

From Owls to Humanities: Good Values in “Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole”

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Abstract: This paper reports the activity of using a movie to provide students with artistic and emotional experiences in recognizing good values of humanities. The activity is a part of Australian Studies course delivered at the Study Program of English, Universitas Brawijaya, and the movie being reviewed is an Australian box office “Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole”. During the movie appreciation, the students are instructed to focus on (1) the indigenous value and culture found in the movie, (2) the most impressive aspects of the movie, and (3) the character’s inspiring line(s). The result of the activity shows that most students recognized the Australian value of “mateship” which was shown by the main characters. Australian indigenous culture such as telling stories of legends and myths and about the Dreamtime is well addressed by most of the students. The students are also seen to disclose their understanding of universal values of good and bad. The students’ most favourite line, which is uttered by one of the main characters, “Mend the broken, make strong the weak, and vanquish all evil” reflects the students’ awareness on the importance of adopting good values and suppressing the bad ones.

1 INTRODUCTION

Higher educational institutions have long been recognized to contribute to the development of society and human civilization. This is due to their role in not only providing the students with series of knowledge and skills in disciplinary fields, but also utilizing the students with sense of awareness on how to function well in society. Nowadays, many emerging situations such as social ignorance and family values deteriorating have challenged our global society that if left unacknowledged may lead to an egoistic, selfish, and unemphatic life. Therefore, as an educational institution, universities may assign themselves to encourage their students to adopt good values that should work well in creating a harmonious society, and one of achievable efforts is by designing activities emphasizing on the acknowledgement of good humanity values in regular courses. For example, Australian Studies which is an elective

course offered by the Study Program of English, Universitas Brawijaya provides a room for the aforementioned activity.

Taking a movie into classrooms as a part of learning activity is practical yet engaging. Students can learn many aspects depending on the course objective and the film selection. Celli (2011, p. 1) mentions that a work of art can replicate realism and epitomise nature and he further suggest that “When elements that define a nation’s historical and cultural identity appear in popular films, it is possible to see such imitation in action.”

Thereby, as a work of art, a film like *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole* can illustrate storylines, conflicts, and characters that are relevant with the given setting, which is Australia, making it suitable as a material selection discussed in the course.

2 FROM OWLS TO HUMANITIES

The activity being reported was a part of learning activities conducted in Australian Studies course. The movie selected is *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole*, an American-Australian 3D computer-animated fantasy adventure film which was released in 2010 and was directed by Zack Snyder based on Kathryn Lask’s Guardian of Ga’Hoole series (Animal Logic Entertainment, 2010).

This movie was selected at the first place considering that it has several aspects relevant to the objective of Australian studies course. The tale is situated in Australia and shows some geographical and cultural features that can be found down under such as the Three Sister rock of Blue Mountain in New South Wales, Australian gum trees, as well as the story telling culture and the cave drawing/painting of Australian indigenous people. Furthermore, Clarke (2010) suggests that through many ‘breath-taking moments’ the owls of Ga’Hoole teach more than wisdom to its viewers. More importantly, Thomson (2016) claim that “A good film does more than entertain or fill seats at the cinema. It has the power to change hearts and minds – and sometimes society more widely.”

The film appreciation on this movie selection proved to endorse the notion that a good film containing good values can ‘touch’ its viewers effortlessly. This is reflected in the students’ responses upon watching the movie of *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole*. All students agree on the good values depicted in the movie through its storyline and the characters, and they recognize the evil deeds as having bad values to avoid.

2.1 Australian Indigenous Values and Culture

Australian indigenous values and culture are literally and figuratively projected in the film of *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole*. The cultural heritage and culture are clearly presented along with the main character, Soren. Soren and his family reside on a tree whose situation has resemblance to a cave that has been ancient Australian indigenous residence for thousands of years.

Having read about Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people’s history, the students’ eyes are easily caught by the paintings on the wall of Soren’s tree home which resemble those found in ancient caves in Australia. The cave paintings are parts of indigenous tradition serving as resourceful media recording

information on past events or stories. The students also noticed the story telling activity taking place in Soren’s home and they relate this event to Australian indigenous oral story tradition.

