

## *Whale Rider* – Introduction

### **Opening Voice-Over**

“In the old days the land felt a great emptiness that was waiting, waiting to be filled up, waiting for someone to love her, waiting for a leader. And he came on the back of a whale, a man to lead a new people, our ancestor, Paieka... But now we were waiting for the firstborn of the new generation, for the descendant of the whale rider, for the boy who would be chief... There was no gladness when I was born. My twin brother died and took our mother with him.” —Paieka Apirana

### **I. Introduction**

In a small New Zealand coastal village, Maori claim descent from **Paieka**, the Whale Rider. In every generation for more than 1000 years, a male heir born to the Chief succeeds to the title.

At the beginning of the film, the **Chief's** eldest son, **Porourangi**, fathers twins—a boy and a girl. However, the infant boy and his mother die in childbirth. The surviving girl is named **Paieka** (or **Pai** for short), the name of the ancestral Whale Rider.

This enrages **Koro**, Pai's grandfather and the Chief of the tribe, who refuses to acknowledge **Pai** as the inheritor of the tradition and claims she is of no use to him. Concerned with finding the next chief for his tribe, **Koro** believes the line of succession of chiefs in his tribe has been broken. The old Chief is convinced that the tribe's misfortunes began at **Pai's** birth and calls for his people to bring their 12-year-old boys to him for training. He is certain that through a grueling process of teaching the ancient chants, tribal lore, and warrior techniques, the future leader of their tribe will be revealed to him.

### **II. Main Characters**



**Pai (Paieka)** - protagonist



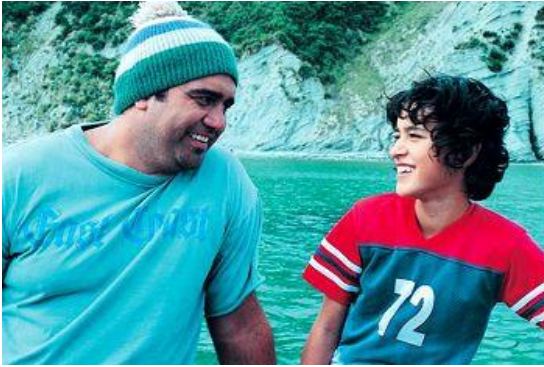
**Koro** - Pai's grandfather/the tribal chief



**Porourangi** - Pai's father



**Nanny** - Pai's grandmother



**Rawiri** - Pai's uncle



**Hemi** - a boy in Pai's class at school

### **III. An Important Early Conversation between Pai and Koro (Her Grandfather)**

PAI: Paka, at school we gotta do a speech on where we come from and that... So anyway, you know how we all came on a whale?

KORO: That's right.

PAI: But where does the whale come from?

KORO: From Hawaiki.

PAI: Where's that?

KORO: It's where we lived before we came here, where the ancestors are.

PAI: So, Paikea came from there.

KORO: Ae.

PAI: How long ago?

KORO: Long time.

PAI: But how long?

KORO: See that there? *(He shows her the rope for starting the motor.)* Look at it closely. What do you see?

PAI: Lots of little bits of rope all tied together.

KORO: That's right. *(He recites a saying in Maori.)* "Weave together the threads of Paikea so that our line remains strong." Each of those threads is one of your ancestors all joined together and strong all the way back to that whale of yours.

