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Disney Films: a Suitable Way to Teach Children about Death

Death is an inescapable reality of human life. It is often excruciating especially for the children because they do not have any knowledge and understanding about mortality as adults. This is the reason of them being unprepared for the death of their loved ones, even if it is about the death of their favorite movie character. Children’ perceptions are influenced by what they are exposed to. They watch movies, and cartoons in which they experience death scenes from killing, wars, and fights but they are often unable to understand the reality behind death. Some fantasy-based deaths also create unrealistic perceptions in their minds; however, watching death scenes in movies allow discussing death with children and let them understand the inevitable reality of life. Traumatic deaths in Disney films are a great way to teach children about death and dying in an accessible way, opens up the discussion about taboo subjects because they portray purposeful deaths and let them understand emotions associated with it.

Disney films are a great way to help children in understanding death. Some parents are not very comfortable talking about death with their children. These films can be an effective starter to discuss death with children. Death is an important concept to talk about, and parents must not delay talking about death to their children. Deaths infamous Disney movie leave an impact not only on children but on adults as well. For instance death of Bambi’s mother in Bambi (1942), death of Mustafa in The Lion King (1994), death of The Witch in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Shan-Yu in Mulan (1998), and Clayton and Kerchack in Tarzan (1999), help children understand and accept death as a reality. Disney movies feature a lot of death scenes, and studies report that the number of death scenes is twice as likely to death scenes in adult movies. While children are watching death scenes in the movies, it is an opportunity for parents to indulge in a conversation with children and teach them about death as a reality (“Parents” n.p).

The age in which children watch Disney movies are unfamiliar with the concept of death. The target audience of these movies has vague ideas about different realities of life. They are unable to understand the permanence and inevitability of death. Many children younger than five years do not realize that death is permanent (Cox et al, 268). There is a lot of support available for the idea that children have a limited understanding of death and do not consider it a universal and non-functional state. The process of understanding death is a psychological process which involves understanding what death is, understanding that it is permanent and accepting the emotions of grief, and the reorganization of sense of identity with child’s relationship with their environment. This unpleasant reality, when experienced in movies, helps a child go through all of these stages and parents role in it make them better comfortable with the fact of death.

The patterns which teach death in the movie are highly influenced by the character status in the film who dies, the reason for death, and the fact that if the character was good or bad morally. In this way death scenes offer a different lesson; they not only teach about death event but also the aftermath of it and linked moral lessons. For instance, the death of Shan-Yu in Mulan explains that the death of evil characters bring peace. The death of Mufasa in The Lion King teaches the notion of death to children and how losing a loved one is a stressful event to reconcile. It also shows that the death of a loved one is not an easy event bit staying strong and determined, along with the help of a few friends one can easily make it through. Another important lesson that it teaches is that even if death is unfair, ultimately good always triumphs over evil.

Studies also show that Disney films show purposeful deaths. All the bad characters in the movies die in a similar way giving a lesson that the protagonist has won without doing anything immortal. That has been portrayed in deaths of Scar from "The Lion King," Gaston in "Beauty and the Beast, and Captain Hook in “Peter Pan”. These deaths make children think about the good and bad guys, and the moral implications associated with the deaths scenes can be taught well to kids as a result of having discussions with them. Some of the unrealistic deaths in the movies and the dead character coming back let children understand the difference between reality and fiction. Moreover, deaths in Disney movies do not destructively impact children and make them feel emotionally down because they know that the character is fictional.

Studies reveal that the number of deaths in Disney movies was portrayed as permanent which teaches children that death is a permanent event and it is irreversible. It confirms the reality of death and the life cycle (Tenzek and Nickels, 13). This is the positive aspect promoted in the movies, children understand one who dies never comes back. Deaths in movies are also followed by the expression of sadness, negative emotions, anger, grief, and frustration (Tenzek and Nickels, 13). The characters which express such feelings gives children the knowledge of acceptable and normal behavior at this event who lack experience with death.

Death unveils children with the concept of understanding other's emotions such as they feel sympathy with the characters on the death of their loved ones, such as Simba in "The Loin and King", and Bambi after the death of Bambi's mother. If the character who dies is the favorite of children, these movies also make them understand ways to cope up with the death of loved ones.

Antagonists don't get a second chance in life. Death of protagonist teaches that one has to die no matter how heroic and noble one is and the death of antagonist show that bad characters deserve to die to end evil happenings. In addition, the death scenes in movies enable them to handle death in a way which would not have been possible otherwise.

Disney movies also face criticism for teaching children the stereotypes, racism and the image of perfection through its characters. Such as critics argue that Sleeping Beauty (1959) gives a message that looking perfect is the path to female content (“Five Disney Movies You Shouldn’t Show Your Kids - and Five You Should” n.p). In addition, Disney movies show either the evil side of women or the virtuous side, two typical stereotypes associated with women. These movies are also criticized for portraying racism by showing evil characters as black, such as Scar in “the Lion and the King” and critics suggest parents to ban these movies for their kids.

To sum up, it is very reasonable to say that Disney movies have an everlasting impression on the lives of children. Disney movies teach numerous moral lessons to children, however, children minds are not very much developed to grasp those teachings and they do not understand the underlying meanings attached to themes, events and characters. Parents must take the responsibility to accompany their children while they watch these movies and make them understand the significant life lessons highlighted. At the same time they must try to remove their misconceptions about any negative events.

Works Cited

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