

Hunt for the Wilderpeople

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.



Genre: Adventure, Drama, Comedy

Rating: PG (Not recommended for children under 15; may contain material which some children find confusing or upsetting.)

Length: 101 minutes

Starring: Sam Neill, Julian Dennison, Rima Te Wiata, Rachel House

Director and Screenplay: Taika Waititi

Adapted from the book: *Wild Pork and Watercress* by Barry Crump.

Synopsis

Ricky Baker (Julian Dennison) is a wild child, out of control. He has stolen, defaced, destroyed and graffitied property. He has been a serial foster child and almost run out of options. He has one chance left and if that fails it will be juvenile prison. In a police car and accompanied by his welfare officer, Paula (Rachel House), he arrives at a run down farm property in the wilderness. There he is introduced to Bella (Rima Te Wiata), who welcomes him with a hug. Ricky cases the joint and is startled by Bella's husband, Hec, coming up the hill carrying a wild boar on his back, and promptly gets back in the police car. Threatened with juvenile detention he gets out and stays with Bella and Hec. Soon he finds that Hec doesn't want anything to do with him. Bella, however, is all kindness, feeds him and has set up a special room for him with all sorts of comforts including warming his bed with a hot water bottle. He runs away the first night and Bella finds him in the morning, asleep, up the hill and scarcely 200m from the house. He sees Bella attack a wild pig and kill it with only her bare hands and a knife. He is invited by Bella but refuses to join her plucking the fur from dead rabbits. He is horrified but finds life is better with Bella and his birthday is celebrated with cake and singing and a present of his own pet dog which he calls Tupac. Hec endures Ricky in silence.

Suddenly, when it seems that Ricky has at last found a safe place, Bella dies. Hec and he are both devastated. Hec makes it clear that Ricky goes back to welfare. Hec indicates he is not going to stay on the farm. Ricky decides that he will not go back. He packs supplies, takes the rifle that Bella taught him to shoot with and goes bush. Lost, and having run out of food, Hec finds him but is injured. He and Ricky are forced to camp out. Meanwhile the authorities find that Hec and Ricky are no longer at the farm and a national manhunt is called with a \$10,000 reward. Hec and Ricky are on the run together and through many adventures, avoiding the authorities, grow closer together. Ricky feels that Hec is family and Hec reluctantly feels more for Ricky. Ricky calls Hec and himself the Wilderpeople.

Questions for discussion

Some general questions might provide enough framework to get started:

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

Who we are?

Ricky sees himself as a gangster and a rapper. He is a tough dude? How do you see Ricky? A lot of kids in trouble are not literate but Ricky is keen on books and reading and makes up Haiku poetry which, he explains, was taught to him to let him express his feelings in a helpful way. Ricky is astonished to discover that Hec can't read. How does this change through the movie? How important is it to express our feelings in a positive manner? How do you do this?

Being Spiritual but not Religious

Bella talks about her Maori beliefs about what will happen when she dies. There is not much evidence of any religion until the funeral service. Only a few people are present including Hec and Ricky making up half. Why is there a Christian Service for Bella? The minister prattles on. Why do you think Hec walks out? Would you have done? Why? What issues does this raise?

The Misfits

After the funeral Hec reflects on Bella collecting misfits, referring to himself and Ricky. It was who she was. Bella tells Ricky "Have your breakfast ... then you can run away." On a walk in the bush with Bella, Ricky sees some wild horses and asks if he can ride them. Bella replies, "Why do they need to be ridden anyway? Why can't they just eat grass and be happy?" What does this say about Bella? Do you know any people like Bella? It takes special people to foster wayward kids. At the moment our society has more kids than foster families. Why do you think this is? What dangers are there in Christian families fostering children? What do you think it takes to be foster parents?

Finding Family

Ricky finds a home and the warmth and love is reflected in a hot water bottle and a dog. Why do you think Ricky is drawn in to this family, despite Hec's protests to leave him alone and not call him "Uncle"? Even when Hec takes to the bush and finds Ricky when he is lost and wants to take him back, Ricky persists in refusing and wanting to follow Hec. Why do you think this is? Why does he hold on despite obviously having been rejected by other foster parents? What might be different this time?

The Wilderness

Out in the wilderness, Hec and Ricky and the two dogs travel and survive, even in the cold of winter snow. What elements of being in the wilderness contribute to the developing relationship between Hec and Ricky? How does the spirituality of place appear in the film? Discuss.

When what we say is not what we mean

When Ricky and Hec meet some men on the hunt for them, Ricky and Hec's explanation of their relationship together is misconstrued. Why does this happen? How easy and dangerous is it to jump to conclusions about people you don't really know? Discuss.

Unconditional Love

Aunt Bella showers unconditional love on Ricky. Comment on how she does this? Ricky encounters another family on his journey that does the same. Who are they and why do you think they do this? What might be said about the Christian values that these people hold? Why aren't all Christians like this? Counterpoint to this is Paula who sees Ricky as a problem to be solved. "No child left behind!" A tick in a box! How can the bureaucratic response from organisations or government ever be the answer? Can it be changed?

Thanks to Palace Nova Cinemas for supporting the Movie Discussion Resource project.

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