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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,_Idaho). Thomas is an [eccentric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eccentricity_(behavior)) 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,_Arizona), where he has stayed after leaving Victor and his mother Arlene ([Tantoo Cardinal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tantoo_Cardinal" \o "Tantoo Cardinal)), 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_(canoe)) 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. 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. 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 Pai’s 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. 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,_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_(actor)) 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

**Keeper N' Me   
Chapter 1 Plot Outline  
- Garnet is taken by child services at age two, seperated from his family and leaves the White Dog Reserve. He lives in countless fost care families throughout his childhood.   
-He runs away at age sixteen, hitchikes and roams the country, pretending to be other people, anything but aboriginal.   
-He settles in Toronto, discovering his love for the blues music. Garnet meets Lonnie Flowers and his family, eventually moving in with them. Lonni influences Garnet to dress and act more like Lonnie.   
-Garnet starts dealing drugs, gets arrested and is sentenced for five years in jail. Two years into his sentence, his brother Stanley makes contact with him and they begin communicating.   
- A year later he is released and makes his way to his original home, White Dog. He reunites with his siblings and his mother and moves into his mother's house.   
Keeper N' Me  
Chapter 2  
-Keeper invites Garnet over to his cabin and begins to tell him stories about their history.   
- Garnet learns more about his family, specifically his grandpa's best friend and how he used to be one of the last traditional people.  
- Garnet finds out that Jackie doesn't talk to him because he feels like he didn't save Garnet when he was taken away by the social workers.   
-Garnet and Jackie play hockey together, and Jackie expresses how he felt when Garnet was taken away, and how much he missed him.   
- Keeper tells Garnet about Beedahbun, how it is the first light and how it connects to your life.   
- Keeper gives Garnet words of wisdom.  
-They talk about their culture.   
Chapter 3  
- Wilbert Fish smashes the shortwave radio against the wall, Bert Otter's radio. This cause Garnet to talk to Wally Red Sky about bringing a radio to White Dog.  
- Everybody was "cranky" after the radio was smashed, which motivated the community to support the new radio station.   
- Red Sky One Radio is announced.   
- Keeper tells Garnet how "people are gonna bump up against the outside world" warning him about the coming radios influence on White Dog.    
- A Pow-Wow is held at White Dog.   
Chapter 4  
- Garnet decides to go into the forest on his own for a few days to live on the land on his own. He does this to meditate on the land and to experience the silence of the land.   
- Keeper helps Garnet get ready for his four day spiritual journey and tells him to pray for all he's thankful for while smudging tobacco.   
- While Garnet was canoeing and day dreaming oneday he saw two eagles watching him and moving in mysterious ways. He later had a dream of a young man and women dancing who he later realizes are symbols of the eagles.   
- Garnet returns home and tells Keeper about the eagles he saw and asked about what it could have meant. Keeper gives him two eagles feathers to signify his pride and honor in Garnet.   
- Everyone began calling Garnet "Jake" which was an honorable term meaning he way cool and hip.   
- Garnet's mother decided to organize a celebration to celebrate his achievements since he arrived in White Dog. Everyone was very proud of him and he recieved many gifts of recognition and Garnet truly felt like he belonged**

Keeper ‘N Me Chapter 1 (“Bih’kee’-yan”) Summary

(Definition of “Bih’kee’-Yan” at the bottom of the chart)

