

EXPERIENCING LIFE VIA A BEAR'S EYES: AN ANALYSIS OF IMMERSION IN *BROTHER BEAR*

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Abstract: This study analyzes the Disney animated film *Brother Bear* (2003) to explore the transformative journey of its protagonist, Kenai, focusing on his characterization and development. The paper investigates three key areas: the rationale for Kenai's transformation into a bear, the resultant shifts in his beliefs and perspectives, and the film's portrayal of the human-animal relationship. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology, the analysis examines key scenes and dialogue, applying both formalistic and literary theories that include characterization, *mise-en-scène*, empathy, and immersive transformation theories. The findings indicate that Kenai's transformation is a consequence of his grief and anger following his brother's death, an act of revenge aligning with violence theory. Initially an immature and arrogant adolescent who views bears as violent creatures, Kenai undergoes a profound shift in perspective. His immersive transformation deepens his empathy, leading to his maturation into a responsible and compassionate individual. The film ultimately portrays the human-animal relationship as one of spiritual and emotional equality, highlighting the potential for harmonious coexistence. The acceptance of Kenai and Koda into the human tribe at the film's conclusion symbolizes reconciliation and mutual respect, minimizing the initial tensions and conflicts.

Keywords: *immersive, perspective, empathy, transformation*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis film animasi Disney *Brother Bear* (2003) untuk mengeksplorasi perjalanan transformatif protagonisnya, Kenai, dengan fokus pada karakterisasi dan perkembangannya. Makalah ini menyelidiki tiga bidang utama: alasan transformasi Kenai menjadi beruang, pergeseran keyakinan dan perspektif yang dihasilkan, serta penggambaran hubungan manusia-hewan dalam film tersebut. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif deskriptif, analisis ini memeriksa adegan-adegan dan dialog kunci, dengan menerapkan teori formalistik dan sastra yang mencakup teori karakterisasi, *mise-en-scène*, empati, dan transformasi imersif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa transformasi Kenai adalah konsekuensi dari kesedihan dan kemarahan setelah kematian saudaranya, sebuah tindakan balas dendam yang selaras dengan teori kekerasan. Awalnya seorang remaja yang tidak dewasa dan sombong yang memandang beruang sebagai makhluk kekerasan, Kenai mengalami pergeseran perspektif yang mendalam. Transformasi imersifnya memperdalam empatinya, yang mengarah pada pendewasaannya menjadi individu yang bertanggung jawab dan penuh kasih sayang. Film ini pada akhirnya menggambarkan hubungan manusia-hewan sebagai salah satu kesetaraan spiritual dan emosional, yang menyoroti potensi koeksistensi yang harmonis. Penerimaan Kenai dan Koda ke dalam suku manusia di akhir film melambangkan rekonsiliasi dan rasa hormat satu sama lain, yang meminimalkan ketegangan dan konflik awal.

Kata kunci: *imersif, perspektif, empati, transformasi*

Introduction

Within communities, the relationships and interactions fundamentally shape the social nature of humanity. Venniro & Golden (2020) argues that the process of socialization plays a significant role in the internalization of cultural norms and development of empathy—a complex socio-cognitive behavior essential in the formation of any social bonds. As suggested by the classic work of Rogers (1959), empathy involves the capability to understand and be aware of another's perspective "as if" one was that person. In this sense, empathy allows for a deeper understanding of motivation and feelings.

Empathy, however, is not something that is neutral or unbiased. Many research, like the one by Gutsell & Inzlicht (2012), point to the existence of a bias in a significant level that happens because of the individual tendency to empathize more with those one perceive as close to them, or similar to themselves. It is that this study calls the phenomenon of in-group favoritism. The amplification of this bias is made possible through the algorithms of social media that do the curation of contents based on personal preferences. This further creates echo chambers that potentially limit exposure to diverse perspectives and hinder empathy toward those outside of their circles.

