

Comprehension and Discussion Activities for the Movie

Whale Rider

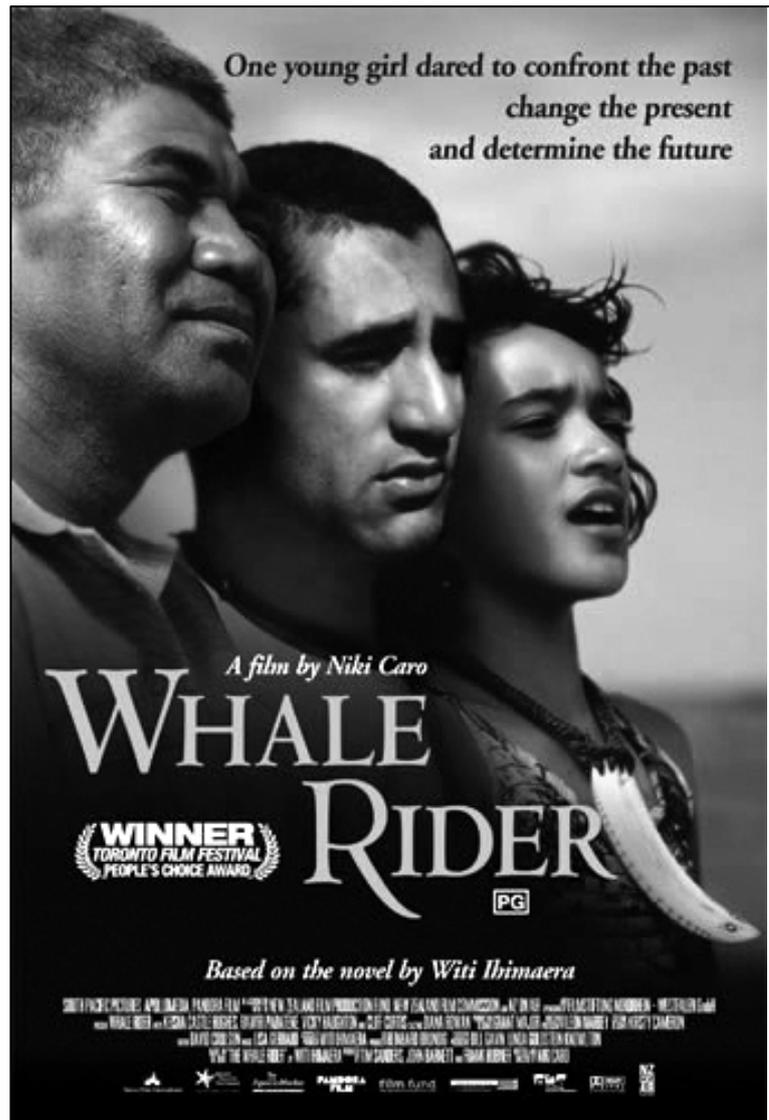
This module has been designed to accompany the film Whale Rider (2003).

Whale Rider is an internationally successful New Zealand film focusing on indigenous cultural issues, especially relating to gender.

It follows the adventures of Pai, a young Maori girl living in a small coastal community in rural New Zealand. Pai's grandfather is looking for a boy to become the new chief of the tribe. Pai feels that she is the right person for this role.

However she has to prove to her grandfather that a girl is capable of being chief.

The module consists of teacher's notes and two handouts with background information and exercises that you can copy and give to your students. If you don't have access to a copier, you can write these on the board.



You might like to do many of these activities in students' first language. It is important that they understand the ideas behind the story, and this is easier in their own language.

1. Before You Watch

Here are some useful terms that will help students understand the movie:

ancestry
beliefs
legend

tradition
generation
myth

community
migration
prejudice

Write them on the board, and get students to look them up in their dictionaries.

Give copies of **Worksheet 1: Background Information** to your students, or explain this information to them.

