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ED 800

Unit 3

“Our Ancestors”

In the movie scene titled “Our Ancestors” I observed interactions and conversations between Pai and her grandfather, Koro, who is also the leader of their Maori tribe.

Koro was trying to start a pull cord boat engine. Pai told Koro that she needed to make a speech about her ancestry for a school project. Then she asked him, “Where did the whale come from?” I think as the leader of their Maori tribe, Koro must have placed great value on knowing about their culture and ancestry. Koro responded, “Hawaiki [...] where we lived [...] where the ancestors are.”

Koro then used the pull cord rope from the boat engine as a metaphor to illustrate the strength of the Maori people. Koro first had Pai examine the end of the rope and then explained that each strand of thread in the rope represented a different ancestor. Rope gets its strength from the threads that are weaved together so the Maori must get their strength through their combined strength of their ancestors. Koro must have been thinking that if they strictly adhere to their traditions then the Maori people would remain strong. But then how do you adapt to a changing world? I wonder if Koro’s unwavering desire to adhere to Maori tradition would be detrimental or beneficial to his tribe. By adopting too much of worldviews you run the risk of losing the distinctness of your culture, but by not changing at all your tradition could become rigid, obsolete and eventually break.

Ironically, when Koro pulled on the rope to try and start the boat engine again, the rope broke. The rope which was a symbol of strength of the ancestors broke from being pulled. I hope the Maori ancestors have more strength than what they just displayed. Koro’s following sigh seemed to indicate his embarrassment. He quickly left to search for another rope to be used for the pull cord engine. Could the broken rope be a sign of a future trouble? Could the strength of the ancestors be weakening and the tradition possibly break?

While her grandfather was gone, Pai took the two pieces of broken rope and tied them together. She then used the mended rope to start the boat engine. I thought this was a very practical way to solve a problem. While her grandfather saw the rope as broken and useless, Pai saw things differently; instead of accepting that the rope as useless, Pai fixed the rope and succeeded in starting the engine. Maybe this is another omen of things to come--but this time, a positive one.

However, when Koro saw what Pai had done, he was not pleased. He immediately turned off the engine. He then told her, “I don’t want you to do that again. It’s dangerous.” However, what is dangerous? Why would Koro see Pai’s action as dangerous? Yes, the boat engine could be dangerous

since Pai was using it unsupervised, but that didn't seem to explain enough why he told her it was dangerous because Koro soon left Pai alone again with the boat engine and the pull cord. If Koro was concerned about Pai's physical safety then he probably would have had her go away or even taken the boat engine or rope with him. I couldn't quite understand Koro's reaction. Pai was simply trying to help someone she cared about. Did Pai offend Koro by fixing something that she was not supposed to fix?

An explanation I could find was in gender roles within the Maori tribe. I noticed that Maori men were the ones who primarily piloted boats. By starting the boat engine, Pai must have thought she was only helping her grandfather; but to Koro, Pai was breaking the traditional gender roles in Maori culture. Being the chief of their tribe, Koro is very conservative and wants to continue to preserve the tradition. Koro must have thought that if Pai went on to even control and pilot a boat, it would have been too radical. It seemed to me that in Koro's eyes, Pai had her own role to play as a woman in the Maori culture while it was his job, as the current chief, to lead the tribe and keep the tradition going.

It turned out, however, at the end of the movie, Koro ended up making Pai the new leader of the tribe and the Maori culture would continue under her leadership just as she was able to fix and continue to use the symbolic rope of her ancestors.