Hank Williams First nations – plot summaries etc.

An elderly Cree man decides that before he dies he must travel via Greyhound from his remote Indian Reservation in Northern Canada, into the southern United States to visit the grave of Hank Williams. Along the way he and his travelling companion, a 17 yr old nephew, are picked up as a regional human-interest story in the US press. News of their growing celebrity causes a stir back home among an eclectic cast of locals; including a chief running desperately for re-election, a young girl trying desperately to find a prom date, a teacher trying desperately to help, and a social worker trying desperately to get a transfer.

*Hank Williams First Nation* is a harmless and occasionally charming movie that seems to want less to tell you a story than to paint an open-ended portrait of a community. I couldn’t help but think while I watched it that while it didn’t amount to much as a movie, it would make for an effective pilot for a TV series. It wasn’t much of a surprise then when I learned that a year after the film was made, a TV series was spun off from it.

The film takes place on a reservation in Alberta and focuses primarily on one family. Sarah (Stacy Da Silva) and Jacob (Colin Van Loon) Fox are two teenagers being raised by their grandparents (Gordon Tootoosis and Edna Rain). Sarah excels as a student and longs for affection from her cheating boyfriend and her absentee mother. Jacob is a poet with dreams of getting away, though he knows that everyone on the reservation claims to want to get away but never succeeds. He gets his chance to get off the reservation when his grandfather asks him to go to Nashville to accompany his elderly Uncle Martin (Jimmy Herman) who wants to visit the grave of Hank Williams.

While Jacob and Martin make their way through the States, Sarah navigates her own personal turmoil. She had been looking forward to a visit from her mother, who doesn’t show up, and confesses to a teacher that she has no relationship with her father. She has a boyfriend but also engages in a tentative flirtation with Huey (Bernard Starlight), a student in name only whose focus is primarily on his business selling wood. Ever the opportunist, Huey also comes up with a way to use Jacob and Martin’s trip to raise money by convincing people that it’s a fundraising trip and having them sponsor it.

Packed with fascinating characters and scenarios, *Hank Williams First Nation*depicts life in a remote Albertan Cree community - the frigid cold, the idleness, the hopes of its members and its adulation of the titular country-music legend. Adelard Fox (Gordon Tootoosis) asks the school principal (Ron Waller) to excuse his grandson Jacob (Colin Van Loon) for a few weeks right before midterms. Suspecting Hank Williams, Sr. might still be alive and hoping to track him down, 75-year-old tabloid enthusiast Martin Fox (Jimmy Herman) needs Jacob's assistance on an impromptu journey to Nashville, Tenn. Meanwhile, high-school valedictorian Sarah Fox (Stacy Da Silva) is struggling with insecurities as she searches for a date and copes with her parents' perpetual absence. Practically a dropout, Huey Bigstone (Bernard Starlight) sells firewood door to door and raises money for the sketchy Community Betterment and Enhancement Committee.

One priceless scene has Adelard and Chief Chicken Wings (Raymond Carafelle) conversing in Cree without any subtitles, but the occasional English vocabulary in their exchange hilariously clues viewers in on the topic of discussion and ingeniously underscores the larger cultural war and identity crisis within the community. Another amazing scene captures Huey and Jacob's small talk over lunch entirely in a masterful long shot.

**Monkey Beach Plot Summary**

As the book begins, Lisa wakes up as her parents are preparing to leave to help with the search to find her brother who is missing at sea. Lisa remains behind in the village. Lisa decides to join her parents, however, she cannot find a flight which will quickly take her to where they are, so she decides to take her family‟s motorboat on a long journey along the Pacific Ocean coast to get there. Along the way, something horrible happens, and she either almost drowns and is rescued by her brother, almost drowns and gets a vision from her dead brother to send a message to his girlfriend, or drowns.

Intertwined with this sequence of events is a series of flashbacks in which we learn about Lisa‟s life up until this point.

Lisa is born and raised in the village by her parents and a number of aunts, her grandmother, and her uncle. She grows close to her uncle and grandmother and is devastated when they die.

After they die she leaves for Vancouver where she loses herself in the party scene. After receiving a vision that her best friend has died, she meets up with another friend and returns to the village. Once home, she grows close to her brother. Her brother falls in love, but upon finding out that his soon-to-be fiance was raped by another man he takes a fishing job with the man and kills him on the ocean after sinking their boat.

**Characters in the Novel**

**Lisa:**Lisamarie Michelle Hill, main character. Teenage girl in the late 1980s.

**Ma-ma-oo:**Lisa‟s paternal grandmother. Lisa is close to her grandmother, and the grandmother teaches Lisa to connect with the land and the spirit world. Ma-ma-oo teaches Lisa a new Haisla word everyday, tells her the history of places, and teaches her resource harvesting traditions. Ma-ma-oo also tells Lisa about her family history.

**Ba-ba-oo:**Lisa‟s late paternal grandfather. He died before Lisa knew him. He was violent towards his wife, but his wife holds no ill-will.

 **Albert:**Al, Lisa‟s dad

**Gladys:**Lisa‟s mom

**Mick:**Michael, Lisa‟s paternal uncle. Mick takes Lisa out on the ocean to check the family nets and is close to Lisa. Mick left home to join the American Indian Movement and returned home after a long absence. Mick is jovial and has a good relationship with his brother, Al. Mick is also close to Lisa‟s mom and has a good relationship with Ma-ma-oo. While Mick does drink andsmoke,itisnottotheextentthatitharmshisrelationshipswiththosearoundhim. Having lost his first wife, Mick lives alone as a sort of rootless bachelor, and the possibility that he will leave again is always looming.

**Jimmy:**Lisa‟s younger brother.

**Trudy:**Lisa‟s paternal aunt and Tab‟s mother. Drinks heavily and dates Josh.

Neglects/verbally abuses her daughter and hates Ma-ma-oo. Her real name is Getrude, but she won‟t let anyone call her that.

**Aunt Kate:**Lisa‟s paternal aunt. Lisa doesn‟t like going to Aunt Kate‟s because she supervises them too closely. Erica‟s mother.

**Uncle Geordie:**Lisa‟s paternal great uncle.

**Aunt Edith:**Lisa‟s paternal great uncle‟s wife.

**Thelittleman:**a spiritual apparition that appears to Lisa before something happens. Comes from a cedar tree. She cannot understand her premonitions, and so is often frustrated with the little man.

**B’gwus:**sasquatch

**Spotty:**Jimmy‟s crow.

**Queen of the North:**Josh‟s boat, which Jimmy has gone out on with Josh, and which is lost at sea.

**Frank:**Lisa‟s friend. Is the school bully in the beginning of the novel, along with friends Pooch and Cheese, however, becomes Lisa‟s friend later in the novel. While Frank is romantically interested in Lisa, they both date other people throughout the course of the book.

**Pooch:**Lisa‟s friend, and for a period towards the end of the book, boyfriend. Frank‟s cousin.

**Cheese:**Lisa‟s friend for a period in the book, described by another character as creepy.

Frank‟s cousin.

**Tab:**Tabitha, Aunt Trudy‟s daughter, Lisa‟s closest friend and cousin.

**Erica:**a girl Lisa‟s age who is very popular in the village. She is the Queen Bee of Lisa‟s age group and because Lisa sees her as shallow and preoccupied with trivial things like her hair, Lisa‟s friendship with Erica is strained, at best. Erica is also Lisa‟s cousin.

**J.J.:**Erica‟s older brother

**Josh:**Mick‟s friend, Trudy‟s on again off again boyfriend, someone in the novel says that there‟s something not right about him.

**Adeline:**a girl from the village who is strikingly beautiful, much more so than Erica. Introduced to us when both Adeline and Lisa are children, Adeline grows up to be a hard drinker, fighter, and takes on the nickname Karaoke later in the novel. Towards the end of the novel, Adeline and Jimmy begin a romantic relationship. Adeline is also Frank‟s cousin and Josh‟s niece.

**Ronny:**Adeline‟s sidekick, Frank‟s girl cousin.

 **Mrs. Jenkins:**Lisa‟s psychologist, who she sees once.

**Cookie:**Mick‟s A.I.M. wife. Mick and Cookie married through a medicine man, broke up and made up many times. Cookie was killed in a suspicious accident.

**Annabella:**Jimmy‟s eighth-grade girlfriend.

**mimayus:**Lisa‟s paternal grandmother‟s sister. She was beautiful, and left the village to be closer to a man that she loved, however, upon her arrival he died on a boat in a storm. Died before Lisa knew her.