Today, thanks to technological advancements in the name of virtual reality (VR), these empathic biases can be dealt with. According to Dede (2009), VR is capable of creating immersive experiences, which produces a "suspension of disbelief" and allows participants to genuinely feel they are living another person's reality. VR facilitates a new, powerful form of perspective-taking that cannot fully be achieved through existing traditional methods.

In this respect, research interest on how the application of immersive experiences can be utilized as a tool to enhance empathy has grown. A compelling example of such a research is the study by Bunn and Terpstra (2009). In this study, medical students were invited to participate in an auditory hallucination simulation during a psychiatric interview and cognitive test. It was an immersive exercise that was intentionally designed to facilitate the participants cultivating a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of mentally ill individuals. It was found from this study that this designed method was effective to boost the students' empathy toward the particular patient population. A mere temporary placing of the participants in the roles of those they will treat and serve in the later stage of their careers has been capable of fostering a profound emotional and cognitive understanding in them, thus underscoring the power of experiential learning in developing empathy.

The application of immersive theory to connect theory and experience in education can happen beyond clinical contexts. Another instance of it can be found in the teaching program initiated and carried out by the English Letters Study Program of Universitas Ma Chung where students were sent to teach at a local school in Kucur Village for the period of approximately six months in 2023. This initiative of teaching students serves as a robust example of the application of immersive theory, because the program enables the participating students to engage personally and directly with the community's daily life, social structures, and cultural context. As an experiential learning, this program does not only deepen their empathy and cultural awareness but also significantly facilitate their professional and personal growth through direct involvement.

It can be inferred that immersive experiences are practiced across various domains, including but not limited to educational, therapeutic, artistic, and ethical applications. In the domains of arts and entertainment, Bertrand, et al. (2018) argues that deeper emotional resonance and empathy is achieved by enabling people to adopt different perspectives. Proximity in the level of emotion like this can produce a greater understanding of others, especially when immersive experiences are intentionally designed to amplify marginalized voices, introduce individuals to cultures

unfamiliar to them, or provide insights into perspectives that are non-human (Herrera, et al., 2018).

The concept of immersive transformation is evident in literature (McAnulty, 2025 and Ryan, 2015) and logically should also be in its derivative forms like movies. What this paper tries to do is fill the gap of underrepresentation of such exploration into how immersive transformation exists in movies. This paper seeks to explore the concept of immersive transformation in Disney's *Brother Bear* (2003). Kenai, the movie's protagonist, is narrated to be transformed into a bear because of his act of killing a bear as an avenger to his brother's death. Kenai's physical transformation makes it a powerful metaphor for his emotional journey. That narrative parallels Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief, as Kenai's forced perspective-taking moves him from denial and anger toward acceptance. Involuntary living as a bear prompts Kenai to develop a deep empathy for the animal he is used to dislike. He ultimately undergoes a transformative journey of personal growth and maturation. *Brother Bear*, therefore, can be understood as an illustration of how an immersive change in perspective can be a catalyst for understanding and fostering harmonious coexistence.

The fact that *Brother Bear* is a movie, not written literature, makes the theory of *mise-en-scène*, which is French for "placing on stage," needs to be employed in this analysis. The theory of *mise-en-scène* refers to all the visual elements that appear within a film frame and how they are arranged to create meaning. According to Bordwell et al., (2004), as a theory, *mise-en-scène* encompasses four key aspects: setting, costumes and makeup, lighting, and staging. Setting provides the physical environment where a scene happens. Settings can include the geographical location, historical time period, and the objects present, all of which contribute significantly to the film's atmosphere, mood, and themes. To better illustrate the concept of settings, here is an example from the children's story of "Hansel and Gretel." In the story, the setting shifts from the warm, humble family home to a progressively dark and menacing forest. This transition in the environment directly mirrors the children's journey from security to peril, with the final image of a witch's house made of sweets serving as a deceptive lure that advances the plot.

