

In the scene “The Sacred School of Learning” from the movie *Whale Rider*, we see the men and boys of the Maori begin to participate in a school dedicated to learning about the ancient ways of the group. In this scene, one of the main characters, Paikea is late getting to the meeting with her grandfather growing impatient. As an observer, you only see that Paikea’s grandfather, Koro, and grandmother are at the meeting hall, but you do not know where Pai is. Koro wonders why the meeting hasn’t started yet and he explains to his wife that the boys and men have been waiting for thirty minutes. In response, she says that everyone is not there yet, and we see Paikea enter the meeting house. This exchange is significant because it shows the relationship between Paikea and her grandfather. Koro is willing to begin the meeting without Paikea, showing indifference about her being there or not being there. It is Pai’s grandmother who resists because everyone is not there yet. Throughout the movie, we see the vacillation between her grandfather accepting Paikea and having significant intimate interactions with her, but then pushing her away from meaningful traditional experiences.

The beginning of this scene is important because you see what traditions mean to this group, without a character explicitly stating this fact. Paikea’s grandfather wants to keep tradition alive; this is the main reason he begins to teach young boys the ways of the Maori. His two sons do not want to take his place as chief, so he must teach another boy to lead the group. Since the tradition is extremely important to Koro, he is willing to do whatever it takes, including hurting and excluding Paikea from the proceedings because she is a girl. As an observer, we could have drawn different conclusions about why she was being excluded, but then we hear Paikea say to a boy in the class that she is not allowed because she is a girl. The observer can see that Koro wants to uphold these traditions and not let anything, even his granddaughter, stop him from keeping these traditions thriving.

In a following scene, Hemi, a boy in the sacred school, brings his father to a meeting to watch the progress they have made. Hemi’s father sits down with the other fathers, seemingly following the traditions of the Maori because the observer sees the other fathers watching their sons. Hemi performs for the group, with his father clapping and supporting him. Immediately following the performance, Hemi’s father walks outside, getting into a vehicle with people smoking and wearing clothing that seems to not fit with the rest of the Maori group. Hemi asks if he will see his father soon, and his dad tells him that it might be in the next few days. You can see Hemi visibly deflate, going from proud to sad and disappointed in the matter of minutes.

These two scenes are important because the observer can make connections to the differences between these two elders. Koro wants to uphold traditions of the tribe, and by consequence excludes his granddaughter. Hemi’s father seems to not be as involved in his son’s life, and the tradition of being involved in your child’s life is not being upheld. The involvement in a child’s life seems to be an important tradition, especially if that child is a boy. Although we see two characters, Koro and Hemi’s fathers, who are seen as polar opposites, the result for the children in their lives is the same; Hemi and Paikea still feel the disappointment. Tradition is shown as the reason for Koro’s behavior, but the reason for Hemi’s father’s behavior isn’t as clear. One thing is clear though, the fact that Hemi’s father is not following the traditions of the Maori.

Tradition is a main focus in both of these two scenes; the two ends of the spectrum are shown. Hemi’s father is not following traditions at all, and Koro is

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following traditions that were upheld in the past. As an observer, you can see that things in the Maori have changed, and some changes could be seen as positive or negative for the people of the Maori.