

## **Three Day Road and Whale Rider Heroic Journey Analysis**

By: Jacqueline Gogek, Raquel Cacciottolo, Niki Daneshvar, Taylor Lam and Alicia Kogan

The heroic journey or the monomyth is a structure and pattern that is exhibited in many stories that transforms a character into a hero as they undergo a journey. Three Day Road and Whale Rider are examples of these powerful stories that display the heroic journey. Although in these stories there is more than one character that experiences the heroic journey, Xavier and Pai were found to have the most powerful journeys to be analyzed.

Like the majority of Xavier's and Pai's lives, they both have rather unusual births and childhoods. Not only was Xavier born of Cree origin, but he was also born into a direct line of windigo killers, and he even had to watch his aunt, Niska, kill a windigo when he was only a mere child. He only attended residential school for a short period of time, unlike other children, who stayed there for years on end like Elijah did. Since he lived in the forest with his aunt, he had to learn to hunt from a young age. Due to the amount of practice he got over the years, he has always been good with tracking and hunting which is why he does so well while fighting in the war.

Pai was born into a indigenous tribe as well. She was born as a part of the Maori tribe in New Zealand, and she is also a direct descendant of her tribes Saviour, Paikea, who Pai is named after. Pai was born having a twin brother, but his life was quick to end due to his unfortunate death in birth, along with their mother. The death of her brother caused chaos in Pai's life, especially throughout her childhood. It caused her to get bullied and made fun of daily, and even caused her grandfather to alienate himself away from her.

The first time Xavier is called to adventure is when he and Elijah decided to join the war. They both are under the false impression that the war will not last very long, which is why they feel comfortable enough to go and fight for their country. Unlike Xavier, Pai had a very different experience that called her to adventure. She was being mistreated by her grandfather, and her biological dad had offered to take her out of the country with him. When driving away from her home, she felt the need to return back to the village because of her internal pull to the ocean, whales and her tribe, and by doing so, she shows her dedication and ability to be chief.

For Xavier, crossing the threshold meant volunteering to go to war with Elijah. This shows Xavier's strong will and desire for adventure by leaving the place he grew up in, and especially leaving his beloved aunt, Niska. However when Niska warns him about war, she notices he is less keen than Elijah. Xavier's true moment of realization of war is when he saw a dead boy lying in the mud. The image of a dead boy shows him how horrific and dreadful war is and that this experience may not be what he had anticipated.

For Pai, her moment of crossing the threshold was deciding to train to be chief, after her grandfather specifically told her she was forbidden to do so. She began to secretly learn the chant of the chiefs, and how to use a *taiaha*. Pai, like Xavier also has a strong will and a brave heart to learn what should be her birthright, despite directly defying Koro by doing so and following her heart's desire.

Xavier's special weapon is his gun. First his Ross rifle and then the German Mauser. His Mauser is his most important weapon; it is a trophy from his first sniping kill. Killing the famed German was not only his first sniping kill, but also a form of revenge for him killing Sean Patrick. Even Elijah covets Xavier's fine Mauser.

For Pai, her special weapon was the *taiaha*. The *taiaha* is a fighting weapon of the Maori and was traditionally only taught how to use to males. Pai took it upon herself to learn from watching Koro and her Uncle use the staff. After minimal training she beat Hemi in a fight, who had been taught by Koro himself. The other special item is Koro's whale tooth amulet. After Koro throws it into the ocean and states that whoever finds the amulet would be chief, no boy he had tested could retrieve it from the bottom of the cove. Therefore Pai attempts to accomplish the task that had been failed by many others before her to achieve her goal. After an uncanny time under water, she finally emerges from the depths of the cove with the precious amulet signalling that she has the capability to be the chief of her tribe.

Xavier's wise mentors include Niska, Thompson and McCaan, Niska being most prominent. Niska raised Xavier from a young age and taught him about hunting, their heritage and living off the land. Niska was a source of strength for Xavier in the war, and he muttered her name to help keep the pain away. Thompson and McCaan were Xavier's commanding officers. Thompson taught Xavier and Elijah about sniping while McCann was one of the few people to respect Xavier's abilities. Both were some of the only ones who were nice to Xavier in the war.

Pai's mentors are her Grandma and her Uncle. Her Grandma gave her the support she needed between her father being away for long periods of time and her grandfather shunning her. Her Uncle taught her how to use a *taiaha* properly, and trained her so she was capable of beating Hemi in a fight.