2. While Watching

2.1: Pai's Background 00:00 – 30:00

Play the film to 30.00. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.1

Exercise A:

1. *Her grandparents*
2. *Yes*
3. *Grandson*

Exercise B: 3, 1, 4, 6, 5, 2

Exercise C:

You may like to have students discuss these questions in groups, or answer in their own language.

Possible answers:

1. *Because her mother is dead, and her father lives in another country.*
2. *He is angry with his father. His father doesn't care that Porourangi's wife has died. He is only interested in having a grandson.*
3. *Yes, but he prefers to have a grandson rather than a granddaughter.*

2.2: School 30:00 – 1:10:00

Play the film to 1.10.00. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.2

Exercise A:

1. *True*
2. *True*
3. *False*

Exercise B:

*Koro thinks that Pai is **bad** luck for his tribe. He gives all the firstborn **boys** in the village training. He teaches them **tribal traditions and warrior skills**. He wants to find the future leader of the tribe.*

Exercise C: You might like to have students discuss these in groups, or answer in their own language.

Possible answers:

1. *Because her mother is dead, and her father lives in another country.*
2. *He is angry with his father. His father doesn't care that Porourangi's wife has died. He is only interested in having a grandson.*

2.3: Saving the Whales 1:10:00 – 1:32:00

Play the film to 1.32.00. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.3

Exercise A:

1. *No, they're whales*
2. *No, Pai does, although the community helps by pouring water on the whales to keep them alive.*

Exercise B:

1. *b*
2. *c*

Exercise C: You might like to have students discuss these in groups, or answer in their own language.

Possible answers:

1. *When Nanny Flowers gives him the whale bone.*
2. *No, because she realises this might be necessary to save the whales.*

2.4: End 1:32:00 – 1:38:30

Play the film to 1.38.30. If students don't have **Worksheet 2**, write the exercises on the board before you play the film.

Answers to 2.4

Exercise A:

1. *No*
2. *Yes*
3. *No*
4. *Yes*

3. After You Watch

3.1: Leadership, Tradition and Change

Exercise A: Write these questions on the board. Put students into groups to discuss the answers.

Throughout the film the story focuses on two leaders.

1. Who are the two leaders?
2. How do they show their leadership?
3. What similarities are there between them?
4. Why did Koro so desperately want a male leader to succeed him?

Answers to 3.1

Exercise A:

1. *Koro and Pai.*
2. *Koro is seen by the community as the traditional leader. He organises many community events, and makes decisions for the community. Pai (and also Koro) show leadership through determination, skills and courage.*
3. *They both care about the community and work hard for it. They are both stubborn, determined and don't give up easily.*
4. *Because he believes that only men can lead the tribe. He thinks that women leaders are bad luck.*

Exercise B: Write the question on the board. Students discuss the answers in their groups.

How could the following events be examples of Pai's gift for leadership? How is Pai a role model for young and old?

1. Pai telling Nanny Flowers she should not smoke
2. Pai fixing the rope on the engine
3. Pai learning about her culture
4. Pai playing a lead role in traditional songs and dances

Exercise C: In their groups, students write two lists:

1. What qualities do you respect in a leader?
2. In your community, what problems would they need to solve?

Exercise D: Discuss these issues as a class.

Think of some leaders within your community. What characteristics do they have? What makes them leaders?

How can the students develop their own characteristics now to become role models for others in the future?

3.2: The Changing Role of Women

In *Whale Rider*, we have seen that Pai had to fight to get recognition as a girl with the skills to become a leader, in an environment where men are the leaders. She tries hard to prove how much she loves her grandfather and how much she wants to succeed him as chief.

Exercise A: Brainstorm a list of movies that students have seen recently. List the strong female characters that featured in these movies.

Discuss whether any of the female characters on the list are *heroes*. Are there any?

Exercise B: Discuss these issues as a class.

- Are women's roles in your society changing?
- Are there more women leaders in your communities than before?
- Do students think women should have an equal right to lead?
- Should women be encouraged to lead?
- Who are some important women leaders that you know of?
- What leadership characteristics do they show?