**Bib:**Frank‟s older brother

**Julie:**Frank‟s girlfriend for a portion of the novel.

**Alexis:**Lisa‟s cat, named after a character on her grandmother‟s favorite soap opera, Dynasty

**Screwy Ruby:**a destitute woman in the village who chases coins when kids roll them down the street. Rumored to be a witch.

**Themes**

**Spiritual awareness:**Lisa grapples with a gift. First, she is able to see a little man that often appears before something bad happens. Second, she often has dreams with people in her life or symbols which warn her of events to come or help her grapple with struggles in her life. Third, throughout the book she increasingly sees ghosts. Fourth, towards the end of the book she begins sleepwalking. Lisa flirts with bad intentions, and is often called to by spirits to help her solve her problems through a meat offering. The spirit world is understood in a metaphor of a medicinal plant which is very powerful, but also very dangerous if you don‟t know what you‟re doing with it. Lisa seeks guidance for her gift through her grandmother, Ma-ma-oo, however, when Ma-ma-oo passes Lisa no longer has someone to turn to for guidance, and her descent into drugs and alcohol is in part a reaction to the increasing presence of her gift without someone there to assist her in understanding it. Lisa‟s father does not understand her gift at all, Lisa‟s mother has some of the gift but denies it, and Lisa‟s uncle Mick is open to her gift, but cannot serve as a guide to her like Ma-ma-oo can. Lisa‟s brother is not receptive to her gift. At one point, another character, Cheese, ostracized Lisa because of her gift.

**Grief:**Early in the book, we learn that Lisa‟s uncle Mick grieves for his wife who died in a mysterious accident. His grief shows itself in nightmares he has where he calls out her name. Lisa‟s grandmother does not grieve for her dead husband because he abused her. Lisa‟sAunt Trudy grieves for her childhood as she grew up with her abusive father and then was sent to residential school. Aunt Trudy deals with her grief by abusing alcohol and blaming Lisa‟s grandmother. As the novel goes on, Lisa loses her uncle Mick and grieves by turning numb and withdrawing from her usual friends and from school. When Ma-ma-oo dies, Lisa responds by losing herself in a cycle of alcohol and drug abuse. She returns to the village after the death of a friend and tries to deal with her pain by going back to school and focusing on a goal. Her brother, Jimmy, deals with the grief of losing his goal of qualifying as an Olympic swimmer in an accident, and he responds with rage, followed by alcohol abuse. His grief subsides when he falls in love and begins a relationship with Adelaine, however, when she leaves him his rage followed by alcohol abuse resumes until she returns and they rekindle their romance.

**Sexual assault:**It is alluded to that one of the main characters, Josh, was sexually abused by a priest in residential school. Josh then goes on to rape Adelaine, who aborts the resulting pregnancy. A car full of white men threatens Erica with sexual assault in Terrace, and when Lisa intervenes they threaten her. Lisa‟s Aunt Trudy explains that while they could not publicly abduct a white girl, because Lisa is native she is expected by society to be a slut, therefore it is possible that the men could have abducted her off the street and assaulted her. Lisa‟s friend Cheese drugs her and assaults her, then tells Frank, who likes Lisa, that it was consensual. Jimmy finds out about Josh‟s sexual assault on Adelaine and goes on to kill him in revenge.

**Sibling relationships:**At first Jimmy is Lisa‟s annoying tag-along little brother. Then, Jimmy becomes a competitive swimmer and Lisa has a hard time relating to him because swimming takes over his life. Jimmy wants to become an Olympic swimmer, and the attention that he gets from swimming draws the attention of girls at school. Throughout the course of the novel, Jimmy becomes increasingly popular and successful in school, while Lisa becomes more isolated and less successful. Lisa likes to go Christmas tree hunting in the woods, while Jimmy doesn‟t see the point. While Jimmy is skeptical about spiritual matters (yet remains superstitious by feeding his crows), spiritual matters play a large role in Lisa‟s life. While Lisa is close to Ma-ma-oo and Mick, Jimmy is engrossed in swimming. As Lisa‟s drug and alcohol use increases, Jimmy maintains his health as an athlete. Towards the end of the book,both gain a better understanding of each other as Jimmy understands Lisa‟s grief over the death of their uncle and grandmother and Lisa understands Jimmy‟s goal-driven behaviour through her desire to graduate high school before he does. In the end, Lisa tries to save Jimmy by taking him out on a boat to dry out after his girlfriend leaves him, and Jimmy saves Lisa by helping her with her schoolwork. Jimmy eventually ends up with his crush, while Lisa avoids a relationship with Frank who is interested in her.

**Death and disfigurement:**While Ma-ma-oo presents an appealing version of the afterlife, Lisa encounters many episodes of disfigurement. First, there is a strange incident where she finds a mutilated dog in the ditch. Then, her father‟s chickens are maimed by hawks. She is with her father when they discover her uncle‟s body partially eaten by seals and disfigured from being in the ocean. She also hears of her grandfather‟s body being recovered from an overflowing bathtub.

**Racism:**Ba-ba-oo, who lost his arm fighting a war, did not get compensated from Veterans Affairs because they said Indian Affairs would cover it, and did not get compensated by Indian Affairs because they said Veteran‟s Affairs would cover it. Residential schools ,a mandatory federal policy for Indian children, causes a rift in the family because Trudy believe that Ma-ma- oo chose to send her there. Erica and Lisa are harassed by a carload of white men who threaten them because they are native and no bystanders intervene despite the fact that it happens in broad daylight. Alcan pollutes one of the oolichan rivers, reducing the supply and causing villagers to have to travel farther out of their way to fish oolichan.

**Keeping secrets:**Throughout the novel Lisa keeps secrets of both spiritual and non-spiritual things that happen. Some of them are small, such as her sighting of b‟gwus crossing the road, but some of them are big, such as little man. Lisa keeps secrets that belong to others, too, such as the time that she saw Mick kiss Gladys‟ neck. She shares some secrets with others, such as her abilit to see ghosts; some secrets, such as Cheese‟s sexual assault, are figured out by other characters close to her; and some secrets, such as her death sending from Tab are never revealed to other characters. She is also constantly trying to make sense of others by unravelling the secrets of those around her, such as Mick‟s relationships and Josh‟s history as a sexually abused child and sexual predator. Dreams may help unravel secrets, but certainly not in a straightforward way.

**Multiple perspectives on the same story:**This is in part, a storytelling strategy, however, it also reflects worldview. For example, in the first telling of b‟gwus Lisa‟s dad tells a gory version and Ma-ma-oo gets upset that he embellishes it. Ma-ma-oo also tells Lisa that stories used to be raunchier than they are now. The character of Ba-ba-oo highlights how different people can have drastically different versions of the same story.

**Structure**

The novel is structured in four chapters. The narrative is told in first person from Lisa‟s perspective. The main part of the narrative begins with Lisa waking up shortly after finding out that her brother is lost at sea and ends with Lisa at sea looking for her brother. During the present narrative, Lisa reflects on events leading up to her brother‟s disappearance and significant events in her life. Intertwined with this narrative is a series of frequent and sometimes lengthy flashbacks which illustrate how her brother came to be lost at sea, Lisa‟s relationship with her brother, and Lisa‟s relationship with the spirit world. Lisa‟s flashbacks begin in childhood and end the day that her brother left to sea.

**Chapter by Chapter Summary Part One: Love Like the Ocean**

***\*IMPORTANT NOTE\* -Present day is in italics,*memories are in normal font.**

*Lisa hears crows telling her la’es - go down to the bottom of the ocean. Lisa awakes to find her parents in the kitchen. Her brother’s boat, Queen of the North, is lost at sea a six hour boat ride away. Lisa dreamt that she saw her brother at Monkey Beach.*

• Lisa remembers her father telling them, as children, stories about B‟gwus (sasquatch). Jimmy wanted to take a picture of b‟gwus because he saw a tabloid ad offering a reward for a picture of sasquatch. The goes to Monkey Beach. Lisa sees a sasquatch, Jimmy does not, she doesn‟t tell him.

*Lisa reflects on her dream, knows it isn’t a death sending because they happen when you’re awake.*

• Lisa remembers a dead dog and the first time she saw him - a “little dark man with bright red hair,” before a tidal wave hit the village.

*Lisa smokes on the balcony with her father and wishes she could talk to him about spiritual matters.*

• Lisa remembers seeing the little man and telling her mother, but her mother said it was a nightmare.

• Mick returns from a long, unexplained absence. The children don‟t recognized him, but everyone else is happy to see him.

• Little man is described in more detail. • Lisa remembers the tidal wave. • Lisa remembers her dad buying chickens and hawks attacking the chickens.