Once Xavier volunteers with Elijah and crosses the threshold, he undergoes many tests and challenges that expose him to war and develop his heroic character as he advances through this journey. Xavier is faced with initial challenges prior to entering the war, as he and Elijah are canoeing to the town and face a fire in the forest. Once he has entered war, one of the first significant challenges that Xavier faces is having to kill human beings. This is demonstrated in

his first sniper kill with Elijah as he felt nauseous and sick afterwards. This accentuates his innocence and one of the first experiences that begins to transform his character. As he progresses through the war having to kill more Fritz, Xavier accepts that he must kill for survival showing his evolving character. Another significant example that highlights his evolving bravery for killing is when he is on the ship and kills the suffering horses. His strong love for animals along with his bravery brings him the courage to kill the horses and make the right decision. Moreover, being in the war environment is another challenge as there are many harsh conditions they endure. They reside in the trenches for a majority of their time where they face coarse weather and living conditions including the mud, rain, drastic temperatures, lice and more unbearable conditions that Xavier was never accustomed to. One of the most significant feelings that Xavier consistently expresses is the noise, fear and death that constantly surrounds him. He is in a place where he is in constant fear and endangerment of his life, and the loud explosions have caused his sense of hearing to suffer tremendously. This imagery brings to life the dangerous and appalling experiences they face daily for years. In this war environment while Xavier is struggling with these conditions, he also deals with loss of friendship. A major example of this is when Gilberto, whom he admired and related to, died right in front of him. This exemplifies the power of death and how someone's life can be taken away in an instant and affect many others. In addition to being in this dreadful environment, Xavier often feels as though he is an outcast. Due to his Cree culture and poor English, he feels invisible and ignored. He encounters racism in many forms and is exposed to this very early in his journey. An example of this is when he is sent to the back of the train on his way to war due to his culture. He discovers the way he is treated at an early stage. As he progresses through the war, Xavier becomes distant from Elijah as he feels that his accomplishments are being ignored. All these tests have helped transform Xavier into a hero.

Similarly to Xavier, Pai in *Whale Rider*, faces many tests that transform her into a hero. After crossing the threshold and deciding to return to the town, she undergoes many challenges and tests that help her evolve as a character. Throughout her life she has experienced sexism and mistreatment from her grandfather as she is denied being chief because of her gender. Despite her grandfather's behaviour, she continues to return to him. Throughout her journey, she is constantly upset because her grandfather does not accept her. An example of this discrimination is when Pai enters the school her grandfather has made for potential chiefs for boys and her grandfather tells her to sit at the back or leave. She sits in the front row and then leaves showing that she stands up for herself. After this incident she decides to learn how to use a *taiaha* from her uncle as she strives to become chief. One of the most significant tests that show her worth and ability to be chief is when she retrieves the whale tooth from the bottom of the ocean when none of the boys who had gotten the chance to attend her grandfather school were able to. Lastly, when she recites a poem about Paikea, her grandfather does not attend. This is very significant because Pai is reciting powerful words about being a leader and seeing that she has no support

from her grandfather, she feels powerless. Nonetheless, these tests create a stronger character within her as she is resilient and returns even stronger.

The climax in Xavier's hero cycle is his final battle with Elijah. This battle is significant because this is the moment Xavier realizes that Elijah is no longer the same and even fears his safety. Elijah is a constant conflict for Xavier throughout the war due to his love and enjoyment for killing soldiers compared to Xavier's idea of doing it for survival. This battle also holds significance because Elijah is Xavier's first windigo kill highlighting Xavier's growth as a hero since the beginning of the war. During the battle against Fritz, Xavier and Elijah begin to engage in their own battle against each other where Elijah tries to strangle Xavier, awakening Xavier's instincts causing him to attack Elijah himself. This moment is important to the climax because this is the moment Xavier realizes that Elijah is trying to hurt him and that there really is no going back to the way it was when they were in the bush. Xavier mentions in the battle, "You have gone mad. There is no coming back from where you've travelled...I must finish this. I have become what you are, Niska"(pg 370). This demonstrates how Elijah hurts Xavier badly enough that he is unable to be forgiven, even by his best friend. At this moment, Xavier is mentally ready to fulfill his role as the next windigo killer showing the importance of Niska's words in his final decision. This relates to the climax of his hero's journey because he is defeating a windigo, also known as a monster and through killing Elijah, he is winning a critical battle in his journey. Towards the end of Xavier's battle he says: " I desperately want to stop what I've started but something else controls me now" (pg 370). This shows that even though Elijah tries to harm him and that war is quickly changing him, he still has doubts about what he's doing to his friend. The only thing keeping him going is his sense of duty because he knows that if Elijah isn't stopped at this moment, then he will continue to turn more Windigo.