Besides the traditions, the students recognize the indigenous values extracted from the storyline and the characters’ depiction. Most students agree that, through the owls, the film is promoting several indigenous values of unity, trust, loyalty, peace and harmony, and belief in history and tradition.

Among the comments delivered by the students regarding the indigenous values and culture, seven of them are presented as follows:

Student’s comment 1

“The indigenous value(s) that I found are about trust, because whenever you trust/believe in someone, those whom you believe in will be help you whenever you need help. Second is unity. To fight against something evil, you need to unite with the person you trust. From the culture aspect, I can see that in this film they (read: the owls) preserved the story of their ancestor with a picture(s) in the wall and by stories they tell to the youngster.”

Student’s comment 2

“The indigenous value that I found in this movie is we should live in harmony. Love, care, and respect are some of the keys to create a harmony. Because when you bring these keys into your life, you’ll always find peace wherever you are. Just throw away the arrogance, it is such a negativity that will destroy you.”

Student’s comment 3

“The indigenous values that I find in this story is about trust. This story has relation with our daily life, how to realize with our dream even it looks like impossible. The power of trust is pictured by Soren who has belief in the story of the Guardians. Even though, many people ignore the story, Soren is still curious and believe that the story does exist. If we have a dream, we have to make it possible and make it comes true.”

Student’s comment 4

“The indigenous values I found in *Legends of The Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole* are that they believe in their history, they cherish and are never tired of hearing those stories of their Guardians, the Owls of Ga’Hoole. Even

when they've have never seen the Guardians themselves, they still believe that the Guardians are the heroes and the history was not just a story. They cherished and apply the good morals from the Guardians into their lives, make them as the role of what they should be as owls. The strong belief of something the owls have never even seen before in this movie is the indigenous value I found."

Student's comment 5

"The indigenous values that I can find from this film is loyalty. Loyalty from the movie that I can take is that how loyal we are towards a person or groups. Soren, shows us how loyalty is supposed to look like. He won't ditch his own family or groups in order to achieve power in a wrong way."

Student's comment 6

"The indigenous value(s) that I got from the movie is trust. This is the most important thing in this whole movie, in my opinion. We can see it in the whole journey of Soren. This movie taught us about trust which seems to be a simple thing to say, but in fact is very hard to do. When you got trust. You can do anything and everything together."

Student's comment 7

"I think the indigenous value that this movie wants to tell is about Collectivism. It stands for the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it. It is clearly shown how Soren and his squad uphold this idea from the journey in finding the sea of Hoolemere until they become guardians. It's very relatable with Australian indigenous value which has very high sense of belonging on each member."

2.2 Humanity Values behind the Impressive Aspects of the Movie

Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole motion picture is selected to review not only because the movie setting is based in Australia but also because it was created by an Australian animation and visual effects digital studio, Animal Logic that is world widely well known for producing high quality animations.

The supreme digital production of the given motion picture has provided its viewers ultimate artistic experiences and the storyline has taken the viewers into emotional involvements. In addition to these strong points, good humanity values can always be originated in almost all aspects of this movie.

2.2.1 Good Values behind Artistic Experiences

All students participating in the designed activity acknowledge the quality of the animation and admitted to be visually and auditorily pampered. The sophistication of the art work in this animation making geared the students to appreciate the hard work of the animator in creating detailed and lively graphics. This leads to the recognition of the hard work and giving the best efforts in our work as exceptional values treasured to be adopted in the students' both present and future life.

The unusual visualization of some characters delivers messages exceptionally. Most students brought up the contradictory appearances of Nyra and Ezylyrb with their personality. Nyra is pictured as very beautiful and admirable in her clean white feathers, but she has an evil heart. On the other hand, the details of scars and wounds on Ezylyrb's body and face and his messy feathers is out of anyone expectation that he actually has a noble and brave heart. Focusing on this graphic aspect to depict the characters, the students mention to not judge other people merely from their physical appearance because looks may be deceiving. More importantly, the good value to highlight is that having good personality should be considered more essential than being only good looking.