*Lisa’s parents leave,and Aunt Edith stays with Lisa at the house. Lisa remembers her brother telling her that he took the job on the Queen of the North “to make things right.”*

• Lisa remembers a childhood day on the beach with Tab, Erica, and Jimmy. They meet a new girl, Adelaine, who is very beautiful. Lisa ditches Jimmy and her mother tells her that someday she‟ll miss having him around all the time. Jimmy was a good swimmer but Lisa struggled to learn. When Jimmy got a bike Lisa injured herself learning how to ride before he did.

• Lisa remembers the first time Mick babysat her and Jimmy and how Mick told her about his time in AIM.

• Lisa remembers a funeral feast where Ma-ma-oo and Trudy didn‟t get along. Ma-ma-oo said that there was something wrong with Josh. Tab tells Lisa that Ma-ma-oo and Trudy don‟t get along because Ba-ba-oo was abusive and Ma-ma-oo chose to send Mick and Trudy to residential school instead of kicking Ba-ba-oo out of the house.

• Lisa remembers seeing Mick in an angry rage after Elvis died. Mick then went to Graceland without telling anyone where he was going and was gone for a month.

• Lisa remembers playing with Erica when the town bully Frank, along with Cheese and Pooch, tried to pick on them. Lisa and Frank fought, Lisa won, and both ended up in the ER.

• Lisa remembers Christmas tree hunting with her father and Mick.

• Barry, Cookie‟s brother, comes to town, and the family discovers that Mick was married to Cookie.

• Lisa and Mick go q‟alh‟m picking with Mick and they bring some to Ma-ma-oo.

• Lisa and Ma-ma-oo make an offering to Ba-ba-oo on his birthdy. Lisa doesn‟t tell her mom. Ba-ba-oo was a vet who lost an arm but didn‟t get compensated through Veteran‟s Affairs because he was an Indian or through Indian Affairs because he was a veteran.

• Tab and Lisa smoke at the graveyard. *Phone call from Lisa’s parents. No news from Jimmy. Lisa goes into Jimmy’s room.*

• Lisa remembers going to fishing camp with Mick and seeing ghosts on the way. Mick tells Lisa about her parents‟ first almost-date. Mick finds a halibut in a crabtrap and Mick says it‟s a magic thing and lets it go. Mother, Geordie, and Edith meet them at a cabin. Lisa mentions ghosts. Mick asks Gladys if she‟s ever told Lisa about Ba-ba-oo, Gladys says no, they change the subject. Mick has a nightmare about Cookie. Mick, Gladys, and Lisa decided to go camping at a nearby lake. Gladys tells a story about Stone Man. When they return to camp Geordie and Edith have left for supplies. Mick goes jigging. Lisa leave the cabin without permission and explores an abandoned village. When she comes back she sees Mick put his arms around Gladys‟ waist and kiss her neck. Gladys removes his arms from her waist. On the way home from the camp Gladys has a vision.

• Lisa further contemplates the gore of the chickens.

• Lisa remembers Jimmy‟s crow Spotty.

• Lisa remembers visiting Tab‟s and Aunt Trudy drunkenly telling her that Mick was a drunk back in the day and in love with Gladys. Lisa returns the next day and a hungover Trudy tells her that Mick and Gladys dated but nothing happened because Mick mysteriously disappeared, and Gladys was upset but Albert comforted her, and they‟ve been together since.

• Little man appears, touches Lisa, trying to comfort her.

*Spotty tells Lisa la’sda. Her parents cal to say that the search party has found the empty life raft from Queen of the North. Lisa decided to take an 11 hour journey by speedboat to meet up with her parents. She leaves a note on the table for Aunt Edith.*

**Part Two: The Song of Your Breath**

*Lisa is on the boat, passing a graveyard.*

• After Mick‟s funeral Josh gave Lisa two pictures of Mick and $100. Barry shares memories of Mick‟s AIM days with Lisa.

• Trudy gets evicted and Tab announced that they‟re moving to Vancouver.

• Lisa makes an offering to Mick.

• Lisa, Ma-ma-oo, and Gladys can and smoke fish.

 • Ma-ma-oo and Lisa pick oxasuli - “powerful medicine. Very dangerous. It can kill you, do you understand? You have to respect it.” Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa. Ma-ma-oo teaches Lisa how to ward off ghosts and Lisa tells Ma-ma-oo about the little man after Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa about cedar spirits that lead medicine men to the best cedars to make canoes out of. Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that Lisa‟s maternal side of the family has a gift of being able t predict the future. Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that the man is an unreliable guide. “Never trust the spirit world too much. They think different than the living.” Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that there‟s good medicine and bad, and it‟s “best not to deal with it at all if you don‟t know what you‟re doing.”

• Lisa goes back to school. Frank is at her school because he‟s been kicked out of all other schools for fighting. Frank chooses Lisa as a bullying target.

• Lisa sinks into a depression.

• Jimmy takes Lisa for a joyride in their parents‟ vehicle, then encourages Lisa to drive. When she does they get caught and she doesn‟t tell their parents that it was Jimmy‟s idea.

• Ma-ma-oo and Lisa go berry picking and Ma-ma-oo shares a story about her late sister, Mimayus, who fell in love with a man from far away and died in a storm travelling to visit him when she was young.

• Description of a heart

*Lisa regrets not going with her parents. Drinks coffee while boating.*

• Lisa‟s grades drop. Jimmy keeps working towards his goal of qualifying for the Olympics as a swimmer.

• Franks leaves a dead frog in Lisa‟s desk. Lisa, angry that Frank killed a frog for a prank, fights Frank in the classroom.

• Lisa talks back to Erica, and Erica responds by pitting her friends against Lisa. In the heat of the moment Lisa reveals an embarrassing fact about Erica and makes her cry. Lisa becomes a social outcast.

• Lisa visits Ma-ma-oo. Lisa cuts her hair in mourning.

 • Erica‟s friend threatens to fight Lisa after school, Lisa punches her out at lunch which endears her to Frank. Frank, Pooch, Cheese, and Lisa begin a friendship.

• Contacting the dead lesson two.

• Lisa invites the boys over for her birthday party, surprising her mother.

• Lisa communicates with Screwy Ruby, and Screwy Ruby tells Lisa that she‟s a bad girl.

• Further description of a heart.

• Brief Haisla history lesson.

• Ma-ma-oo shares memories of Mick and Albert in their youth.

• Cheese, Frank, and Pooch share their dreams for the future.

• Tab returns and Lisa smokes marijuana with her for the first time. Tab says Cheese is a pervert. Tab hitch-hiked up from Vancouver without permission, and when Josh comes to drive her back she says she‟d rather hitch-hike back, then is strange when she gets in the truck with him.

• Ma-ma-oo tells a story of a woman who kills her husband with a paddle to be with his brother.

• Lisa and Albert go to Overwaite to buy a Christmas tree.

• Contacting the dead lesson three.

• Ma-ma-oo and Lisa pick kolu‟n.

 • Lisa discovers that Pooch practices voodoo.

• Lisa tries a contacting the dead spell, then fears that she‟s accidentally put her brother at harm. She insists he be with her so that she can watch over him, and during this time he meets Adelaine. • Alexis goes missing so Pooch, Cheese, Frank, and Lisa try to use the Ouija board to find her. It spells out JOSH BED, and when asked about Alexis spells out WORM MEAT.

• Frank sends Lisa an unsigned Valentines card which she ignores.

• Little man shocks Lisa awake.

• Ma-ma-oo survives a health scare.

• Pooch falls into a deep sleep after drinking a single can of beer.

• Frank and Julie become steady partners.

• Lisa‟s mom catches her smoking.

• Cheese asks Lisa out, telling her she can make Frank jealous, Lisa turns him down.

• Lisa goes to Terrace where she sees Erica being harassed by a car full of white guys. Lisa intervenes and a confrontation escalates till a bystander steps in. The abuse by the white guys is sexual and racist.

• Trudy, Josh, and Tab are visiting. Josh calls Lisa “little Mick.” Little man darted into Lisa‟s closet in the morning and wouldn‟t come out till she put her bathrobe on.

• Trudy tells Lisa to be more careful because priests in residential schools weren‟t punished for sexually abusing kids, and a car full of white guys wouldn‟t be punished for sexually assaulting her because society expects natives to be “born sluts.”

• Cheese spikes Lisa‟s beer at a party and sexually assaults her. Little man appears at Tab‟s house afterwards and Lisa is angry at him for not doing anything to stop the assault. Spirits in the woods offer to hurt „him‟ if Lisa brings them meat. Cheese tells Frank that Lisa had consensual intercourse with him, Frank goes to Lisa to confirm it, when she implicitly denies it he leaves.

• While sleeping on the beach with Ma-ma-oo Lisa hears footsteps. When she tells Ma- ma-oo, she is told not to be scared of things she doesn‟t understand.