Worksheet 1: Background Information

New Zealand and the Maori

The Maori are an indigenous people who *migrated* from the Pacific Islands to New Zealand almost 2000 years ago. They made their journeys in canoes or *waka* and used the stars to navigate. After a difficult journey, the Maori discovered New Zealand and settled on the fertile land. *Ancestry* is very important to the Maori. Their *traditions* have been handed down to each *generation* through stories and art.

The Legend of Paikea

The first Paikea was a man who came to New Zealand 2000 years ago. On the way, his *waka* sank. He survived by riding on the back of a whale. His descendants settled in a small coastal village called Whangara on the east coast of New Zealand.



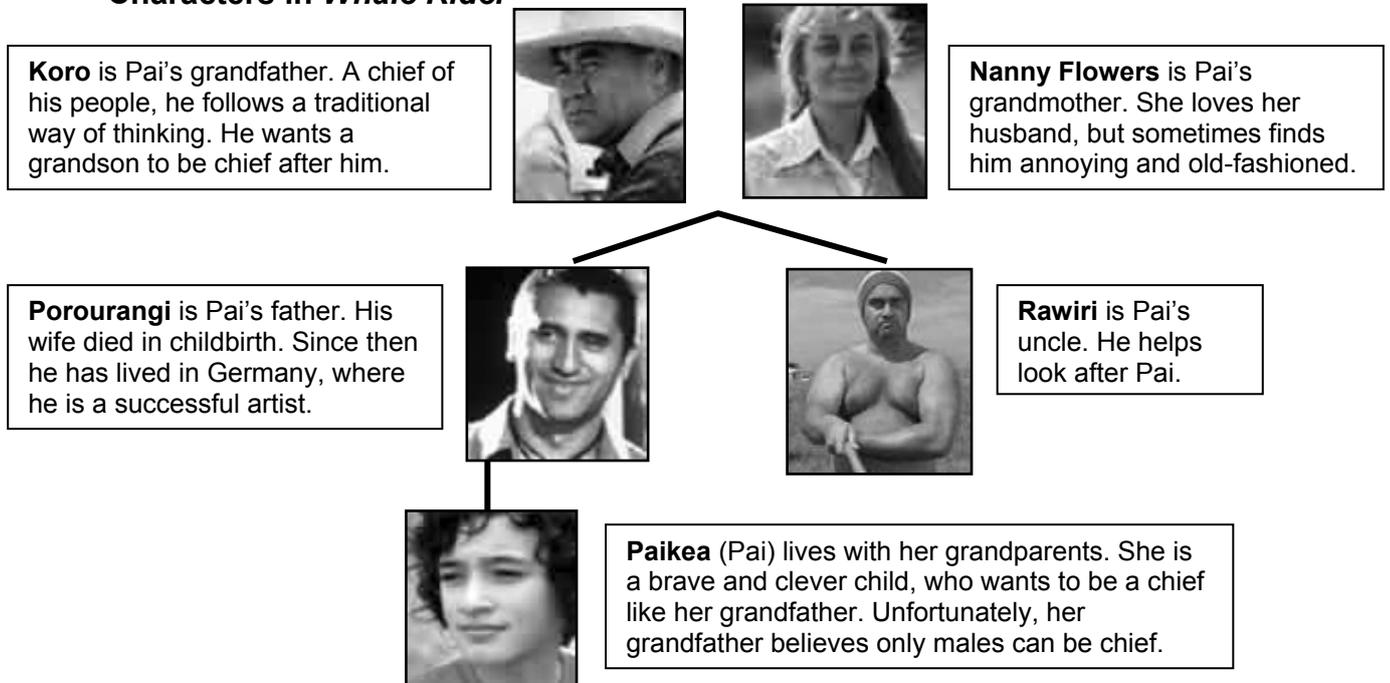
A Modern Paikea

In modern day New Zealand, a young girl named Paikea tries to make Koro, her grandfather, realise that she is the next leader. Koro refuses to believe this because traditionally the chief has always been the previous chief's firstborn son. Despite clear signs that she is the chosen leader, Pai has to save a pod of whales and endanger her life before Koro realises the truth.

