

Whale rider essay



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Whale Rider is a 2002 drama film directed by Niki Caro, based on the novel of the same name. A contemporary story of love, rejection and triumph as a young Maori girl fights to full fill a destiny her grandfather refuses to recognize.

The film whale rider follows the story of a young girl Paikea; the lonely daughter of Porourangi. Pai's mother died giving birth to her and her twin brother who also dies. Porourangi was heartbroken by his loss and leaves his daughter to be brought up by her grandparents. Also leaving his village and the Maori traditions behind him. Porourangi's father, Koro, is the chief of Whangar tribe but his beliefs of the traditional cultures blind him to his granddaughter's potential as the leader of the tribe. It is only when disaster strikes Pai can prove to her Grandfather that the Maori culture lives on.

The culture and traditions of the Maori people are significant to the plot of the whale rider. The Maori religion considers nature as a living thing, closely bound to man through ritual as we see many times during the film. The setting of the film is very important, as is the traditional beliefs that only a male can lead the Maori people. In the movie we first see this when Koro sets up the school for the young boys to trial and become the leader of the tribe; Whilst this is happening, Pai is always secretly watching and trying to learn the ways of the ancestors, showing her strength and determination as the true leader should.

Pai's relationship with her grandfather, Koro, is threatened by her strength and determination to adapt and so carry on traditions that have been important within the Maori culture for generations. Tradition dictates that in

every generation the chief's eldest son will take over his role As Pai grows up, her belief that she can become chief grows stronger. She loves her grandfather and desperately tries to prove herself but Koro cannot adapt and her determination constantly threatens their relationship. Throughout the film Pai consistently proves her ability to lead; she demonstrates the necessity to both hold on to the important values within a society while adapting to new challenges and ideas. This theme is also explored through the coming of the whale, which symbolises the importance of understanding our relationship with the natural world.

The director Niki Caro has used a number of cinematic techniques in this film to create atmosphere and sometimes show what the character is feeling. These three well-used techniques are camera shots, lighting and sound and dialogue. By using these techniques Niki has created a film that is emotionally connected to the viewers. During the film she has also used quite a number of underwater shots to create a great amount of tension and to show the whales and how they are acting. Voice overs are used over the film to tell the story; it gives a feeling of truth and gives the viewer the perspective of Pai and her story. The movie starts with a voice over it gives a very emotional and personal feeling as Pai tells us the story of the ancestors and it tells about the relationship between Pai and Koro. The music from the film is made up of a mixture of traditional Maori songs, whale sounds, sea sounds and instrumental music. Together, these sounds create a strong sense of place and enhance the message of the film.

Throughout this film I have learnt about the different cultures and traditions of the Maori's. They have very different beliefs; it has really improved my

knowledge on how other cultures have different beliefs and traditions. The Maori's were very interesting because of the aspect that only a male can lead, the women are treated as lower class, but Pai proves that women are just as capable to lead. I also found it interesting that the Maori's consider nature as a living thing, bound tightly to man, as we see in the movie Pai can sense the whales and they can hear her. This becomes a problem as the whales become beached and start to die, it is only when Pai "the whale rider" rides the whale back to the ocean and the others follow. We then see Pai in the hospital with the whale tooth around her neck. This shows the tribe have accepted that she was the rightful leader.

Over all watching the whale rider has broadened my understanding of cultures and the way that tribes communicate and carry on the ways of the ancestors past. It is constantly changing and easily lost because of the way things change, but there is always a solution but not the one that we first think. Cultures can adapt, as the tribe did. The explaining of the rope is very significant, but Pai being able to fix the rope gives a positive aspect on what could just be around the corner. So Change is good, and it could be a new adventure.