• Lisa begins sleepwalking.

• Pooch tells Lisa that Frank beat up Cheese.

• Lisa meets with a psychologist with a strange creature attached to her.

 • Lisa‟s grades continue to slip. • At a party, Adelaine resurfaces as Karaoke.

• M-ma-oo survives a heart attack.

• Ma-ma-oo begins seeing ghosts of old friends and family.

• Lisa leaves a party to be alone, hears footsteps but ignores them. Meanwhile, Ma-ma-oo dies in a house fire. Ma-ma-oo leaves Lisa over $200,000.

**Part Three: In Search of the Elusive Sasquatch**

• Modernization of Weegit. *Lisa stops at Monkey Beach, hears whispering and giggling.*

• Lisa remembers visiting Monkey Beach in 1998, “another banner year” [of partying]. Lisa partied through grade ten, gave up on grade eleven, and partied for a year in Vancouver.

• The interest from the money Ma-ma-oo gave her paid for her drugs and alcohol and bought her friends.

• Lisa a a vision where the ghost of Tab tells her that Tab was killed by booze hound rednecks, and that Lisa should “get her act together and go home.”

• Lisa dries out alone in a hotel room, then finds Aunt Trudy. Aunt Trudy says that Tab is alive. Josh takes Trudy and Lisa to a booze can where they run into Frank and Frank ignores Josh. Josh tells Lisa about Cookie‟s unnatural and suspicious death. Frank and Lisa briefly talk. A woman makes a joke about priests and sexual abuse. Karaoke asks Josh for money. Josh says she should be home, and offers to take her home. She leaves without him. Lisa finds Frank on her way out of the booze can and he gives her a ride. During the ride he tells her Pooch has committed suicide and that he and Karaoke are on their way up to the funeral. Frank offers Lisa a ride back in the morning and she accepts.

• On the way home Frank reveals to Lisa that he received a death sending from Pooch. Lisa changes the subject. Frank reveals that he always wanted to ask her out, but thought she deserved better. • While the others sleep Lisa takes a turn driving and sees b‟gwus, but doesn‟t tell the others.

*Lisa is at Monkey Beach and hears voices offering to help her.*

• Description of b`gwus.

• At Pooch`s funeral Karaoke says they all know why he killed himself and beings saying something about Josh before Frank cuts her off.

 • Lisa and Karaoke go to a party and see Cheese who calls Lisa a freak who can see ghosts.

• Jimmy is at the party and he and Karaoke share a moment across the room.

• Jimmy and Lisa talk. Lisa discovers that Jimmy has given up swimming. Jimmy brings Lisa home to see her parents.

• Erica, who has finished high school and had a baby, visits Lisa. Lisa tells Erica that she is going back to school with the goal of ensuring that she does not graduate after Jimmy does. Lisa gets caught up in studying. Jimmy dates many girls, but not Karaoke.

• Frank invites Lisa to Karaoke`s birthday party, Lisa invites Jimmy. At the party Karaoke tells Lisa that Josh thinks Lisa is special because she reminds him of Mickl Karaoke says she`s going to kick his ass one of these days. Jimmy and Karaoke finally make a connection. Lisa has a dream of Ma-ma-oo and a logging road in which Ma-ma-oo tells her to find mimayus. Lisa uses the information to find Jimmy and Karaoke after they have been missing long enough for others to worry.

*The voices at Monkey Beach tell Lisa that they can help her if she gives them meat.*

• Tsonoqua, another mythical figure, is described.

• Karaoke leaves Kitimaat without explanation. Jimmy responds in anger then parties. Lisa takes him to Monkey Beach to dry out. Lisa and Jimmy have a heart to heart.

• Jimmy finds a new dream - opening a crow research center.

• Lisa dreams of Ma-ma-oo`s reaction to Ba-ba-oo`s death.

• Lisa sleepwalks, and Jimmy finds her after Spotty wakes him up.

• Karaoke returns and Jimmy and her return to their romance.

• Jimmy reveals to his family his plan to give Karaoke a promise ring. Jimmy begins to budget for a wedding.

*The voices in the tress offer to help Lisa. She responds that she has no meat but makes an offering of her own blood.*

• Jimmy decides to take a job on a fishing boat with Josh. Lisa tells Karaoke and Karaoke is surprised. Jimmy leaves for the fishing trip and tells Lisa to tell Karaoke that he loves her. Karaoke responds to the news that Jimmy has left by punching another girl out.

• Lisa decides to show Karaoke the ring, and finds a picture in Jimmy`s belongings which explains Josh`s experiences at residential school, Karaoke`s hate for Josh, and the reason for Karaoke`s abrupt and mysterious trip to Vancouver.

*After her blood offering Lisa hears something slither.*

**Part Four: The Land of the Dead**

• *Lisa dreams of herself, Mick, and Ba-ba-oo hunting for Christmas trees.*

• *Lisa awakes to the voices asking for more blood, she demands to know where Jimmy is first.*

• *Lisa learns that Jimmy sunk Josh`s boat and killed Josh, then set out to swim to shore.*

• *Lisa tells the voices that`s not what she wanted to know. They demand more blood. Lisa makes her way to the speedboat but it hits her on the head before she can get on.*

• *Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa ``You have a dangerous gift, it`s like okxasuli. Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you.``*

• *Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa to go back. Lisa asks about Jimmy and Ma-ma-oo doesn`t give her any information.*

• *Lisa manages to take a breath before going underwater again.*

• *A vision of Jimmy lifts her to the surface and fades.*

• *Lisa hears singing and sees a bonfire on the shore. Lisa struggles to reach the shore. Ma-ma-oo and Mick encourage her as she struggles towards the shore.*

• *The figures on the shore sing in Haisla, and sing a song that Ma-ma-oo shared with Lisa, which was written by Lisa`s great grandfather when his wife died, and which Ma-ma-oo sang for Mick.*

• *Lisa sees a pale after image of Jimmy telling Lisa to ``tell her.``*• *Lisa lies on the beach, hears a b`gwus, hears a speedboat.*

Plot[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Monkey_Beach&action=edit&section=1" \o "Edit section: Plot)]

The story of Monkey Beach is relayed through the eyes of Lisamarie Hill, a feisty young woman with supernatural abilities. Lisamarie's brother, Jimmy, has gone missing at sea under questionable circumstances. Lisamarie reflects on profound events in her life, as she waits on news of her brother. Perhaps in reflecting on these formidable events, a new light will be shed on the ominous circumstances in her life, and within the community of Kitamaat. The introduction of various memorable characters allows the reader to fully grasp the richness of Lisamarie’s tale. Lisamarie possesses’ supernatural abilities, the ability to see and to communicate with other worldly beings. These abilities are a source of contention, yet they will eventually satiate the turmoil in her life. The struggle between the physical plane and the supernatural realm also correlate to a greater struggle between cultural identity and mainstream society. In all of this, Lisamarie is led on a journey to understand the disappearance of her brother, and come to terms with her identity.

Symbolism[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Monkey_Beach&action=edit&section=2" \o "Edit section: Symbolism)]

Location and animal symbolism plays a large part in First Nations literature. Symbols are used as symbols of the ancestors or as warnings and messengers from the spirit world to those still living. The locations in Monkey Beach play a large part in the emotional progression of the characters. Throughout this and her following books Robinson uses all the natural elements to weave the culture of the land into the story.

Symbolism is a very important part of Monkey Beach as well as the Haisla culture. Throughout the story crow are used as a symbol of luck and warning for Robinson’s characters. The first introduction to the importance of crows in this story is Jimmy’s belief that they are a symbol of luck for him. This comes after feeding them before his swim meet leads inevitable win. Following this it becomes Jimmy’s good luck charm for his following competitions. Luck is not the only symbol that the crow carries, in another section of the novel Spotty Jimmy’s favorite raven alerts Jimmy to the danger his sister is in during the middle of the novel. Lisamarie had several encounters with crows playing a part in her spiritual visions. Coming along with the Red man who was a sign of death, the crows appearing with Jimmy were a sign of the impending threat to Jimmy’s life; a foreshadowing of what was to play out through the rest of the novel. Ravens and crows play a very large part in the mythological histories of many west coast First Nations communities. They represent both the trickster and the creator of the world. The Raven in Haida mythology is the bringer of light and stars to the world. Also according to some communities such as the Haida the Raven is seen as the creator of man as well, unlocked from the clam shell they were trapped in as expertly depicted by Bill Reid in his sculpture The Raven and the First Men. Haida mythology