The graphical work on contrasting the settings of St. Aegolius Academy for Orphaned Owls which is a part of the Kingdom of Tytos and the Tree of Ga'Hool also creates an awareness for the students on the effect of practicing or assigning different life values. At St. Aegolius Academy for Orphaned Owls or St. Aggie's, among the darkness, fire, and dust, the life is miserable for all suppressed owls of lower castes. Contradictorily, the life in the tree of Ga'Hoole, with green trees and bright and clear scenes, is perceived to be harmonious and convenient because every owl is treated fairly and they are always ready to help each other. This graphical depiction offers the viewers to recognize the egalitarian, fair play, and 'mateship' values that have been claimed to be some of good values assigned in all aspect of life in Australian society.

2.2.2 Good Values behind Emotional Experiences

All students admitted that this motion picture offers interesting storyline and strong characterizations. The viewers are taken into the journeys of different emotions of the characters such as happiness, love, hope, courage, fear, sadness, jealousy, and anger.

The scene showing the main character’s family engagement at the beginning of the movie bring the viewer the sense of happiness, warmth, love and care people can get from a family. The students can feel the loving attitude of Soren toward her brother and her sister. Also, Noctus and Marella, are seen being warm and responsible parents to Kludd, Soren and Eglantine. However, this condition might be easily ruined when any member of the family behave inappropriately. For example, Kludd’s behaviour sparked an argument and was found annoying due to his ignorance attitude and his refusal to play and have some good times with his siblings. His envy of his younger brother leads to a more serious trouble and conflict.

Some emotional moments are observed when Soren keep on showing that he cares about his very own brother, Kludd, no matter situations they have, but Kludd does not show the same affection to him. From this, the students can learn a powerful lesson that even though others do bad things to us, it does not mean that we have to be as bad as them. Instead, we have to keep on doing good things such as taking care of our family and friends and getting ready to help them whenever needed.

Determination is another good value offered by this movie which is depicted through Soren’s characterization. Soren is represented as being always optimistic regardless the difficulties to face. Confidently, he ensured Gylfie when she could not see any way out. He is very determined to find and get the help from the legendary Guardians of Ga’Hoole, and do all that it takes to achieve it.

This movie also reminds the viewers that a person must not become selfish by sacrificing his friendship as these will harm not only those whom are betrayed but might also harm the egoistic individual himself. An exemplary scene for this lesson is picturised through the character of a traitor named Allomere who got killed instead of being given higher position and power.

Throughout the movie, it is shown that the protagonist owlets always get some help, advice, and encouragement from adult owls. Similarly, all the

miseries are also caused by adult owls. Thus, some students perceived that this movie was created for and intended to not only children but also for parents and other adults. The roles of adults are very important in introducing good values and, in turn, creating better societies who assign good humanities values.

2.3 Inspiring and Meaningful Lines

Having learned different aspects of language and literature, the students of English Study Program, Universitas Brawijaya must be aware of the roles and importance of language in human life. Being used appropriately, some language expressions can be very powerful in delivering certain messages or even changing people.

After watching the assigned movie, the students discussed several lines that they consider inspiring and meaningful. They also elaborate why they can relate to lines. The followings are the lines prized by most of the students.

Line 1

Soren: *“To mend those who are broken, to make strong the weak, and without hesitation, vanquish the evil.”*

(and it’s variation)

Narrator: *“They strengthen the weak, repair the broken, and undoubtedly defeat evil. And when the sun shines again, all can see that they win over evil.”*

The utterances in **Line 1** is favoured by most students because this line delivers a strong message to the viewers of the film. One student mentioned that he was motivated by this line to be a better person that is skilful and emphatic so that he can help those in need as much as he can. Others suggested that the line is very realistic considering that the ‘evil’ always presents in society. Thus, everyone needs to be aware of this situation and should not be hesitate to fight against all kind of ‘evilness’. Also, even in the worst and the most difficult situations, we have to keep believing that eventually the good will always overpower the evil.