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| --- | --- |
| List 8-10 key events that happen in Chapter 1 (in order) | List 5 themes that apply to this chapter and (in point form) connect them to the main events |
| The reader is introduced to the character of “Keeper” who will serve as a philosophical voice throughout the novel. Keeper speaks about how “we are all tourists” looking for someone to guide us. He comments how Garnet is like a tourist who is caught between the two worlds when he (Keeper) first meets him on the White Dog reserve. He also mentions how Aboriginal youth are often caught between the shiny attraction of fast modern, Westernized life, and the teachings of an older, traditional history.  Narrator switches and the reader is introduced to the protagonist Garnet who describes life on the White Dog reserve. He describes how the reserve is like a completely different world from modern society with no running water or electricity, but he also highlights that “even though we’re poor we still got spirit and heart and we look out for each other”  Flashback: Garnet describes how he was taken from his family when he was three and spent the next 12 years getting moved from foster home to foster home with no idea about his family or cultural heritage. He mentions stereotypes of Indians (term used in the novel-preferred term now Aboriginal) in movies and how Aboriginal history was ignored in schools. He then describes how the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people led him to a desperate attempt to hide his background. He pretends to be Hawaiian, Mexican… anything except Aboriginal.  When he is older, Garnet discovers a love of Blues music which eventually leads him to an African American man named Lonnie Flowers. Lonnie and his family become the closest thing to family that Garnet has ever had to family and they spend significant time together living the fast life in Toronto. Lonnie and his family are good and generous people who love and support Garnet.  Garnet gets caught for possession and attempt to traffic drugs and ends up with a 5 year prison sentence.  While in prison he receives a letter his brother Stanley Raven letting Garnet know that he has an entire family living on the White Dog reserve who have been waiting for 20 years to see him again.  Once out of prison, Garnet goes to White Dog and is immediately overwhelmed by the incredible contrast with his former life.  Narration switches back to Keeper who describes how lost and foreign Garnet is when he first comes home. Keeper describes how Garnet will need help and love and guidance to reconnect with his culture. Keeper mentions how he has seen this situation many times before with other youth who were taken away and no longer know who they are.  Garnet makes a comment about laughter and how humour is an ingrained part of Aboriginal culture, and something that has allowed them to survive constant negative historical experiences.  Garnet is introduced to his brother Stanley and his sister Jane. He has a second brother Jackie who he does not meet at this time. He learns his father John Mukwa never really got over his children being taken away and he became a recluse and eventually died (it is speculated that he fell off a bridge during a night of drinking).  Stanley and Jane tell Garnet stories of their childhood before Garnet disappeared.  At the end of the chapter Garnet is reunited with his mother Alice Raven. The chapter ends with Alice singing the song Bik’hee’-yan to Garnet and explains that it means “Come Home” and that she has been singing it all through the years as she hoped and prayed for her lost son to one day be returned to her.  **BIH’KEE’-YAN meaning** Bih’kee’-Yan means **“come home”**. It is the one word in a single-word-song that Garnet’s mother sang to herself when she didn’t know where he was. It captures the main themes of the first part of the novel of displacement and loss of identity which resulted  when Garnet was taken involuntarily from his family and completely stripped of his culture. His entire journey so far has revolved around him trying to regain his own identity and discover who he truly is. While he has finally “come home”, his task of discovering his true heritage and becoming comfortable with himself has only just begun. The song “Bih’kee’-Yan” also proves that the entire time that Garnet was lost and searching for his family, his family never forgot him or gave up hope that he would someday return to them. | Tradition vs. Modernity  Personal and Cultural Identity (and loss of that identity)    History and colonization (impact of historical legislation such as the “Indian Act” relocating Aboriginals to reserves and creating cycles of poverty)  Resilience and healing (though there is a lot of poverty on the reserve, the community bonds are strong and the people are resilient)    Grief & Loss  Racism, stereotypes, negative labelling  Personal and Cultural Identity    Family and extended family and support provided by others  Sharing and generosity  Transitions (with loss and gain)  Responsibility and decision making  Family and extended family  Concept of “home”  Tradition vs. Modernity  Importance of Culture, Tradition and Ceremony  Learning (how to learn, and roles of teacher and learner)  Importance of nurturing  Roles, inclusivity, belonging  Humour and its importance in Aboriginal society (often a very effective coping mechanism)  Importance of family and cultural heritage and support  Re-claiming identity  Concept of “home”  Resilience and healing  Love of family  Wisdom from family and elders  Family and belonging and identity  Conflict resolution |

Keeper ‘N Me Chapter 2 (“Beedahbun”) Summary

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| --- | --- |
| List 8-10 key events that happen in Chapter 2 (in order) | List 5 themes that apply to this chapter and (in point form) connect them to the main events |
| * Keeper uses the “open-lake telephone” to contact Garnet Raven * Garnet meets Keeper at his cabin, learns about him and his people. Agrees to teach and learn from Keeper. * Keeper talks about his experience with alcoholism, spirituality, embarking on this new journey with Garnet * Garnet tells story about Uncle Gilbert * Jackie (Garnet’s oldest brother) gets angry at Garnet at family bonfire * Jane tells Garnet about A.I.M. (American Indian Movement) and Jackie’s role in it * Keeper tells Garnet that Jackie “has a lot of the bear” in him and gives him examples of how bears learn and teach through games, and tells Garnet that he and Jackie need to find a way to play together * Garnet learns that Jackie is out on the ice early every morning and decides to join him * Through play they open up communication and Jackie explains his cold-heartedness is based on his anger at Garnet being taken away * They become like children again * Explanation of “Beedahbun” at the end (first light) “Life. That’s what you feel. The universe shrugging its shoulders, wakin up together...you’re a part of all of it.” | * Traditional ways vs. modernity * Responsibility (role of teacher vs learner) * Knowledge (oral vision, spirit world) * Addiction * Storytelling * Conflict & conflict resolution * Grief & loss, love, hate, anger, rage * Peace/War harmony, community, collectivity, politicization * Connection to Animal World      * Resilience and healing; family |