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| --- |
|  Smoke signals- The film opens on the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation -- called "the rez" by its inhabitants -- in 1998. Immediately there is a flashback to July 4, 1976 when the community was celebrating "white man's Independence Day" in drunken abandon. Accidentally Arnold Joseph (Gary Farmer) sets an uncontrollable fire to his neighbor's house, killing the couple who live there. But Joseph catches the baby, Thomas, when he is thrown out of a second story window from the burning house. The rescued Thomas (Evan Adams) is brought up by his grandmother and along side of Victor (Adam Beach), Arnold Joseph's son of about the same age. Joseph keeps on drinking but is in despair about the conflagration and its consequences. 12-year-old Victor watches sullenly while his parents drink until one night he smashes all their beer bottles. This action is a wake-up call for Victor's mother, Arlene (Tantoo Cardinal), who insists that she and Arnold both stop drinking. She chases Arnold out of the house; he leaves, never to return, while Victor watches, sobbing. These elements of the story occur in flashbacks while the 20-year-old Victor and Thomas travel by bus to retrieve whatever they can of Arnold Joseph, who has died outside of Phoenix. The remaining story unfolds in that forsaken spot where Joseph lived in a trailer and befriended Suzy Song, a young Indian woman originally from New York. |
|  In spite of the grim events described above, the film has the typical tongue-in-cheek humor and cultural insight that characterize the work of [Sherman Alexie](http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/People?action=view&id=3751), who wrote the screenplay. It is filled with quirky individuals (a woman who only drives her car backwards; Thomas, who insists on wearing a dark suit and vest everywhere) and underplayed one-liners: the reservation radio announcer stating that it's "a good day to be indigenous"; Victor telling Thomas that he needs to stop smiling and look "stoic" if he wants to be a real Indian; the suggestion that Victor and Thomas will need a passport to the United States when they leave the reservation; and "the only thing more pathetic than watching Indians on TV is Indians watching Indians on TV." Nevertheless, there are serious threads that run throughout, such as the tragedy of reservation alcoholism, the long-range effects of parental desertion, and the power of imagination and story -- Thomas is a born storyteller who has a tale for every occasion, telling "both truth and lies." Thomas tells stories about Victor's father that give the father dignity and worth -- traits that ultimately turn out to be "true." Thomas is naïve, nerdy, and unworldly -- even otherworldly -- but he is also kind and generous and combats Victor's cynicism and disillusionment. As the film ends, Thomas is heard in voiceover: "How do we forgive our fathers? . . . If we forgive our fathers, what is left?" A striking and profound observation indeed. |

**Movie Description**

 For years and years, Hollywood has got it wrong by presenting stereotypes and inaccuracies about Native Americans. Alexie tackles these past indecencies by providing us with a script that genuinely depicts life on a reservation. The movie’s opening scene of a raging house fire on Idaho’s Coeura d’Alene Indian Reservation sets the tone for the film’s fiery relationships and internal struggles. The two main characters, Victor and Thomas, just babies at the time, are rescued from the fire by Victor’s father, Arnold Joseph. As the flames envelop the burning house, “Thomas’ rhythmic voice narrates the scene, explaining that some children are pillars of flame, while some are pillars of ash; he and Victor, he declares are both” ([yhonline](http://www.yalehearld.com/)).
 The movie alternates between past and present, acknowledging the frightening reality of dealing with the loss of family. Victor must handle being abandoned by his father, while the death of Thomas’ parents leaves him to be raised by his grandmother, played by Tantoo Cardinal. *Smoke Signals* focuses on the journey by Thomas and Victor from the Coeura d’Alene Reservation to Arizona to pick up the remains of Victor’s deceased father. Alexie’s tale comes to us through Thomas’s narration, a voice that reflects Alexie’s poetic nature. Alexie was a poet before being a screen writer or novelist. During an interview with Cineaste Magazine, Alexie reminds us that his poetry contains strong imagery. He wanted to avoid the traditional narrative in *Smoke Signals*; "I was not interested in their (other writers) formulas for successful screenplays... I was interested in going outside the traditional format. In my books, I've always been fascinated with dreams and stories and flashing forward and flashing back and playing with conventions of time.” Alexie admits that it is through Thomas’ storytelling that *Smoke Signals*' complicated layers adds to its success, “I always knew that while a person was talking we were going to see images from the story he or she was telling...the story of the movie is told by Thomas, so at certain points he's telling the story about himself telling the story about somebody else telling a story"
This dramatic feature was written, directed, and co-produced by Native Americans. Native American writer Sherman Alexie scripted this adaptation of his 1993 shortnto Fistfight in Heaven. Director Chris Eyre's previous short Someone Kept Saying Powwow is incorporated into the 88-minute feature. Developed at the Sundance Lab in 1995, the film was a The story centers on Victor Joseph ([Adam Beach](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Beach)) and Thomas Builds-the-Fire ([Evan Adams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evan_Adams)) who live on the [Coeur D'Alene Indian Reservation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coeur_d%27Alene_Reservation) in [Plummer, Idaho](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plummer%2C_Idaho). Thomas is an [eccentric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eccentricity_%28behavior%29) storyteller and Victor is an angry, rising local basketball star.

Victor and Thomas are brought together through Victor's father, Arnold ([Gary Farmer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_Farmer)). Arnold rescued Thomas as an infant from a house fire that killed his parents. Because of this, Thomas considers him a hero. On the other hand, Victor, who endures Arnold's [alcoholism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholism), [domestic violence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_violence), and eventual [child abandonment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_abandonment), regards his father with both deep love and bitter resentment. Thomas and Victor grow up together as neighbors and acquaintances, fighting with each other and simultaneously forming a close, albeit uneasy, alliance.

When Arnold dies in [Phoenix, Arizona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix%2C_Arizona), where he has stayed after leaving Victor and his mother Arlene ([Tantoo Cardinal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tantoo_Cardinal%22%20%5Co%20%22Tantoo%20Cardinal)), Victor and Thomas go on an adventure to retrieve his ashes. It was a self proclaiming trip for Victor and Thomas. Neither of them lose sight of their identity as "[Indians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States)", but their perspectives differ. Victor is more of a stoic type, and Thomas is more traditional (and romantic to the point of watching the feature film [*Dances with Wolves*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dances_with_Wolves) countless times). This dichotomy continues all through the film and is the source of Victor's irritation with Thomas, and Thomas's fascination with Victor.

Once in Phoenix, Victor must confront his conflicted feelings about his father, as well as his own identity. He also must grapple with information provided to him by his father's friend, Suzie Song ([Irene Bedard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irene_Bedard)), mainly, the true origins of the fire that killed Thomas' parents. The trip turns out to ultimately cure Victor's brooding disposition toward life and shows him why his father became an alcoholic, was abusive, and eventually left their family. The film concludes with Victor achieving a better understanding of Thomas and of his unconditional reverence for Arnold.

Whale rider – plot summaries

**1st plot summary-THE STORY...(aspects of book and movie)**

Kahutia was a girl who was meant to be a boy. She is the first child of her generation in the chief's family, and her birth breaks a long line of chiefs, stretching back to Paikea himself. Further than that, when she was born her mother died, and her father was not willing to just put things behind him, marry again, and produce another child (preferably a son) any time soon. In the movie, this is more tragic, more poignant. The movie is about a girl called Paikea, and over the opening scene, you hear her words: "There was no gladness when I was born. My twin brother died, taking our mother with him." This is the kind of life Kahu/Paikea leads… growing up with the knowledge that she was meant to be a boy, that she was meant to grow up to be chief of the tribe.

It is important to know here that the place of women in Maori society is much regulated by tradition. Women may not speak on a marae, they may not set foot on a waka (traditionally a war canoe), they may not learn to wield the taiaha (spear). They cannot see a tekoteko panel or a canoe being carved. They cannot take part in the schooling of future chiefs. It is the women who do the cooking, who do the karanga(welcome) for visitors to the marae. Women do **not** wear trousers on a marae. The women sing the waiata (songs) at the close of each speech, the men do the haka (war dance). A woman cannot be chief. Paikea/Kahutia challenges that.

She cannot see why she shouldn't be permitted to learn at the school the elders (including her great grandfather/grandfather, Koro or Paka) set up for the boys of her generation. A kura (school) to instruct the youngsters of the tribe in the way of the ancient ones. And youngsters means males. In the movie Nanny Flowers (her grandmother/great-grandmother) refuses to let the first lesson start until Paikea is there. Paikea does the karanga for the manuhiri (visitors) while Nanny Flowers does the Karanga for the tangatawhenua (hosts). Koro relents and suggests that Paikea can stay, but only if she sits at the back. She leaves, and learns the chant by listening through the windows, learns the taiaha from her uncle. She bests one of the boys at the taiaha, on the marae grounds. Koro is angry, yells at her for breaking tapu (sacredness). She can do no good as far as he is concerned: because she is a girl. Were she a boy, she would be the one. But she isn't. In the book this whole exchange is present, and yet not as obvious.

