

Plot Summary of *Whale Rider*

1. Pai, the protagonist, briefly explains the story of Paikeia, the legendary Whale Rider who founded Maori civilization.
2. When Pai is born, her mother and twin brother both die. Her mother's last words are "Paikeia. Paikeia." Her father Porourangi names her "Paikeia," even though Koro forbids him from giving her this name.
3. Years later, we see Koro giving Pai a ride home from school on his bicycle.
4. Home from school, Pai scolds Nanny and Nanny's friends for smoking and tells them, "Maori women have got to protect their child-bearing properties." Pai reminds them to be at tonight's concert, which starts at 7 pm. One of Nanny's friends teases Pai about her father, Porourangi, who is supposed to be coming for a visit.
5. Pai leads the first concert. Hemi makes a joke out of it by purposely farting. Koro tries to maintain order. Porourangi arrives from Europe. He has been gone a long time and barely recognizes his brother, Rawiri, who has put on a lot of weight. Koro and Porourangi talk.
6. When Koro is working on a boat-motor, Pai tells him she is writing a speech for school and asks him to explain "where we come from." Using the boat-motor's old rope, Koro explains: "Each of those threads is one of your ancestors all joined together and strong all the way back to that whale of yours."
7. During a slide show of Porourangi's artwork, Koro learns that Porourangi has a girlfriend named Ana in Europe and that they are expecting a child. Koro argues with Porourangi about making "souvenirs" in Europe instead of trying to help the people who need him back home. Koro also states that Pai is of "no use" to him.
8. Pai and Porourangi have a serious talk about Koro, and then Pai decides to move to Europe with Porourangi. However, during the drive to the airport, Pai changes her mind and asks to go home without giving a clear reason.
9. Back at the school, Pai scolds Hemi for smoking. Hemi says that if he had been in Pai's shoes, he would have gone to Europe with Porourangi and says that "when [his] dad gets out," he plans to leave "this dump."
10. Koro begins his "sacred school of learning" for the firstborn boys in Pai's generation. He refuses to allow Pai to take part in it. When Pai refuses to sit quietly in the back, Koro demands that she leave.
11. Nanny tells Pai that Koro isn't her boss and that Rawiri, her uncle, knows a lot about the *taiaha* (the Maori fighting stick).
12. Pai asks Rawiri for lessons in using the *taiaha*. Rawiri agrees and teaches her.
13. Hemi's dad comes to Koro's school to see Hemi perform Paikeia's traditional chant. However, Hemi's happiness turns to disappointment when his dad leaves as soon as his three "mates" show up. When Pai asks Hemi about it, Hemi comes at Pai with his *taiaha* stick, and the two of them spar. Koro discovers their sparring right after Pai has knocked the *taiaha* from Hemi's hands. Koro accuses Pai of trying to make the boys fail, and he forces Pai to apologize to the boys.
14. Koro takes the boys out in a boat, but he bars Hemi from participating. Koro throws his *reiputa* (or whale-tooth necklace) into the ocean and tells the boys that the one who retrieves it will be the chief. Most of the boys in the boat (except for the twins) dive in, but no one retrieves the *reiputa*, which is now lost in the ocean.
15. Koro stops speaking to others and becomes depressed. He doesn't want to talk anymore. Because of his condition, Nanny has Pai move out of the house and into the house of Shilo (Rawiri's girlfriend).
16. Koro tries to call "the ancient ones" for help, but his chanting doesn't work. Then Pai calls to the ancient ones. She tells us, "He was calling to the ancient ones, asking them to help him, but they weren't listening. So I tried. And they heard me."

17. Out in the boat with Rawiri, Shilo, and Rawiri's two friends, Pai dives off the boat and down deep, staying underwater quite long, to retrieve Koro's *reiputa* from the bottom of the ocean. She not only brings up the *reiputa*, but also brings up a lobster for Koro's dinner. Rawiri gives both to Nanny and asks her if she will tell Koro about the *reiputa*. Nanny replies that Koro is "not ready yet" to face the truth about Pai.