Costumes and makeup, the next in the *mise-en-scène* theory, are essential components because they say something about characters, communicating their identity, background, and emotional state in visual ways. The elements of costumes and make up provide crucial visual cues or inferences about a character's social status, age, profession, and personality. A villainous character, for example, may be portrayed as someone with dark, caricatural, and exaggerated makeup and clothing that visually emphasize their malevolent nature and pose a sense of danger. As the third element, lighting is a powerful tool to shape the mood, atmosphere, and narrative of a film. Lighting is intentionally employed to highlight key moments, emphasize emotions of the character, and can even carry deeper meanings. In this respect, bright, warm, and sunny tones are intentionally chosen when a moviemaker wants to create a cheerful and optimistic atmosphere. Meanwhile, dim or muted lighting with darker colors is employed when he/she wishes to convey tones of melancholy, suspense, or sadness. The final element, which is staging, refers to the strategic arrangement of characters and objects within a scene. This arrangement includes blocking, which means the placement and movement of actors as well as the use of depth and spatial relationships to guide the viewer's attention and reinforce themes. An example of this is characters whose relationship is close, such as a couple. They are typically positioned in close proximity to one another to suggest intimacy. Adversaries, on the other hand, are often placed at a distance to emphasize tension and conflict.

There are three central questions that this paper would explore in relation to the narrative and thematic core of the film. Firstly, it makes an exploration into the motivations behind Kenai's transformation into a bear, examining the precise psychological and narrative catalysts for this event. Secondly, the study seeks to investigate how Kenai's immersive transformation into a bear reshapes his initial beliefs and perceptions regarding the natural world and human-animal

relations. Thirdly and finally, the research analyzes the broader influence of the film's narrative on the description of the dynamic between humans and animals, expounding its message of empathy and reconciliation.

Method

Brother Bear (2003), directed by Aaron Blaise and Robert Walker, which becomes the main material of this study, is an animation produced by Walt Disney Pictures. It is set in a prehistoric, indigenous land where the spiritual and natural worlds are deeply intertwined. The story follows three brothers—Sitka, Denahi, and Kenai—as Kenai prepares for his coming-of-age ceremony. During the ceremony, Kenai receives as his totem the Bear of Love, which he dismisses with disdain due to his preconceived notion of bears as selfish and aggressive creatures. It is this disdain that leads him to a reckless confrontation with a bear, where Sitka must sacrifice himself to save his brothers. Overcome by grief of the loss of Sitka and a desire for revenge, Kenai hunts and kills the bear he holds responsible for the action. As a consequence of this unnecessary violence, the Great Spirits intervene and transform Kenai into a bear. Trapped in the form of the very creature he once despised, Kenai starts on a quest to reclaim his human form, accompanied by a lively cub named Koda. In his immersive journey, Kenai is forced to confront his own biases while learning the true meanings of empathy, love, and sacrifice.

In regards with the design, this research employs a method of descriptive qualitative. This approach is employed because it provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomena and meanings underlying the research questions. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the lived experiences, perceptions, motivations, and behaviors of its subjects (Moloeng, 2018). Awasthy (2019) further expounds that the qualitative method utilizes a variety of data collection methods, that include textual analysis of narratives, videos, and other media, to provide a rich description of the subject matter. The descriptive qualitative is particularly suitable for this study's purposes because its aim is not to measure or quantify, but to describe and interpret the complex interplay of character transformation, perspective shifts, and human-animal relationships within the *Bear Brother*. In addition to the employment of qualitative research methods, this analysis also applies a multi-theoretical framework, which includes characterization, *mise-en-scène*, empathy, immersion, the five stages of grief, violence, and human-animal bond theories.

This study collects and analyzes data using a detailed process of textual and visual analysis of the film. In doing so, the researcher conducted multiple viewings and explorations of *Brother Bear* to identify and document key moments, dialogues, and visual details pertinent to the research questions. Systematic data collection was conducted from several cinematic elements, including character dialogue, scene summaries, and specific visual frames. This involved detailed notetaking on critical scenes to serve as direct evidence.