The final test asked of the boys is one of endurance. Koro takes them out on a boat on the harbour, and explains how he was taught. The chief took a carved stone and threw it overboard. Whoever could return it would be the next chief. In the book, it is a stone, in the movie it is Koro's whaletooth pendant, the symbol of his chieftainship. All the boys fail to retrieve it and it settles on the ocean floor. Later Paikea/Kahutia is out in the same spot with her uncle. She dives down, is gone for ages, and returns with the whaletooth/stone - and a crayfish for Koro. It is not until much later, at the end of the book/movie that Koro is given the stone/pendant.

After the boys fail to return with the taonga (treasure = pendant/stone) Koro withdraws into himself. Paikea/Kahutia is sent away - she has disappointed Koro. Nevertheless she is still proud of her heritage, her family, and she writes a speech which she delivers partially in Maori. She leads the Maori Culture Group, and Koro is her special guest at the end of year concert. The audience is told that she won the school prize and the district prize for her speech. The power in this part of the film is awesome. Dressed in the Culture Group 'costume', holding a small cup, her lips blackened traditionally, unruly hair partially tamed by a headband, she gives her speech. Dedicated to her Koro, who was not there, the empty chair in the front row. "I come from a long line of Maori chiefs, stretching back to Paikea. I broke that line, and it is nobody's fault it was broken" she says.

Meanwhile, down on the beach, the whales that Kahutia/Paikea called because her Koro was calling them and they were not answering him, are stranded and dying. Kahutia/Paikea is not allowed to help, not allowed to watch. They're trying to protect her. One by one, the whales give up - if they can only get the king whale out, it will be fine, the others will follow. But it is not to be. "He wants to die." Koro says. Paikea has other ideas… going down to the beach as the others leave, she greets the whale with a hongi. She climbs onto his back, she pats him, she talks to him, and she asks him to move. He moves... when the people leaving the beach turn around Paikea is not in sight, the big whale is not in sight, the rest of the whales are not in sight. Nanny Flowers gives Koro the stone/pendant. He looks at her. "Which one? Which one?" "Do you need to ask that?" It was Paikea/Kahutia, of course. And she is out at sea on the back of a whale, and no one thinks to see her back.

Later her body is washed up on the beach. She lives, but is in a coma. In hospital, Koro waits at her bed, he is ready for her to be his successor. She wakes.The movie closes with a scene that you have to understand Maori customs to understand completely. Paikea and Koro are on a waka, a war canoe - the one Paikea's father Porourangi never finished carving, the one she went to when she needed to think. She calls the chant for the paddlers to follow, to keep time to. And the paddlers of that waka? Male and female, together… keeping the community strong.

2nd plot summary –

The film's plot follows the story of Paikea Apirana ("Pai") [In the book, her name is Kahu, short for Kahutia Te Rangi].The leader should be the first-born grandson – a direct [patrilineal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrilineal) descendant of [Paikea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paikea), aka Kahutia Te Rangi in the book, the Whale Rider – he who rode on top of a whale from Hawaiki. However, Pai is female and technically cannot inherit the leadership. While he does later form an affectionate bond with his granddaughter, carrying her to school every day on his bicycle, he also condemns her and blames her for conflicts happening within the tribe. At one point Paikea decides to leave with her father because her grandfather is mistreating her. However she finds that she cannot bear to leave the sea as the whale seems to be calling her back, she tells her father to turn the car back and returns home. Pai's father refuses to assume traditional leadership; instead he moves to Germany to pursue a career as an artist. Pai herself is interested in the leadership, learning traditional songs and dances, but is given little encouragement by her grandfather. Pai feels that she can become the leader, although there's no precedent for a woman to do so, and is determined to succeed.

Koro leads a cultural school for the village boys, hoping to find a new leader. He teaches the boys to use a [taiaha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiaha) ([fighting stick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fighting_stick)). This is traditionally reserved for males. However, Nanny tells Pai that her second son, Pai's uncle, had won a taiaha tournament in his youth while he was still slim, so Pai secretly learns from him. She also secretly follows Koro's lessons. One of the students, Hemi, is also sympathetic towards her, but Koro is enraged when he finds out, particularly when she wins her taiaha fight against Hemi. Koro's relationship with Pai erodes further when none of the boys succeed at the traditional task of recovering the rei puta (whale tooth) that he threw into the ocean – this mission would prove one of them worthy of becoming leader. With the loss of the rei puta, Koro in despair calls out the Ancient ones, the whales. In an attempt to help, Pai from the beach also calls out to them and they hear her call.

Pai, in an attempt to bridge the rift that has formed, invites Koro to be her guest of honour at a concert of Māori chants that her school is putting on. Unknown to all, she had won an inter-school speech contest with a touching dedication to Koro and the traditions of the village. However, Koro was late, and as he was walking to the school, he notices that numerous [right whales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_whale) are beached near Pai's home. The entire village attempts to coax and drag them back into the water, but all efforts prove unsuccessful; even a tractor does not help. Koro sees it as a sign of his failure and despairs further. He admonishes Pai against touching the largest whale because "she has done enough damage" with her presumption. Also, the largest whale traditionally belongs to the legendary Paikea. When Pai's grandfather, Koro, walks away from the scene, she climbs onto the back of the largest whale at the location and coaxes it to re-enter the ocean. The whale leads the entire pod back into the sea; Pai submerges completely underwater, and the spectators had wondered if she'd drowned, but were relieved when she came back above sea level. When she goes out to sea, Nanny shows Koro the whale tooth which Pai had previously recovered. When Pai is found and brought to the hospital, Koro declares her the leader and asks her forgiveness. The film ends with Pai's father, grandparents, and uncle coming together to celebrate her status as the new leader, as the finished [waka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waka_%28canoe%29) is hauled into the sea for its maiden voyage.

3rd plot summary

The movie, which takes place in the present day in New Zealand, begins with the birth of twins. The boy and the mother die. The girl, Pai ([Keisha Castle-Hughes](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/keisha-castle-hughes)) survives. Her father, Porourangi ([Cliff Curtis](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/cliff-curtis)), an artist, leaves New Zealand, and the little girl is raised and much loved by her grandparents Koro and Nanny Flowers. Koro is the chief of these people. Porourangi would be next in line but has no interest in returning home. Pai believes that she could serve as the chief, but her grandfather, despite his love, fiercely opposes this idea. He causes Pai much hurt by doubting her, questioning her achievements, insisting in the face of everything she achieves that she is only a girl. There are moments when Pai is lost in discouragement and despair, and when her father comes for a visit she almost leaves with him. But, no, her people need her--whether or not her grandfather realizes it.Pai is played by Keisha Castle-Hughes, a newcomer of whom it can only be said: This is a movie star. She glows. She stands up to her grandfather in painful scenes, she finds dignity, and yet the next second she's running around the village like the kid she is. The other roles are also strongly cast, especially [Rawiri Paratene](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/rawiri-paratene) and [Vicky Haughton](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/vicky-haughton) as the grandparents.

One day Koro summons all of the young teenage boys of the village to a series of compulsory lessons on how to be a Maori, and the leader of Maoris. There's an amusing sequence where they practice looking ferocious to scare their enemies. Pai, of course, is banned from these classes, but she eavesdrops and enlists a wayward uncle to reveal some of the secrets of the males. And then--well, the movie does not end as we expect. It does not march obediently to standard plot requirements but develops an unexpected crisis and an unexpected solution. There is a scene set at a school ceremony, where Pai has composed a work in honor of her people and asked her grandfather to attend. Despite his anger, he will come, won't he? The movie seems headed for the ancient cliche of the auditorium door which opens at the last moment to reveal the person that the child onstage desperately hopes to see--but no, that's not what happens.

It isn't that Koro comes or that he doesn't come, but that something else altogether happens. Something in a larger and more significant scale, that brings together all of the themes of the film into a magnificent final sequence. It's not just an uplifting ending, but a transcendent one, inspired and inspiring, and we realize how special this movie really is. So many films by and about teenagers are mired in vulgarity and stupidity; this one, like its heroine, dares to dream.

**Powerful scenes**

**Paikea’s speech** –What made it so powerful? (The topic– her respect for her Koro despite his resistance to her).Children might comment on the tension as to whether or not her Koro would attend. How was the tension created? (Film cut between shots of Paikea, the empty chair, and Koro out of his bed and looking at his suit laid out, cut back to the speech etc.) Children might like to draw the storyboard of that section up to where he finds the whale.

