to make space for a house, making ice to combat the heat, and dragging the boat to evade a flood).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do you agree with Allie's opinions about modern society, whether in the U.S. or similar countries?
2. How did you feel about Allie as a person? Does your liking or disliking for him match up to your level of agreement with his opinions, or not?
3. How did you feel about the conflict between Allie and Reverend Spellgood? Did you find yourself taking a side, and if so, what was it?
4. What did you find yourself hoping would happen in the end of the film? Why do you think you hoped for that outcome?
5. Are there any ideas of Allie's that you think could be usefully implemented in your own society? If so, what, and why?