The data being collected was then analyzed in the lights of the central research problems. It began with the categorization of the scenes based on their relevance to Kenai's character development and thematic progression. The elements of *mise-en-scène* were analyzed using visual evidence from specific frames so that their symbolic meaning can be interpreted. Dialogues, meanwhile, were also examined to understand the characters' thoughts and their emotional states. The insights gained from this evidence were then synthesized to address the research questions and provide a comprehensive interpretation of the film's narrative themes within the established theoretical framework.

Findings and Discussion

The Reasons behind Kenai's Transformation into a Bear

Kenai's being transformed into a bear is not an arbitrary or accidental event. The Great Spirits deliberately carry out the act to impart a crucial lesson to him. As mentioned, *Brother Bear* is a movie that establishes a worldview in which the natural and spiritual worlds are deeply interconnected. This interconnectedness is symbolized by the northern lights, which represent the spirit of the ancestors who guide the living and possess the power to alter the world. The film *Brother Bear* visually reinforces this belief by showing Sitka's spirit, that of Kenai's brother who died to defend them from a bear's attack, taking the form of an eagle. Eagle is the animal totem Sitka received during his coming-of-age ceremony, thus reinforcing the profound link between all living beings and the spiritual realm.



Figure 1. The Great Spirit in form of northern lights (*Brother Bear*, 2003 00:01:24)

Kenai's change may be linked back to his reckless behavior and deep lack of empathy. His story begins with a negligent act: forgetting to take good care of a basket of fish, which is later stolen by a bear. This seemingly trivial negligent act is exacerbated by his displeasure and contempt with his own totem, the Bear of Love, as he has a long-held bias against bears, perceiving them as selfish and aggressive.

Following Sitka's death during a battle with the bear, Kenai experiences the early stages of grieving, as outlined by Kübler-Ross (1969). His obsessive quest for Sitka, even after Denahi accepts her loss, is a striking example of denial. This denial quickly gives way to rage, prompting him to seek vengeance on the bear he blames for his brother's death. The Great Spirits, on the other hand, deem this act of violence superfluous because they believe all life is equal. The spirits, represented by the northern lights and Sitka's eagle form, step in to chastise Kenai for his revenge.

Kenai's immersive change serves as the event's conclusion. The Great Spirits raise the murdered bear's body, returning it to the spiritual realm, before transforming Kenai into a bear. This metamorphosis is the direct result of his acts, as well as a symbolic punishment. When Kenai finds his new form, his old human perspective is abruptly erased, forcing him to experience life through the eyes of the creature he previously detested, the bear.

There is a point in the story after his transformation into a bear where Kenai has an encounter with the shaman of the village, Tanana. Right away, Tanana realizes that the bear she confronts was Kenai, who at this point is still unaware of his change. From their conversation we learn Kenai changes for a reason.

Tanana: Kenai, listen to me. Sitka did this. (*She begins to observe his body.*) Strange. Spirits don't usually make these kind of changes. Oh... Oh, my, my, my, my. (*She gasps, astonished.*) Sitka must have something really big planned for you. Yep, yep. You are going to get a whole new perspective on things. (*She gasps again, her curiosity piqued.*) Oh! Do you see in black and white or color? (*Kenai growls at her, and she playfully punches his nose.*) Hey. Listen to me. You got yourself into this mess. If you want to change, take it up with your brother's spirit. (*She points toward the sky. Kenai whines and grunts in protest.*) You'll find him on the mountain where the lights touch the earth. He'll help you make up for what you've done wrong. (*Tanana draws a map in the soil. She suddenly disappears.*)

Kenai: But I didn't do anything wrong. Tanana? Tanana! *(He looks around frantically.)* Wait. I didn't do anything wrong. I don't even know how to get there.

