

Joyce, William. *The Fantastic Flying Books of Morris Lessmore*. Shreveport, LA: Moonbot Books, 2011. iPad app.

It seems strange that a story that expresses such love towards books as physical objects was first produced as an award-winning animated short film, and then adapted into an “interactive narrative experience” for the iPad. The protagonist, Morris Lessmore, is transported via hurricane to another land where he encounters a young woman held aloft by a flock of anthropomorphized flying books. One book leads him to a house full of more books, where he ends up living. He takes care of the books, and lends them to drab, black-and-white people who bloom into full colour (à la *Wizard of Oz*) as soon as they receive their reading material. Finally, as an old man, he is whisked away by the books, and the book that he wrote is used to draw a young girl into the house to take over his role as caretaker.

It is usually the fate of new media to be unfavourably compared to more established media forms, but in this case, Morris Lessmore also suffers from being an adaptation rather than an original work. This iPad version seems uncomfortably caught between the fluidity and liveliness of the original animated film and the sequential narrative of a traditional picture book. Like a video game adaptation of a major motion picture in which the player re-enacts a simple replay of the movie plot, many of the interactive features of this book app seem contrived, acting as tacked-on gimmicks rather than being truly integrated with the story as a unique experience.

However, that does not mean that the narrative experience is entirely without merit. The animation (taken directly from the film) looks amazing on the iPad’s vibrant screen, and finding the hidden “Easter eggs” on each page is quite entertaining for all ages. Moonbot Studios also gets extra credit for its inventive use of the iPad’s touch interface - readers will enjoy swiping, coloring, dragging, and even playing the piano on the screen, even if these activities are sometimes tangential to the narrative itself. Despite its shortcomings, Morris Lessmore stands out as exceptional in comparison to other picture book apps currently available for the iPad. As a final incentive, it is very reasonably priced; for only \$4.99 at the iTunes Store, the app is much less than your average print picture book (although there’s not much chance of finding it at your local library).

Recommended: 3 out of 4 stars
Reviewer: Dale Storie