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The Value of Finding Nemo

Josiah Watson

Josiah Watson is a freshman Computer Engineering student who loves spending time with his family. He plays piano and guitar and likes to discuss artistic imagery with his friends.

When I first saw the movie *Finding Nemo*, the amount of detail in the storyline impressed me. At ten, I was still too young to fully understand every plot twist. However, now that I am older, I can appreciate the depth of the characters and the messages of the film. Many people have their own ideas on this film's content and artistry.

Some critics praise the film for its characters. Laurie Frankel in her review, "*Finding Nemo* (Film)," notes that the plot of *Finding Nemo* is different than the traditional Disney fairy-tale. In her view, Disney movies tend to have powerful male villains or ugly female villains and seem to lack a positive female influence. The main female character is usually weak, unnaturally thin, and in need of rescue. The "happily ever after" ending means that the main two characters romantically love each other and the evil foe is vanquished. Frankel thinks that these aspects could negatively affect the young people who watch these films. However, Frankel is thrilled that *Finding Nemo* is different. It has a positive female character, its villains are internal rather than personified, and it ends with a satisfying friendship not a romantic relationship (75). The characters allow the creators of *Finding Nemo* to move beyond the superficial.

Frankel explicitly praises the characters, but other critics highlight the storyline. David Ansen, in "Freeing Nemo: A Whale of a Tale," emphasizes the creativity of the writers. In his opinion, the sharks' fish-eater support group was especially ingenious (44). Steven Aoun disagrees, however. In the review, "*Finding Nemo* (Film)," he contends that the director Andrew Stanton, approached the script cautiously. Stanton made sure to explain Marlin's over-protective behavior in the opening scene. Aoun's believes that the director did not want Marlin to seem overly annoying. In addition,

the shark support group inserts an inconsistency in the storyline, but Bruce's subsequent attack fixes the incongruity (172-173). Either way, Pixar beautifully portrays the story.

Many praise the movie's artistic style. Aoun applauds the animators for the level of detailed emotion that they put into their characters. He even declares that the animated characters seem more alive than their live-action counterparts (172-173). Ansen agrees that the animation fantastically covers a difficult range of scenes and backgrounds (44). The animators worked incredibly hard to make the coral reef and the water look realistic. The primary reason I enjoy this film, however, is the storyline. *Finding Nemo* displays a more realistic view of life by demonstrating that love is more than romance, that life is more satisfying when it is not lived in fear, and that teamwork and the advice of friends is essential when facing difficult circumstances.

The story of *Finding Nemo* tells a tale of love and sacrifice that is a refreshing alternative to the customary romantic relationship that characterizes most films. In Frankel's view, *Finding Nemo* is different than the traditional Disney fairy tale (75-76). More reasonable personifications replace the beautiful woman in need of rescue and the terrible villain. American culture gets caught up in the fantasy of the story. Leaving the real world behind for a couple hours is enjoyable, but real life continues once the movie is over. Fairy tales are not bad, but *Finding Nemo* moves beyond the romantic and displays a broader application. People show love by sacrificing their time, energy, resources, and even their life for the good of another person. *Finding Nemo* displays this sacrificial love throughout the film.

Marlin's love for his son, Nemo, is unwavering and drives the main part of the story. In the opening scene of the movie, a Barracuda eats Marlin's wife and all but one of his children. This devastates Marlin. After that, he pours all of his love and attention into his son. He even promises that he will never let anything happen to Nemo. Despite his best efforts, however, a scuba diver kidnaps Nemo. Marlin risks his life and safety in a journey across the ocean to find his son.

Dory consistently shows love to Marlin in spite of his attitude. When Dory first appears in the film, she tries to show Marlin the direction of the boat that took Nemo. Unfortunately, she is not much help because she suffers from short-term memory loss. Dory ends up

joining Marlin on his journey and consistently encourages Marlin to keep going. The love displayed between them is not romantic. Instead, the friendship between Marlin and Dory grows as the movie progresses, but not beyond friendship.

A third place that the film demonstrates love is in the friendship of Gill and Nemo. Gill is a fish in the tank at the dentist office where the diver takes Nemo. As an ocean fish that is desperately trying to return, Gill takes Nemo under his wing. At first, it seems that Gill's interest in Nemo is only in Nemo's size. As part of a foolproof plan to get out of the tank, he tells Nemo to put a rock in the filter because he is the only one small enough to fit. Gill's actions later in the film, however, show that he cares for Nemo. When Nemo can't put the rock into the filter the first time, Gill is the one who, despite his desire to return to the ocean and save Nemo from the fish-killer Darla, agrees that it is too dangerous for Nemo to attempt again. Later, Gill risks his life to save Nemo. When the dentist is about to throw Nemo away by accident, Gill tells his friends to shoot him out of the fish tank to distract the dentist. The diversion works, but a fish out of water does not last long. At the last second, the dentist places Gill back in the fish tank and Nemo follows the water system back to the ocean. While romance is a wonderful aspect of love, sacrifice must be the basis for a lasting relationship.