**Paikea and her father in the waka** – both of them have failed Koro. This brings up the idea of expectations and not

meeting them. Can students say where their sympathies lay, and why? Students may wish to write about that aspect of the film, or perhaps about situations they know of from their own experience.

**Koro with Pai in hospital -** at the end of the film when Pai is in hospital how do they know Koro has changed his

attitude towards her? (He has put his whale tooth round her neck and addresses Pai as ‘Wise Leader’)

**The scenes with Hemi -** at the performance when his dad comes – then goes off so soon with his mates. Later during the taiaha lesson, and when he and Paikea fight. Then he is excluded from the boat. “Not you, Hemi.” Encourage students to discuss what was happening in these scenes. How would Hemi feel? Which of Hemi’s actions made Koro ‘fail’ him? Did they feel it was fair?

**The Whale Tooth** - when Koro realises who has retrieved his whale tooth. The look on Koro’s face shows he has accepted that he was wrong. Students could identify some of the situations where he ignored signs of Pai’s ability and aptitude to lead.

**Pai calling to the whales** (the ancient ones) Koro grieves after the incident of the whale tooth. Pai’s ‘voice-over’ says he was calling to the ancient ones but they weren’t hearing. So Paikea tries - stands in the waka – the yellow blanket. Ask if that image made the viewers think of anything else. (It looked rather like a flax cloak.) Discuss other times Pai was in the waka and the blanket appeared. It was wrapped round her on previous occasions by her father and by her Nanny Flowers (giving her comfort, warmth – and chiefhood?)

**The scenes with the beached whales** - What feelings were present? Was it just concern for the whales? Or was

it for the people, too? When the community walk away together, Paikea comes from behind them and walks alone back towards the big whale. What did that image make you think about Paikea? (alone, small, determined, independent?)

**The final scene with the waka -** explore what made it appealing to students. When did they realise that Pai was

in the waka too? (The shot of her with her Koro started in close, as if they were on the beach watching the waka depart.)

**Leadership-** Nanny Flowers says of Koro, “He has a lot of rules he has to live by.” Paikea says later “He is the boss.” Why does Pai support Koro even though he is so harsh to her? (She understands some of his concerns about being a leader?) Students could trace elements of Pai’s leadership – eg her comments about smoking and health, fixing the rope,

learning about her culture, participating in the life of the community Why did Koro so desperately want a leader to follow him? What do the students think were the problems that faced him? How did viewers become aware of these? What

scenes gave them these ideas?

**Expectations and disappointments-**What are students views on Koro and his expectations? Why isn’t he proud of the achievements of Porourangi? Why wouldn’t he be pleased with Pai for starting the engine? Should he have excluded her from the wanaga/lessons? Other characters have disappointments too, eg Hemi

**Working together-**The community scenes on the marae, working together to help the whales, paddling in unison in the waka at the end.How does Pai’s speech change the idea of a leader from Koro’s “chosen one”? eg “knowledge given to all so we can have lots of leaders”

**Feelings of achievement-**Discuss the scene where Rawiri took up the taiaha again. How does this change carry on for Rawiri? (He later has a leadership role in helping with the whales “They’ll do it for you”, says Koro.) Paikea’s speech was a personal achievement. Students could be encouraged to discuss the sort of achievements that have made them feel good about themselves. They might write a speech introducing themselves and someone they respect.

**The whale** – What images of the whale did the viewers notice? Sometimes linked to the marae by shots of the tekoteko. The island was like a whale – its shape and its grey, striated cliffs. Could the students tell when the film was going to show the whales under the sea? (The music cued us to the undersea shots.)

**The rope** – Koro uses it to teach Pai about their history, but … How does Koro interpret this broken rope? And what Pai does after that? Later a rope does not hold the whale. Is that a bad omen?

**Koro’s staff** – of authority (bangs it on the floor when the school concert is disrupted) of leadership - on the marae as a sign of his chiefly position, as a walking stick when he is cast low. And what happened to it at the end? How did students ‘read’ that image of the carved stick drifting in the sea by the whale?

**The waka** – Unfinished at the start. What do students think it would signify for Koro? (Porourangi’s failure?) What

events occur in the waka during the film? (Paikea comes to it when she is sad, her family support her there. She

leads from there.) By the end of the film what is the role of the waka, and what event occurs there? (Koro acknowledges Pai with love and respect.) How did the viewers feel about the waka in those last scenes?

**The bicycle** -Paikea getting a dub, closeness of Paikea to her Koro, the ‘final’ ride before going with her father, when Koro does not give her a ride, eventually Pai overtaking the bus.

**Humour** - The women getting caught smoking. The golf trophy – for Rawiri’s skill with the taiaha- Opening Titles –Background information to help with movie

 According to myth, Paikea was the founder of the Maori people. His father was a Chief in Hawaiiki with many wives and numerous children. Rua-Tapu was the son of the Chief and a slave woman, while Paikea and the Chief's other sons were born to women from aristocratic families. When Rua-Tapu tried to use a sacred comb belonging to one of his high-born brothers, he was humiliated by the Chief who made it clear that Rua-Tapu was of a lower caste than his siblings. In revenge, Rua-Tapu decided to kill all of his half-brothers, including Paikea. He invited them, 70 in some versions and 140 in others, for a trip in a beautiful ocean-going canoe that he had built. However, this canoe was designed to have a hole that Rua-Tapu kept sealed with the heel of his foot. When the canoe was far out to sea, he moved his foot and all aboard drowned except for Rua-Tapu and Paikea, the latter being saved by a whale who took him to New Zealand. Paikea became the ruler of the people who lived on the islands. Maori consciousness is shaped by reverence for ancestors and the past.

Discussion Questions with answers to refer to:

1. As in many cultures, the value of ancestors and a reverence for the past shape Maori consciousness. The characters struggle with several issues faced by indigenous people all over the globe as they seek to integrate what remains of their traditional ways into modern society. This conflict can be seen in Native American cultures today and is often the source of individual as well as tribal difficulties. Identify some of the scenes in which this struggle is shown.

Suggested Response: These scenes include those that show Maori families as dysfunctional or Maori people abusing alcohol. For example, according to tradition, Paikea's father should stay in the village and assume the role of Chief. However, he wants to be an artist and this causes conflict which he resolves by moving to Germany. Paikea's uncle, Rawiri, is a nurturing man and a leader in the community just by the force of his personality. He is also skilled in the art of fighting with war sticks, which in the movie is a symbol for being able to be a Maori chief. (Note that Koro deems the boy Hemi to be unsuitable for leadership because Paikea, a mere girl, bests him in a contest using war sticks.) However, no matter how many leadership qualities Rawiri may possess, he can never be chief because he is a second-born son. As a result, Rawiri becomes overweight and escapes into alcohol or other drugs. Another example of family dysfunction is Hemi's father. He can spare only a few minutes to watch his son at the ceremony and is then off with his friends. He fails to be a strong presence in the life of his child.

1. How would you describe Paikea?

Suggested Response: Pai is intelligent, patient, and fun. She respects and loves both her grandfather and Maori tribal traditions. She never lets her anger get the best of her. When Koro is cruel and refuses to respect her as a human being to be evaluated based on her character and abilities, she forgives him for his intransigence. However, Pai is strong. She persists and fights for what she wants.

1. How do the women in the film deal with the sexism of their tribe?

Suggested Response: The women let the men think that the men are the bosses. The women carry on with their lives accepting the men, yet criticizing the men's thinking. This can be seen when the women play cards and joke about the men. Pai's grandmother can be highly critical of Koro, yet she tolerates him using humor. She sympathizes with the difficulty of her husband's life, telling her granddaughter, "He's got a lot of rules to live by."

1. There are several symbolic meanings in the scene that starts with Koro unsuccessfully trying to use a rope to start an engine. The rope breaks and Koro leaves to find another. Pai ties the rope together and then easily starts the engine. When Koro returns he admonishes his granddaughter, telling her that what she has done is dangerous and that she should never do it again. Some of the symbolic meanings in the scene are stated by Koro while others can be recognized by the viewer. Describe the symbols shown by this scene.

Suggested Response: The symbolic meaning stated by Koro is that each strand of the rope represents an ancestor with the rope being the tribe. He notes that when all of the threads are woven together they make a strong rope. Then the rope breaks as Koro tries to start the engine. This symbolizes his inability to lead the tribe. Another symbolic action in the scene occurs when Pai ties the rope and uses it to make the engine start. This is a symbol for her ability to lead the tribe in a way that Koro cannot. Koro's reaction to what Pai had done is yet another symbol. He tells her that what she did was dangerous. This shows that he thinks Pai's leadership would be dangerous to the tribe, despite the fact that she can do what he cannot. This symbol can also be seen as representing his inability to see the strengths of Pai's character and to foresee the best path for the tribe to take in the future.