From the dialogue, it is evident that this deliberate act by the great spirits, as expounded by the shaman, is aimed at providing Kenai with "a whole new perspective on things," teaching him the empathy he previously lacked through direct, lived experience.

How the Transformation Reshapes Kenai's View of a Bear's Life

Kenai's immersive transformation as a bear dramatically reshapes whatever he initially believes about the natural world, his takes on masculinity, and human-animal relationships. In the early part of the narrative of the movie, Kenai is portrayed as an impulsive and prideful teen from an Inuit-inspired culture, a background that traditionally holds a deep connection to nature. However, indirect characterization of Kenai, such as his reckless behavior with the caribou and his childish banter with his brothers, suggests the sheer existence of a gap or incongruity between his Inuit cultural heritage and his personal maturity. The fact that he shows great enthusiasm for his coming-of-age ritual does not necessarily mean that he is ready to embrace a spiritual guide. He does so only to gain the status he believes is associated with becoming a "true man."



Figure 2. Kenai is disappointed when his totem was revealed (Brother Bear, 2003 00:8:15)

How Kenai views the world undergoes a dramatic turn during the coming-of-age ritual when he receives the Bear of Love as his totem (see Figure 2). This receiving the totem is a source of deep disappointment for Kenai, since he does not associate [bear of] love with masculinity while harboring a strong prejudice against bears. To him, bears are "thieves" that "don't think," "don't feel." Of course, this perception reflects his ignorance and emotional immaturity. Kenai's perception of manhood that cannot be but strength, action, and retaliation rather than emotional understanding is central to his character. His following decision to hunt the bear to avenge his brother's death, despite Denahi's warnings, is a direct expression of this belief. He is furious at Denahi when the latter does not conform his invitation to revenge for Sitka's death:

Kenai: You ready?
Denahi: For what?
Kenai: For going after the bear.
Denahi: I know what you're feeling, but killing that bear is wrong.
Kenai: Wrong? Our brother is dead and it's because of that monster.
Denahi: I don't blame the bear, Kenai.
Kenai: I see.
Denahi: Killing the bear won't make you a man.
Kenai: Now you're trying to be wise.
Denahi: I'm trying to follow my totem. Why can't you?
Kenai: You really think love has anything to do with being a man? A man wouldn't just sit here and do nothing.
Denahi: Kenai. Don't upset the spirits.
Kenai: *(Scoffs)* Spirits. Thanks for your wisdom.

Kenai's violent behavior toward bears and his hatred against them—including in it his aggressive response to Denahi's rejection to join his act of revenge—is more than a simple and direct reaction to loss; this behavior is a misguided attempt to restore social order and show his power, consistent with theories of violence (Eisner, 2009) and the rage stage of mourning (Kübler-Ross, 1969).

When Kenai is converted into a bear, his pride and prejudice are put to the test right away. Initially, he fights with his new identity and maintains his human perspective. His first contacts as a bear reflect his deep-seated bias, as he dismisses a helping bear cub, Koda, as "stupid" and inferior. He proudly seeks to release himself from a trap on his own, demonstrating his strong confidence in self-reliance and refusal to accept assistance from a bear.

Koda: You need to get down. Let me help. (*The bear cub holds the stick and then starts to hit Kenai with it*)
Kenai: Oh, wait. Ow!
Koda: Hold still. (*still hitting Kenai*)
Kenai: Just... Stop that. Ow! If you just... Stop it!
Koda: (*stops hitting Kenai*) It's no use. The only way to get down is to chew your own foot off.
Kenai: I don't need some stupid bear's help. I just need the stick.
Koda: Okay, here. (*handing the stick to Kenai*)
Kenai: No, I'll do it myself. Put it back. (*Koda puts down the stick near Kenai.*) No, where you found it.
Koda: Oh.
Kenai: To the left. By the little rock.
Koda: Here?
Kenai: Yes. (*Koda sits next to the sticks eating berries and watching Kenai trying to reach the sticks*)

In the following narrative of the film, it is subtly depicted the beginning of Kenai's transformation: he starts to rely on his bear instincts as he is forced to confront the harsh reality of being chased by his own brother, which contradicts his black-and-white worldview.