Useful Maori Words

waka - canoe tapu - sacred rangatiratanga - chief
marae - sacred place used for meetings and worship

Characters in *Whale Rider*



Worksheet 2: While You Watch

2.1: Pai's Background 00:00 – 30:00

Exercise A: Answer the questions.

1. Who does Pai live with?
2. Does Porourangi leave Koro?
1. Does Koro want a grandson or granddaughter?

Exercise B: Put these events in order.

1. Porourangi's wife and the baby boy die.
2. Porourangi returns home after 12 years.
3. Porourangi has twins, a boy and a girl.
2. Porourangi names the girl Paikea after the ancestor who rode the whale.
3. Pai lives with her grandparents, Koro and Nanny Flowers.
4. Porourangi is angry with Koro, and leaves.

Exercise C: Answer these questions.

1. Why does Pai live with her grandparents?
2. Why does Porourangi leave the hospital?
3. Does Koro like Pai?

2.2: School 30:00 – 1:10:00

Exercise A: Are these statements true or false?

1. Koro teaches all the firstborn boys in the community.
2. Koro teaches the ancient traditions of the tribe.
3. Pai is allowed to join Koro's school.

Exercise B: Rewrite this summary so that it is true.

Koro thinks that Pai is good luck for his tribe. He gives all the firstborn girls in the village training. He teaches them mathematics and English. He wants to find the future leader of the tribe.

Exercise C: Answer these questions.

1. Why does Koro throw the whale bone into the water?
2. Who finds the whale bone that Koro threw into the water?

2.3: Saving the Whales 1:10:00 – 1:32:00

Exercise A: Answer the questions.

1. Does Koro discover dead fish on the beach?
2. Does the community save the whales?

Exercise B: Choose the correct answer.

1. The community tries to save the big whale by
 - a. using a helicopter
 - b. using a tractor
 - c. using a truck
 - d. using a tank

2. Nanny Flowers is crying because
 - a. she is cold
 - b. she is happy the whales lived
 - c. Pai is missing in the ocean
 - d. Koro doesn't love her anymore

Exercise C: Answer these questions.

1. When does Koro realise that Pai is Paikea, the 'Whale Rider'?
2. Is Pai afraid to die?

2.4: End 1:32:00 – 1:38:30

Exercise A: Answer the questions.

1. Does Pai die?
2. In the canoe, is Pai leading the chant?
3. Are the people in the canoe angry?
5. Is Koro happy that Pai is with him?

Plot Summary

In a small New Zealand coastal village, a Maori tribe claim descent from Paikea, the Whale Rider. In every generation for more than 1000 years, a boy has been born to become the next Chief.

The Chief's eldest son, Porourangi, has twins - a boy and a girl. But the boy and his mother die in childbirth. The surviving girl is named Paikea (Pai). Porourangi leaves his family and Pai to be raised by her grandparents, Koro and Flowers. Koro is the Chief and loves Pai but refuses to accept her as his successor, because she is a girl.

When Porourangi returns home after 12 years, he is a famous international artist living in Germany. Koro hopes that Porourangi will marry a local woman and become Chief. However, Porourangi is going to have a family in Germany, and wants to live there. Koro is angry. He suggests that Pai go to Germany with Porourangi. She starts the journey but quickly returns because her grandfather needs her.

Flowers tries to convince Koro to accept Pai as his successor. Koro is convinced that Pai is bad luck for his tribe, so he gives all the firstborn boys in the village training. He is certain that through a difficult process of teaching ancient chants, tribal tradition and warrior skills, the future leader of their tribe will be revealed to him. He ignores Pai even though she is talented.

Meanwhile, deep in the ocean, a massive pod of whales is attracted to Pai who is naturally skilled in the ancient traditions. When the whales become stranded on the beach, Koro is sure it means that his tribe will end. Pai realises she must save the whales, even if she has to die.

When Pai saves the Whales, Koro realises that Pai has always been his successor and that his prejudice was wrong. Pai is accepted as a future leader of the Whangara people.