The movie not only displays sacrificial love, it also challenges the audience to take risks instead of living life in fear of the future. Marlin is the main example of this. After losing everyone except Nemo, he promises that he will not let anything happen to Nemo. Marlin develops into an over-protective father that genuinely loves his son, but keeps Nemo from experiencing life because he doesn't want him to be hurt. According to Kevin Lally, the director Andrew Stanton had never seen a movie about over-protective parenting from the parent's perspective. Stanton decided to make this the main perspective of *Finding Nemo*. (10). Marlin's approach to life is to live in fear of the future and carefully calculate every move. He thinks that as long as there is no risk, Nemo will be safe and happy. Marlin doesn't want to let Nemo go because he is afraid of losing him, too. To show his independence, however, Nemo disobeys his father and experiences the consequences of his actions when the diver kidnaps him. Christine Evely notes that even though Marlin carefully calculated each risk, he still could not keep the diver from kidnapping Nemo (70-78). Sometimes a tragedy comes that nobody

can control. From Marlin's perspective, his approach to life and to parenting backfired.

Marlin's journey to find his son shows him that he must allow Nemo to grow by making mistakes and experiencing victory. Frankel notes that Marlin begins his journey calculating every move in an attempt to avoid any risk (76). After facing danger after danger, he and Dory find themselves in the belly of a whale. Marlin loses all hope of seeing his son again. There is no way out of this predicament. It is here, however, that Marlin deals with his fears. He tells Dory of his promise to never let anything happen to Nemo and she replies, "Well that's silly! If you never let anything happen to him, then nothing would ever happen to him." Marlin realizes that his over-protectiveness is actually keeping Nemo from growing up. Later in the scene, the whale tells Marlin and Dory to swim to the back of the throat. Marlin must make a life changing decision. Frankel observes that as the two fish hang from the whale's tongue, Dory tells Marlin that it is time to let go (76). She is specifically referring to the whale, but this statement also addresses Marlin's over-protectiveness. Frankel continues with Marlin's response. With fear in his voice, Marlin asks, "How do you know that this won't turn out badly?" Dory honestly replies, "I don't." This statement challenges Marlin's approach to life, but he decides to let go. The whale shoots the two fish out its blowhole and back into the ocean. Marlin is ecstatic. He let go and hoped for the best and found that it actually worked (76). He can no longer dictate Nemo's life. He must accept the risks and allow Nemo to experience both victory and defeat.

Nemo also must face his fear. He has a damaged fin and therefore has a difficult time performing some tasks. When Gill asks Nemo to put the rock in the filter, Nemo agrees but isn't sure that he can. The first attempt seems successful when Nemo wedges the rock in the filter's fan, but as he starts heading back down the tube toward the water, the fan restarts. The suction pulls Nemo back up the tube toward the fan, and it takes all the other fish in the tank to save him. This understandably scares Nemo and Gill decides to forego any subsequent attempts. Later in the film, Nemo faces his fear and successfully sticks the rock in the filter. He accepted the risk and felt the satisfaction of victory. In addition to sacrifice and living life courageously, the movie promotes teamwork in the face of danger. Marlin and Dory exhibit both teamwork and a lack thereof. For example, they depend on each other. Marlin wouldn't have been

able to make the journey across the ocean without Dory, but Dory wouldn't have made it without Marlin. Dory's ability to read proves important when they try to figure out where the diver's mask was from. Because of her short term memory loss, however, Dory also needs Marlin. Early in the film, Marlin is a bad example of teamwork. He repeatedly must make a decision about the next step in their journey, but because he views Dory as incapable, he ignores her advice. This eventually hurts him when, because he ignores her, they get trapped in a forest of jellyfish. They are nearly killed and Dory retains an awful scar. If Marlin had listened to her more, he would have avoided some of the dangers he encountered. Marlin listens to Dory when they are in the whale and it works out for their benefit. The whale not only spares them, he also brings them to their destination. Marlin and Dory learn to work together, but larger groups also display teamwork.

The fish in the tank are also an example of teamwork. They are like a family. They work together to try to solve their problems and to attempt Gill's crazy plans. When they find out that Nemo will be the dentist's niece's next shake toy, all of them work together to save him. Gill formulates a plan and everyone participates. When the dentist uses a net to catch Nemo and put him in a bag, all the fish jump into the net and swim down to foil the dentist's plan. The dentist eventually catches Nemo, but this proves important when Nemo gets back to the ocean. A fishing net traps Dory and hundreds of other fish. Nemo remembers his experience in the tank and realizes that in order to save Dory, he must tell all of the fish to swim down. He plunges into the net, risking his own life. Surprisingly, his plan works, and he saves Dory and all the other fish from the grip of death. In a sense, this scene summarizes the movie. Nemo has learned sacrifice, courage, and teamwork from the fish in the tank. He approaches this situation with these in mind and experiences the satisfaction of victory.

Finding Nemo presents many great values including sacrificial love, living life to the fullest, and the importance of teamwork. The sacrificial love displayed throughout the movie is a wonderful reminder that love is more than romance. Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Ultimately, love is about sacrificing for the benefit of another person. Gill risked his life for Nemo's sake, but on a much greater scale, Jesus displayed this same kind of love by dying for the

sins of those who trust in Him. Secondly, the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible talks about how people can't live in fear of what may happen. Instead, they should make wise decisions, but not be afraid of what the future may hold. Since people cannot control the future anyway, they should approach it boldly rather than with fear. The Bible also refers to the value of teamwork in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow..." When people approach life as a team, they are much harder to bring down.

I like fantasy. The escape from reality is fun and entertaining. However, *Finding Nemo* is much more than an entertaining story. It helps people consider their life by analyzing these three important issues. I appreciate a movie that makes me stop for a minute to examine my life. *Finding Nemo* is wonderfully animated, but the storyline is the real work of art. This is truly entertainment at its best because even though Nemo may be found, the messages about life still apply.

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