This change in Kenai's attitude is primarily driven by the friendship he forms with Koda. Their voyage reveals a growing empathy gap, with Kenai, a former human, viewing bears as "monsters," and Koda, who has only known life as a bear, seeing humans as the aggressors. On their trek to the Salmon Run, they come across a cave. Kenai follows Koda inside the cave and discovers ancient artwork left by humans. As Kenai looks at the drawing, his face tightens with rage. Koda notices what Kenai is staring at and hides behind him, saying quietly, "Those monsters are terribly scary. Especially with those sticks." Kenai is astounded by Koda's statements (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. A drawing of a bear and human (Brother Bear, 2003 00:48:19)

Following this is the conversation that hints at the motives behind mutual hatred between human and bear.

Koda: Why do they hate us, Kenai?

Kenai: We're bears.
 Koda: So?
 Kenai: So, you know how they are. They're killers.
 Koda: Wait a minute, who's the killers?
 Kenai: Bears.
 Koda: What? Which bears? I'm not like that, and you're not like that.
 Kenai: Well, obviously not all bears. I mean, you're okay. Most bears will look for any excuse to attack a human.
 Koda: But, Kenai, he [Denahi] attacked us.
 Kenai: (*Frustrated*) You're just a cub. When you're older, you'll understand.

The above dialogue highlights how Kenai and Koda are holding different perspectives in seeing their situation. Koda's asking innocent questions, "Why do they hate us, Kenai?" reflects his difficulty to make sense of the fear and violence directed toward bears by humans. Kenai, meanwhile, has a different look on the matter. He thinks of bears as "killers" and makes generalizations of their behavior, although he realizes that he is now a bear himself and that Koda, who shows his gentleness and kindness, clearly does not fit that stereotype. Kenai seeks to justify his belief by saying something like, "Most bears will look for any excuse to attack a human." To this, Koda quickly responds by pointing out, "But Kenai, he [Denahi] attacked us." This simple yet powerful line reminds Kenai that, in their case, it is the human (Denahi) who was the aggressor. Kenai's response, "You're just a cub. When you're older, you'll understand," reveals his internal conflict and the difficulty he faces in letting go of old beliefs. This moment exposes the lingering empathy gap within Kenai, as he continues to wrestle with the identity shift from human to bear.

This conflict of viewpoints causes Kenai to reconsider his prior notions. His interactions with Koda and the other bears lead him to see their world as one of community, affection, and emotional depth, rather than one of hostility and thoughtlessness. When Kenai and Koda arrive at the Salmon Run, they are greeted by a bunch of other bears. Following a brief introduction, Kenai intends to go and head toward the mountain beside the Salmon Run, still focused on his initial aim. However, the other bears stop him and gently remind him that this location belongs to all bears. This moment underscores the bears' sense of community, which Kenai is still learning to participate in. Kenai learns about bear life by seeing and interacting with the other bears. He gradually begins to love his new life, realizing how different it is from his previous life as a human. This emotional metamorphosis is emphasized by the film's soundtrack, particularly the song "Welcome," whose lines "It's nothing like I've ever seen before" illustrate Kenai's sense of astonishment and transformation. The song confirms his growing realization that the bear world is beautiful, warm, and worth belonging to, rather than something foreign or dangerous.

