

**Animation movies as a medium of learning: with special reference to
Disney Pixar's INSIDE OUT**

Namrata Mukherjee SME

and Quality Liaison Plus

Education, Bangalore



Abstract:

“Film is not all about the fancy gear or the camera movement, but about the story, you want to tell.” Mario So Gao. Storytelling has been integral to human beings. Whether it is traditional oral storytelling that existed since medieval times or movies that tell us vivid, visual stories, human beings have always incorporated stories into their lives in various ways. Stories have always taught several lessons to society, imparted knowledge, and made a sizable impact on the human psyche. It is no wonder then, that movies have also emerged as a learning medium of importance in the present times, mainly because of the stories they tell. The visual impact of films has always been far-reaching, be it positive or negative, depending on what they say and how they say it. Thus, great pieces of literature, stories of human emotions, etc all found their way to the visual storytelling medium, across the various movie genres. One can easily mention numerous examples of great, epic storytelling adventures on celluloid but to be one that stays simple at heart and imparts a great lesson transcending the boundaries of genre, target age group, or even the limitations of simple storytelling itself is deserving of a special mention. In recent times, animated movies, which were previously considered to be primarily made for children, have made an equal mark on the audience’s psyche along with regular genre movies. With diverse storylines, ample plots to give the adult thinking brain a nod, and immensely attractive visuals in terms of translating the story on screen, animated movies are now a force to reckon with. My paper here talks about one such recent animated movie, *Inside Out*, and how in a very special way it becomes a medium for imparting invaluable life lessons to the young and old alike.

Keywords:

Movies, Storytelling, Learning, Knowledge, Animation

Introduction

“Film is not all about the fancy gear or the camera movement, but about the story, you want to tell.” Mario So Gao.

As human beings, we are inherently drawn to stories. We read books, watch movies, and tell stories orally that pass the boundaries of generations and nations. We read stories in books and watch stories unfold before our eyes when we watch movies. Some stories speak to us in ways that we feel them as one of our own. We belong to those stories. Movie makers are storytellers: they translate their visions on screen with visuals, and music, peppered with emotional dialogues, all in their attempt to make the audience feel one with the story and the characters. A movie is not just what we watch on the screen, but underneath it is like a complete human being, made out of flesh and bones, blood and muscles, with a myriad variety of emotions on display.

Movies are of different genres, just like there are humans. Over the years, certain genres have been associated with a certain group of audiences, pertaining to a particular age group. But, nevertheless, some of them, in more recent times, have been genre-benders and appealed to audiences over a diverse age group variety. Animation movies, until very recently, were

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supposed to be viewed by an audience who are predominantly children. This sort of classification probably comes from the fact that animated movies to a very large extent were based on versions of fairy tales made suitable for the younger audience. Cases in the example would be tales like Cinderella, Snow White, Beauty, and the Beast, etc. made primarily by Disney studios, suitable for the younger section of the audience. It would although be wrong enough to say that these animated movies are unsuitable for the adult audience. It is, however true, that the stories told in these films speak more to those who are young at age.

Disney studios have been mostly the pioneer in the case of bringing animated films to the younger audience, with versions that are toned down and altered from the original to suit the unadulterated vision of a youngster. Pixar and other studios have followed Disney in pursuit thereafter. The first example of a Disney Studio animated movie could be traced back to 1937 when Disney Studio released its version of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Since then, over the years, it has always been a big number of films, catering to the younger audience. But in recent times, we have seen a major uphaul in the plots and stories of these animated movies as the studios have started tackling a different variety of themes, that vary from family to friends and to relationships and are not just limited to a watered-down version of the fairy tales, supposed to be only watched by children. What was considered to be meant mostly meant for children, is now viewed and liked by adults as well.

One of the more prominent movies that have changed the viewership of animated movies is Disney Pixar's Inside Out. Released in the year 2015, directed by Pete Doctor, InsideOut is no way short of being called a modern marvel of an animated movie. It tells the story of an 11-year-old girl, Riley, and her personality changes shown through her emotional mind map. The screenplay of the movie was co-written by Pete along with two others and the personal element came from observing the emotional and psychological changes of his own daughter.