Keeper ‘N Me Chapter 3 (“Soo-Wanee-Quay”) Summary

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| --- | --- |
| List 6-8 key events that happen in Chapter 3 (in order) | List 5 themes that apply to this chapter and (in point form) connect them to the main events |
| Keeper Speaking: Keeper speaks of the power of the drum and how it connects people to the earth. The drum reminds people of the heartbeat they felt in their mother’s womb. It is the most basic of sounds (and the importance of honouring the “power of the woman” and the ability to give life will be referenced later in the chapter).  Garnet is torn between his Ojibway heritage (and the security he is beginning to feel in White Dog) and the old feelings of lonliness and the desire to run back to the city and fill his life with the “flash and motion” of Toronto  The only radio in White Dog is destroyed and this starts a chain of events that gets people unhappy and longing for change  Garnet talks to Wally Red Sky about bringing a radio station to White Dog and bringing in a little bit of the outside world  Wally unveils the White Dog One Radio Network. People are initially unhappy but then the community finds balance with the new network and make it a positive part of life on the reserve  Keeper speaks of Aboriginal people trying to find balance “between Indyuns” (finding balance between two worlds- “between jobs and the sweat lodge, between school and the powwow, between English and Anishanabe… between 1990 and 1490.”  Pg 185 Keeper speaks of the concept of balance. He uses the metaphor of the eagle and how we see the grace and balance of the eagle but not the work that the eagle put into learning to balance and navigate the currents of the wind  Pg. 212 Garnet finds peace on the lake in his boat when the sky is “eternal blue”. It allows him to soothe his conflict between his old and new life.  Garnet hears a voice singing “Soo-wanee-quay”  Later Keeper tells Garnet “Soo-wanee-quay’s a Cree sayin’ comes from the sweat lodge. Means somethin’ like power of the woman. Whoever was singin’ that song out there was recognizin’ the power of the woman in everythin’ out there and thankin’ it. Recognizin’ the woman’s gifts inside himself and signin’ so he could join himself up with it”  The Chapter finishes with Keeper explaining how Garnet has become as much of a guide for him as he is for Garnet. He tells Garnet the story of the young man who wanted to be a great warrior and wanted to know which of the animals had the most respect from the animal people. Contrary to what the young man expected (he thought the animal would be a grizzly bear or a wolverine-animals of great physical strength) the most respected animal was the mole because the mole (though physically weaker) is constantly in touch with mother earth, and it is always sensitive to vibrations in the earth and always looks at his own feelings. This lesson is important for Garnet who is learning for the first time to value his own feelings and emotions and to look inside himself whenever he needs to make a big decision. | **Place and relationship to the natural world** (the drum links people to the earth as the sound of the heartbeat reminds people that life is all connected). The natural surroundings in White Dog help Garnet connect with who he is.  Culture, tradition and ceremony: these are key aspects of what Keeper is teaching Garnet. These things have helped Keeper overcome his struggles and drumming is a key part of that.  **Resilience and healing:** Garnet is learning to fill the holes from all the pain in his past by adapting to the people and life in White Dog  **Community and collectivity:** While Garnet is leaning balance in his life, the community of White Dog is also collectively learning to balance the introduction of the radio (change can be hard to accept but it is inevitable)  and to find the balance between the traditional and the modern  **Balance & Traditional vs Modern World**  **Theme of balance again, but also the concept of teacher and learning in Aboriginal culture.** Keeper uses story and metaphor to teach Garnet.  **Balance, and resilience and healing, and relationship to the natural world**  **Reflective Listening:** A key part of Garnet’s education is to listen to the songs and stories around him and then reflect on his own life and how they apply. This allows him to learn meaningful lessons from his natural surroundings, from all people around him, and from specific lessons and stories that Keeper tells him (such as the metaphor of the eagle or the story of the mole).  **Decision making.** Garnet ultimately has to decide if he will remain in White Dog or go back to his previous life in Toronto. His ability to reflect deeply on his life and look inside of himself to analyze his feelings is a key component to making good decisions, being a good person and ultimately leading a good life. |

was Victor's father, alcoholic Arnold Joseph (Gary Farmer), who save