It is, however, also during the sharing session with other bears at the Salmon Run where the climax of this journey occurs. During the event, Kenai comes to a realization that he is the one responsible for the death of Koda's mother. This moment is a profound turning point, as he is forced to confront the consequences of his actions from the perspective of the very creature he had wronged. In his admission, he says to Koda, "*Well, it's kind of about a man, and kind of about a bear. But mostly it's about a monster. A monster who did something so bad...*" This holds special significance because Kenai does not begin by making excuses or shifting blame. Instead, he refers to himself as a "monster", and admits, "*Koda, I did something very wrong,*" fully acknowledging the gravity of his actions. This moment is later reinforced in the lyrics of one of the soundtracks called *No Way Out* and echoed again when Kenai says a similarly heart-wrenching line after the song ends: "*Koda, I wish I could... If there was just some way... I'd give anything if... If I could just... (sighs) I'm sorry, Koda. I'm so sorry.*" This moment reflects a huge transformation in Kenai's character. From someone who once acted out of anger and vengeance to someone who now chooses honesty and accountability, even if it means destroying the bond he has come to cherish with Koda.

The journey's culmination, however, occurs during the sharing session with other bears at the Salmon Run. During the occasion, Kenai realizes that he is responsible for Koda's mother's death.

This is a watershed moment for him, as he is forced to confront the implications of his actions through the eyes of the creature he has offended. In his admittance, he tells Koda, "Well, it's kind of about a man, and kind of about a bear. But mostly it's about a monster. A monster who did something so bad..." This is particularly significant because Kenai does not begin by making excuses or shifting blame. Instead, he refers to himself as a "monster" and confesses, "Koda, I did something very wrong," recognizing the gravity of his acts. This moment is later emphasized in the lyrics of one of the soundtracks, *No Way Out*, and echoed again when Kenai delivers a similarly heartfelt line after the song ends: "Koda, I wish I could... If there was just some way... I'd give anything if... If I could just... (sighs) I'm sorry, Koda. I'm so sorry." This moment marks a significant shift in Kenai's character. From someone who formerly acted out of rage and vengeance to someone who now chooses honesty and accountability, even if it means breaking the link he has developed with Koda.

Kenai's confession to Koda, in which he refers to himself as "a monster," represents a full transition from his previous self-centered perspective to one of guilt and responsibility. This great empathy and personal growth culminate in his ultimate decision to remain a bear, giving up his human identity to care for Koda. Kenai redefines his sense of manhood by choosing to live by the totem he previously rejected, demonstrating that true strength is found in love, sacrifice, and compassion rather than violence or power. His change demonstrates how empathy, when learnt via an immersive experience, can bridge vast differences and lead to a more harmonious understanding of nature.

Brother Bear and the Dynamic Relationship between Human and Animal

The film *Brother Bear* depicts a complicated and growing interaction between humans and animals, with both periods of conflict and profound underlying harmony. The story opens by describing a pre-domestic cultural worldview in which the human-animal connection is marked by spiritual and symbolic reverence. The lyrics of the film's soundtrack, "Great Spirits," openly express this philosophy: "man and nature lived side by side" and "we are all the same." This feeling expresses a belief system that sees humanity as interrelated, rather than separate or superior to the animal world. This viewpoint is visually and culturally represented in the coming-of-age ceremony, in which each person receives an animal totem embodying a guiding virtue. This approach implies that animals are not just resources, but also spiritual guides, teachers, and companions, which is consistent with Richard Bulliet's (2005) concept of the pre-domestic age of human-animal connections.

Despite this idealized cultural context, the film admits the presence of conflict and miscommunication. A crucial example is the rivalry for resources, such as the fish stolen by the bear, which sets off a series of events that ends with Sitka's death and Kenai's thirst for vengeance. This first friction indicates a more basic, survival-driven facet of the human-animal bond. The film delves deeper into this interaction by focusing on mutual fear. When the moose brothers, Rutt and Tuke, encounter Denahi, they flee immediately, regardless of his intentions. Their behavior exemplifies how wild animals regard people as a universal threat, a perspective shaped by instinct and previous encounters with violence.