1. Why does Porourangi, Koro's first born son and Pai's father, leave home and live in faraway Germany?

Suggested Response: There are several possible reasons. Germany is very far away from the life of the tribe, in terms of both distance and culture. Pai's father can be his own person in Germany, away from the restraints of his father, the tribe, and Maori culture. Like many indigenous people, Porourangi is torn between two civilizations. His response to the strong ties that he feels to Maori culture and the pressure to be chief is to make a clean break. He needs to get far away to fully develop as an individual and as an artist. If Porourangi had tried to stay in New Zealand, he would have had to constantly face Koro's disapproval. For example, Koro calls Porourangi's art "souvenirs." The old man blames Porourangi for not producing a son and heir to the chieftainship. Porourangi later tells his daughter that the old man is looking for something that no longer exists. When he tells Pai that he cannot be what Koro wants, Pai says, "Me neither." Two other reasons are worth mentioning. Pai's father needed to distance himself from the place where he lived with his wife and where he lost both his wife and his son. Living in the village or even in New Zealand would have reminded him of this loss. In addition, the screenwriter needed to make Porourangi's rejection of the role of chief to be emphatic and permanent in order to make Pai's rise to the position believable. Thus, sending Porourangi to Germany advances the plot.

1. Pai learns how to use the war sticks, the Taiaha, from Uncle Rawiri. Using this knowledge, she defeats Hemi, a boy trained by Koro himself. What is revealed about Pai and her uncle in this episode?

Suggested Response: Pai's defeat of Hemi is a symbol that she is the leader for whom Koro is searching. Viewers also learn that Uncle Rawiri was once a champion with this traditional Maori way of fighting, although now he appears to be lazy, fat, and a user of drugs and alcohol. His mother says that this stems from the fact that he is a second born son and therefor, according to Maori tradition, he can never become chief.

1. Hemi's father comes to see his son for a brief part of the ceremony at the school and then leaves with his friends. What does this suggest about the tribe's problems?

Suggested Response: The tribe and the Maori families are breaking apart because the men are leaving. Paikea's father, Porourangi, is the most important example of this. Hemi's father is another. Pai makes an important point that clearly establishes theme in the speech she delivers in honor of her grandfather: I broke the line back to the ancient ones. It wasn't anybody's fault, it just happened. But we can learn. And if knowledge is given to everyone, we can have lots of leaders. And soon everyone will be strong, not just the ones that have been chosen. Because sometimes, even if you're the leader and you need to be strong, you can get tired like our ancestor Paikea when he was lost at sea and he couldn't find the land and he probably wanted to die. But he knew the ancient ones were there for him so he called out to them to lift him up and give him strength.

1. What idea in this speech offers the solution to the problem faced by both Koro and the Maori as a whole?

Suggested Response: Pai argues on behalf of egalitarian leadership, asserting that anyone with knowledge can be of value to the tribe and that strength can be found in having several types of leaders rather than one. She clearly asserts that tradition can hinder progress.

1. A rope is seen in the episode in which the villagers try to help the beached whales return to the sea. This is an echo of the earlier symbol of the rope. What idea is conveyed by this scene?

Suggested Response: The villagers desperately try to help the whales, pulling together as implied by the tribal custom, becoming the living image of the strands that make up the rope of a united village. Despite their joint efforts, the rope breaks and they walk away exhausted. However, when Paikea climbs atop the whale it responds to her and leads the other whales back to the sea. The symbol is that even with everyone in the tribe pulling together, the purpose cannot be accomplished without the proper leader. At this point, even Koro understands that a leader may emerge, not from tradition, but in the form of a young girl who has the character, skill and desire to be chief.

1. Uncle Rawiri is an interesting character and in many ways a foil for Paikea. Describe the attributes of this character, how they relate to the themes of the film, and how Uncle Rawiri is a foil for his niece.

Suggested Response: Paikea's uncle, skilled in the art of fighting with war sticks, is not considered fit for the role of Chief because he is the second son. However, he is a nurturing man and a leader in the community just by force of his winning personality. This is clearly shown in the scene in which he rallies the tribe to try to save the whales. There is no reason he should not be chief. In this, he is like Paikea who cannot be a chief simply because of her birth: she is a woman. Her leadership qualities, knowledge of Maori culture, and skill with the Taiaha cannot gain for her what they would had she been a first born son. However, unlike Paikea, Uncle Rawiri accepts his fate, becoming overweight and escaping into alcohol and drugs. This highlights Paikea's decision to struggle against the fate that would have been hers had she not become Chief.

1. In this story, the Taiaha, the ability to fight with war sticks is a symbol. What does it symbolize?

Suggested Response: There are several possible ways to express this. They include: leadership, unity with the Maori culture, and knowledge of that culture.

**Rabbit Proof Fence Plot**

In [Western Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Australia) during the 1930s, in the remote town of [Jigalong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jigalong), three children live with their mother and grandmother. They are two sisters, 14-year-old Molly and 8-year-old Daisy, and their 10-year-old cousin Gracie. The town lies along the northern part of Australia's rabbit-proof fence, which runs for several thousand miles.

Thousands of miles away, the "protector" of Western Australian Aborigines, [A. O. Neville](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._O._Neville), signs an order to relocate the three girls to his re-education camp. The children are referred to by Neville as "[half-castes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Half-caste)", because they have one white and one Aboriginal parent. Neville's reasoning is portrayed as: the Aboriginal peoples of Australia are a danger to themselves, and the "half-castes" must be bred out of existence. He plans to place the girls in a camp where they, along with all half-castes of that age range, will grow up. They will then presumably become labourers and servants to white families, regarded as a "good" situation for them in life. Eventually if they marry, it will be to white people and thus the Aboriginal "blood" will diminish. As such, the three girls are forcibly taken from Jigalong by a local constable, Riggs, and sent to camp at the [Moore River Native Settlement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moore_River_Native_Settlement), in the south.

During their time at the camp, Molly notices a [rain cloud](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rain_cloud) in the sky and deduces that if she, Gracie and Daisy were to escape and go back to Jigalong on foot, the rain will cover their tracks, so nobody can track them. Gracie and Daisy decide to go along with Molly and the three girls sneak off, without being noticed and run away. Moments after their escape, an Aboriginal tracker, Moodoo, is called in to find them. However, the girls are well trained in disguising their tracks. They evade Moodoo several times, receiving aid from strangers in the harsh Australian country they travel. They eventually find the rabbit-proof fence, knowing they can follow it north to Jigalong. Neville soon figures out their strategy and sends Moodoo and Riggs after them. Although he is an experienced tracker, Moodoo is unable to find them.

Neville spreads word that Gracie's mother is waiting for her in the town of [Wiluna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiluna%2C_Western_Australia). The information finds its way to an Aboriginal traveller who "helps" the girls. He tells Gracie about her mother and says they can get to Wiluna by train, causing her to break off from the group and attempt to catch a train to Wiluna. Molly and Daisy soon walk after her and find her at a train station. They are not reunited, however, as Riggs appears and Gracie is recaptured. The betrayal is revealed by Riggs, who tells the man he will receive a shilling for his help. Knowing they are powerless to aid her, Molly and Daisy continue on. In the end, after a harsh long journey, the two sisters make it home and go into hiding in the desert with their mother and grandmother. Meanwhile, Neville realizes he can no longer afford the search for Molly and Daisy and decides to suspend the pursuit.

The film's epilogue shows recent footage of Molly and Daisy. Molly explains that Gracie has died and she never returned to Jigalong. Molly also tells us of her own two daughters; she and they were taken from Jigalong back to Moore River. She managed to escape with one daughter, Annabelle, and once again, she walked the length of the fence back home. However, when Annabelle was 3 years old, she was taken away once more, and Molly never saw her again. In closing, Molly says that she and Daisy "... are never going back to that place".

**Cast**

* [Everlyn Sampi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everlyn_Sampi) as Molly Craig
* Tianna Sansbury as Daisy Craig Kadibill
* Laura Monaghan as Gracie Fields
* [David Gulpilil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Gulpilil) as Moodoo the Tracker
* [Jason Clarke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason_Clarke_%28actor%29) as Constable Riggs
* [Kenneth Branagh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Branagh) as [A. O. Neville](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._O._Neville)
* Ningali Lawford as Maude, Molly's mother
* Myarn Lawford as Molly's grandmother
* [Deborah Mailman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deborah_Mailman) as Mavis
* [Garry McDonald](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garry_McDonald) as Mr Neal

Adam Beach), even though it was Victor's father, alcoholic Arnold Joseph (Gary Farmer), who save