Pai's climax in her hero's journey is when she is riding the biggest whale into the ocean, saving all the other whales. This is a significant moment for Pai because this is where Pai realizes her true identity as the chief and finally proves it to her grandfather as well. Her grandfather is always a conflict for Pai so by doing this, she is controlling her own fate instead of her grandfather determining it, making this significant to her growth as a hero. Riding the whale also relates to the climax in her hero's journey because everything she is working for and all of the tests she is going through, lead to this moment of her achieving her goal of becoming chief and riding the whale, becoming the legendary whale rider. Through her actions, Pai is also teaching her grandfather that old traditions can change without it being a negative change. This is important because only after this moment, her grandfather and pai strengthen their relationship and he finally accepts her as the chief to lead their people.

After killing Elijah, Xavier is blown into the air by a bomb and loses a leg. He is then sent to the hospital and sent home. He returns to the town by train where he meets Niska. Niska

then takes him on the canoe and they begin their three day journey home. At this point in Xavier's heroic journey, he is returning from this dreadful experience and his character's transformation is clearly visible. He is enduring an immense amount of pain during the war both mentally and physically, and is becoming both a stronger as well as weaker character. He is becoming both physically and mentally weaker as he is dependant on morphine and struggles to survive. At this stage he has lost all hope because of his listless state. He has lost a majority of what he had, including his friends, strength and happiness. A very significant moment is when Xavier is begging for forgiveness for killing Elijah, "'Ponenimin,' Nephew says. 'Forgive me. I had no choice.' He speaks more, says ponenimin again for killing his friend over there in that place." (p.380). This passage shows that he bears a physiological conscience that haunts and tortures him. In spite of this constant pain Xavier is feeling, he has become stronger mentally because through the many challenging tests he experiences he has become more brave and courageous as he made many important decisions. He has truly become a hero after concluding his journey as he will be known for the sacrifices he made and the challenges he overcame.

After overcoming the many tests and challenges she is faced with, riding the Paieka whale and proving herself a worthy chief, Pai is brought to the hospital and returns from this heroic journey. Her grandfather perceives her ability and inevitably to be chief and declares her the new leader. This brought hope and strength to Pai and the town as they have a new positive and dependable leader. Now that Pai is ending her heroic journey her character has become more confident and brave knowing that she has the trust and support from her grandfather and the village. After examining both stories during the return stage in the hero cycle, it is evident that they both visit a hospital. This shows that after the challenges and tests, there is often a recovery needed before they are deemed heroes.

The elixir present for Xavier is the medicine bundle. The medicine bundle is given to Xavier by Niska before he leaves for the war, as she hopes that the medicine bundle will protect him. Whether or not it is the presence of the medicine bundle that has an effect, Xavier is protected to a certain extent, as he comes from the war alive.

For Pai, her elixir is her grandfather Koro's whale tooth amulet. The amulet is a test for potential chiefs of the tribe, as the one who retrieves it is the chief of the tribe. The boys who are training to be chief have failed to retrieve the amulet, however, Pai, despite the fact that her grandfather does not believe that she is capable to accomplish such a task, is able to. This task is what helps Koro begin to acknowledge that she is capable of just as much, if not more, than the boys vying to be chief.

The journey home for Xavier is a difficult one. After he is injured by the explosion that leads to his leg being blown off, he sent back home on a train. Niska finds him at train station

and leads him to the canoe that they are using for their three day long journey back home. During this difficult journey home, Xavier is reflecting on the war and the trauma he experienced in it. He is in pain both physically, as he is injured as well as suffering from his morphine addiction which he obtains while recovering from his leg injury. He is also in pain mentally and emotionally, as he is suffering from the painful memories of the war. Niska creates a sweat lodge to help Xavier with his morphine withdrawal symptoms. The journey home as we know it comes to an end as Niska reflects on how she and Xavier will be home tomorrow.

For Pai, her journey home starts after Pai almost drowns while saving the whales. Pai wakes up in the hospital to her grandfather beside her after he declares his acceptance of her. He realizes that Pai is meant to be the next chief of the tribe, and with her grandfather's permission and blessing, she takes her rightful role as chief of her tribe and leads her people.

In conclusion, the heroic journey is a crucial part of a story as it creates a powerful structure and plot. This structure follows the journey of a person who often does not fit in and continues as the character undergoes challenges transforming into a hero. After going through this journey, they gain strength knowledge and heroic skills that convey an important message to the audience.