The film's most poignant statement on human-animal dynamics derives from the shared perspective of dread, in which Kenai and Koda refer to each other's species as "monsters." This reciprocal antagonism demonstrates how conflict between animals is frequently caused by misunderstanding and survival impulses rather than malice. Kenai, the human, perceives bears as dangerous predators, but Koda, the bear, sees humans as hostile intruders. Kenai's immersive change serves as the narrative device that bridges this divide. By living as a bear, he sees the world through Koda's eyes, learning that the "monster" is not a certain species, but rather the capacity for violence and discrimination seen in both.

Finally, the film concludes with a denouement in which this negative dynamic is transcended via empathy rather than eradicated. Kenai's decision to remain a bear, combined with his acceptance into the human tribe and Koda's peaceful presence among the villagers, represents the restoration of harmony. This final picture depicts a world in which human and animal populations may cohabit, illustrating that understanding and compassion can help to reestablish respect for nature. The film finishes by reiterating the concept that the relationship between humans and animals is both spiritual and familial, implying that an empathetic bond can bridge ancient divides and establish a cohesive society of all living species.

The transformative trajectory of Kenai in *Brother Bear* serves as a narrative manifestation of the "suspension of disbelief" and immersive perspective-taking theorized by Dede (2009). By shifting from a human-centric worldview to a forced biological immersion, Kenai's experience mirrors the clinical efficacy observed in Bunn and Terpstra's (2009) study; much like the medical students who developed profound emotional insights through simulated hallucinations, Kenai's physical transition into a bear functions as a high-stakes "experiential learning" model. This immersion effectively dismantles the "in-group favoritism" and inherent empathic biases identified by Gutsell and Inzlicht (2012), which initially fueled his hostility toward the natural world. Consequently, the film's denouement—defined by the "restoration of harmony" and "familial bonding" between species—validates the research premise that deep-seated socio-cognitive biases can be transcended when an individual is enabled to perceive another's reality "as if" it were their own (Rogers, 1959). Ultimately, the narrative resolution reinforces the scholarly assertion that immersive transformation is a potent catalyst for reconciling ancient divides, facilitating a transition from antagonistic isolation to a cohesive, empathetic society.

Conclusion

This study found that the animated film *Brother Bear* (2003) is an effective narrative vehicle for exploring themes such as immersive transformation, empathy, and the complex dynamics of human-animal relationships. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology and a multi-theoretical framework, the study successfully examined how the protagonist, Kenai, goes on a profound and transformative journey that challenges his initial worldview and ultimately redefines his understanding of manhood and compassion.

The findings show that Kenai's metamorphosis into a bear was an intentional and meaningful act by the Great Spirits, and it serves as an important lesson in empathy. His path, like the stages of grief, begins with denial and rage and ends with a spiteful act of violence. The immersive change into a bear is more than just a punishment; it is an instructional instrument that forces him to experience the world through the eyes of a creature he once detested. This shift in perspective serves as a catalyst for his personal development, allowing him to overcome prejudice and immaturity.

Furthermore, the study shows how the film's storyline depicts the human-animal dynamic in a complex and nuanced manner. It accepts the existence of mutual fear and conflict caused by misunderstandings and survival impulses, which contrasts with the tribe's spiritual peace. However, the film ultimately resolves this tension by encouraging empathy. Kenai's friendship with Koda, and his final decision to remain a bear to care for him, represent the potential of reconciliation and cohabitation. His reintegration into the human tribe, with Koda, illustrates a new paradigm in which love and understanding may transcend the gap between species.

Finally, *Brother Bear* is more than just a coming-of-age story; it is a powerful allegory for the ability of immersive experiences to inspire empathy and shift deeply held biases. The video contends that true wisdom and maturity are discovered not in power or aggression, but in the ability to perceive the world through another's eyes. This transformative process enables the

protagonist to grow from a prejudiced adolescent to a compassionate person who exemplifies the very virtue he previously rejected: love. The study's examination of the video sheds light on the roles of empathy and perspective-taking in resolving conflict and cultivating a more harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment.

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