Inside out shows Riley's mind map via the five emotions that primarily govern her: Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger and they make her the person that she is. Once she faces some important changes in life, her stable and settled emotional mind map goes awry and everything starts falling apart. Within this basic premise of the movie, it makes some important commentaries on issues that are not only meant for children. It opens a new window through which the adults can also take a look, and also, find solutions to questions that they can identify with. Thus, this movie speaks to one and all.

The very pertaining emotional queries addressed by the movie can be enumerated as:

1. **Necessity of feeling mixed emotions:** Inside Out shows its central character Riley as a predominantly joyful kid, with happy experiences in her life. But when she moves to San Francisco from Minnesota, with her parents, she experiences new and different emotions. Her entire persona changes and she almost becomes a different person. This is where the main crux of the movie lies, as the five predominant emotions governing Riley's personality, which are depicted in the movie as five different human-like entities, with their own eccentricities, try to get her back to the Riley that she was.

Luckily, for them, and for her, things get back to normal and that's when in hindsight both Riley and the audiences realize that it is important to feel and accept all the different emotions as they are all connected, which helps in creating our mental painting with their coloured variety, and not one with a single hue. Inside Out also very effectively depicts

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the importance of sadness as a primary emotion. From the beginning of the movie, Riley is shown as a joyful and happy kid, with almost no reason to feel sad. But, as the plot of the movie progresses, we see that the past important memories of Riley, that construct her persona, are not only Joy, her predominant emotion but also, they have the presence of

Sadness, which, indeed, makes it what i

2. **Parenting:** The parenting style depicted in the movie is a pretty new age and cool one where Riley shares a cozy, intimate bond with both her parents. As her emotional mind map depicts the different islands that construct her personality, the family island, which is built on this very foundation of love shared amongst the three, shatters, when the bond breaks. Riley decides to run away to Minnesota, thereby resulting in the breakage of her family island. But once realisation dawns and she is back, the damages are repaired. The parenting style depicted in the movie is definitely new age and fun but also peppered with the lesson as to how much trust should be vested in a teenage child in order to ensure a transparent parent-child bond.

3. **Role of memories:** The film also very skillfully portrays the importance of memories, old, new, lost, and found, and lost again to oblivion. A very important section of the movie plays with Riley's memories, in a very colourful, almost amusement park-like setting, that shows how we lose certain memories with age, and why sometimes recalling back those old ones might set your emotions on the right path of revival after a meltdown.

Inside Out as a new-age animated film scores not only in terms of brilliant storytelling, remarkable characterization, and impressive visuals but also in terms of the very personal message that echoes and stays with the audiences long after they have finished watching the movie. The message acts in many layers. It teaches the kids, as well as the adult members of the audience some very important life lessons, but it does so without being preachy. That is where lies the magic of the immaculate storytelling that this movie manages to do. Named one of the best movies of the year 2015, it will not be an exaggeration to say that it went on to win the best-animated feature award at the 88th Academy Awards, by virtue of the brilliant handling and matured narration of its theme on the screen.

Animated movies have long been in a way neglected from being part of the mainstream ones because of their storytelling that was primarily targeted at a younger audience. Simply changing the narrative, narration style, and themes that it deals with, has resulted in animated movies emerging as one of the most well-known and well-looked-at forces in the oeuvre of movies today. In recent times, we have seen a bunch of them dealing with original themes that not only tells stories to the kids but also speak to the adult audience, in a way that resonates, teaches, and makes them move. And that indeed is a mark of great and good storytelling. The learning, that thus happens serves not only as a limited period of lesson learning but a lifelong learning of valuable life lessons, as seen in the case of Inside Out. Inside Out, in this regard, acts as a beacon that has paved the way for new-age animated movie storytelling and is to be rightfully lauded for that, with hopes that more movies keep coming with the right mix of

emotions, storytelling, message, and a big heart and the learning imparted by them reaches us all.

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