18. Pai invites Koro as her guest of honor at the school concert. However, Koro gives Pai the "silent treatment."

19. At the concert, Pai's teacher explains that Pai's speech has won both the school contest and the East Coast regional contest. Pai delivers her speech orally, dedicating it to Koro:

This speech is a token of my deep love and respect for Koro Apirana, my grandfather. My name is Paikea Apirana, and I come from a long line of chiefs, stretching all the way back to Hawaiiiki, where our ancient ones are, the ones that first heard the land crying and sent a man. His name was also Paikea, and I am his most recent descendant. But I was not the leader my grandfather was expecting, and by being born, I broke the line back to the ancient ones. It wasn't anybody's fault. It just happened. But we can learn. And if the knowledge is given to everyone, we can have lots of leaders. And soon, everyone will be strong, not just the ones that have been chosen. Because sometimes, even if you're the leader and you need to be strong, you can get tired...like our ancestor, Paikea, when he was lost at sea, and he couldn't find the land, and he probably wanted to die. But he knew the ancient ones were there for him, so he called out to them to lift him up and give him strength. This is his chant. I dedicate it to my grandfather.

20. When Koro leaves home to attend Pai's concert, he discovers an entire pod of whales on the beach, their lives in immediate danger. Koro asks (in Maori), "Who is to blame?"

21. Koro, Rawiri, Nanny, and many others from the community work through the night to keep the beached whales alive. Pai explains to us about the whales, "I called them and they came, but it wasn't right. They were dying." One of the whales dies.

22. Koro goes to the largest whale in the pod, and Pai narrates, "Koro knew what it meant. It was Paikea's whale, sent to us because we were in trouble." Koro tells Rawiri, "If we can move it, the others will follow." They use a thick rope and a tractor to try to turn the largest whale around, but the huge whale seems to refuse all help, and the rope breaks. Pai tells us, "He wanted to die. There wasn't a reason to live anymore." When Pai tries to help, Koro refuses to allow it, telling Pai, "Leave it. You've done enough."

23. When everyone gives up in exhaustion and begins to leave, Pai greets the largest whale with the traditional Maori greeting, climbs on its back, and coaxes it to turn around. The great whale begins swimming back out to sea. Pai tells us, "I wasn't scared to die."

24. Everyone on the beach realizes that the largest whale has swum away and that the other whales are following it. They realize that Pai is also gone; evidently she is lost at sea. Many of the adults begin weeping, while some of the boys from Pai's class begin chanting in Maori.

25. Nanny walks up to Koro and gives places his *reiputa* in Koro's hands. He asks her, "Which one?" Nanny replies with bitterness, "What do you *mean*, which one?" Koro stares out to see in shock at what he has just learned.

26. Koro receives a phone call late at night. Next we see Nanny and others in the waiting room at the hospital. Then we see Koro at Pai's bedside. Pai is lying unconscious in the bed and wearing Koro's *reiputa* around her neck. Koro says to her (in Maori), "Wise leader, forgive me. I am just a fledgling new to flight." Pai briefly opens her eyes, looks at Koro, and then closes her eyes.

27. Porourangi's *waka* (the ceremonial Maori canoe) has finally been finished. Both Porourangi and Rawiri lead a large group of men and women who push the *waka* across the beach to the water, and then climb inside and begin rowing, moving the large craft smoothly out into the ocean. Back on the beach, adults in traditional garb perform Maori warrior chants and movements. Hemi looks on with an expression of pride and happiness. In the *waka*, among all the adults rowing in unison, we see Pai seated next to Koro. Pai alone is chanting; the others row in time with her voice. The story ends with Pai telling us: "My name is Paikea Apirana, and I come from a long line of chiefs stretching all the way back to the Whale Rider. I'm not a prophet, but I know that our people will keep going forward all together, with all of our strength."