Line 2

Ezylryb: *“What did you expect? Some Tyto Alba with gleaming armour and metal claws, the moon rising behind him? Well, this is what it looks like when you actually fought in battle. It’s*

not glorious, it's not beautiful, it's not even heroic. It's merely doing what's right and doing it again and again, even someday you'll look like this."

Another inspiring and touching line was uttered by Ezylyrb, the of Lyze of Kiel, as stated in **Line 2**. This line is very meaningful and inspiring because it is delivered in a very straight forward way. To some of the students this **Line 2** serves as a reminder that heroes don't always look glorious, beautiful and big. One student mentioned that we have always pictured heroes in our heads to look as good as Superman or Captain America, while actually not all heroes look that good. Take the most classic example, our parents, they are heroes but do they look as good as Nyra who is white, clean, and sturdy? They look tired and old for fighting battles to do good for their children and doing it repeatedly that they do not care about how they look anymore. She continues by suggesting that Ezylyrb's statement is a reminder that real heroes, who have fought battles for good, do not look as good as the one you have imagined but they are as heroic as what you have imagined.

Line 3

Soren: *"Yes, the only proof that I have are my words. But words are the only proof I ever had that you were real. And still, I believed"*

The second popular line is the utterance presented as **Line 3** because according to the students this shows how strong Soren's belief in the history of The Guardians is regardless the fact that he does not have anything to prove their existence. Also, from that line, another student claims, "We can learn that we need to believe what we believe. Then it would bring us to goodness and satisfaction. It also reflects that words are so strong that they can influence people's mind and feelings."

Line 4

Soren: *"We are gonna find the guardians of Ga'Hoole"*

The simple utterance of **Line 4** is considered inspiring and meaningful by some students because it contains deep meaning to them. This line shows that Soren has a strong belief and willingness to find the Guardians to save them. Also, as a more superior owl, Soren uses 'we' instead of 'I' to ensure that Soren and Gylfie are going through the struggle together, watching each other's back, and trusting each other.

Line 5

Gylfie: *"We are each other's family now. We'll find them together"*

One of the students' remark on **Line 5** is "I choose this line as my favourite from the movie because trust is important. Supporting each other through thick and thin is also important. I can see that even though they are not related by blood, the bond they have is very much like family and it is not easy finding that kind of bond." This line shows the spirit of 'mateship' that many Australian consider important to adopt in their society life.

Line 6

Da: *"Now, Kludd, stories are part of our culture and our history. We learn from them. Even after the 700th time."*

Line 7

Da: *"Kludd, just because you can't see something, doesn't mean it isn't real."*

Line 6 and **Line 7** are favourable by the students as inspiring because they feel to relate to this line in a way or another. One of the students stated "I like this line because I agree with the dad said. History and culture will remain and be remembered if we can preserve from generation to generation and one of them is through stories." It is true that a history is a past stories that are not experienced by all people especially those who live in later period of times. However, many aspects in a history always teach us various good lessons.

Line 8

Grimble: *"They said the wings of Lyze of Kiel are short too, but it didn't stop him."*

This **Line 8** is selected by a student because it should have inspired everyone that no matter who you are, how small you are, and what kind of owl you are, if you want to be great, what you really need is determination and a strong will. This good value is definitely applicable for all people of any society.

3 CONCLUSIONS

A decision to expose undergraduate students to different cultures and life experiences could be

considered as a favourable effort to promote global harmony. Carefully selected films or motion pictures may serve as perfect media to introduce students to different cultures and values considering that the films are made to project real life situations or depict common emotions. Many times, observing what happens in others’ life is easier than examining what is happening to ourselves. Thereby, assigning students to review a film and find values and messages in it, like the activity being reported in this article, is proved to be effective. The students can well identify the good values and culture while enjoying high quality animation motion picture.

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