

Connect Corner: Lessons on Resilience from the Animated Film *Abominable*

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In this issue's *Connect Corner* we take time to reflect on resilience; something we all must cultivate in this challenging time. *Abominable* is an animated film about personal growth, bereavement, emotional expression, and community as told from the perspective of the main character, Yi.

Yi is a young girl on a journey with her friends across China to bring a lost yeti named Everest back home to the Himalayas. Instead of spending time with her mother and grandmother following the death of her father, Yi fills her days running about the city of Shanghai doing odd jobs. She hides the money she earns in her secret rooftop sanctuary, saving up for a journey across China; a journey she had hoped to take with her late father. We learn that her father taught her to play violin and playing became her way to connect with him after he passed. Meanwhile, the magical creature Everest is captured by poachers with the intention of showcasing his existence to the world. When Yi and Everest cross paths, Yi becomes determined to help the young yeti return home. In helping Everest, she connects with a sense of purpose. Yi learns to move towards meaningful connections with family. Initially for Everest, and by the end of the film, for herself as well.

On her journey, she is accompanied by her goofy neighbor, Peng, and reluctantly by Peng's self-absorbed teenage cousin, Jin. The trio embarks on an epic journey, discovering Everest's evolving magical abilities to manipulate nature, the power of music, and a newfound loyalty to each other. Along the journey, Yi finally expresses her grief when she plays her violin atop the LeShan Buddha, an important landmark on her proposed journey with her father. White flowers, a color symbolizing mourning in East Asian cultures, cover the Buddha as Yi finds peace and acceptance for her loss. After successfully returning Everest to his home,

Yi returns to Shanghai and the film concludes as she, her mother, grandmother, Peng, and Jin all gather for a meal.

The importance of familial connection is a prominent theme in the film and an important factor in promoting resilience.^{1,2} Familial ties of any kind, such as between Yi, Peng and Jin, serve as reinforcements in times of trouble and emotional upheaval. The relationship between the 3 children is that of a "found family." Their loyalty to each other is palpable throughout the film as they band together against adversity, despite their initial differences. They would not allow Yi to journey on her own, and cared enough about her wellbeing to join her on this impromptu adventure. No matter what her state of mind, they offer support and love; this allows her to reach out to them in her own time. Learning to prioritize her relationships and knowing when to ask for help further cultivated Yi's resilience.

The therapeutic value of music has been described both historically and cross-culturally.³ The scene with Yi playing violin atop LeShan Buddha depicts the therapeutic value of music, especially as a form of catharsis. For children especially, it can be difficult to express complex emotions using words. As Yi plays, her expression turns from worried and anxious to sweet and tranquil. The power of her music is amplified visually as it conjures the spread of white flowers across the monument, leaving the audience in awe. Yi builds her resilience in this scene by seeing the value of self-reflection and creative emotional expression. Viewers learn that mindful practices such as this are healthy ways to deal with hardships.

The supportive character Jin, a familiar archetype who easily resonates with young audiences, also displays remarkable resilience. In his own character arc, Jin

starts out as a self-absorbed, social-media junkie glued to his phone, not unlike many modern teens. When he decides to part with his beloved phone in exchange for a boat to reunite with his friends, Jin shows maturity and the ability to adapt to the needs of others. He lets go of his self-absorption to prioritize helping others in need. At Yi's peak distress over her broken violin, Jin channels empathy and humility in helping Yi realize her unresolved grief. By then, Jin has developed a sense of purpose: to be present for his friends and help with their emotional journeys, showing his own emotional growth throughout the movie.

Regardless of which character the viewer identifies with, they all grow and change throughout the film. These are thoughtful and realistic changes, ones that the viewer can incorporate into their own daily lives. Resilience has been defined as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress."⁴ Resilience can be practiced, not only to help children adapt to life's stresses, but also to foster profound personal growth. Helping others, avoiding isolation, self-reflection, and prioritizing relationships are all means to increase resilience in the face of adversity.⁴ These coping skills are important for all

ages and stages of development, and cultivating them helps to develop strength of character and self-worth.^{5,6} The movie *Abominable* is a beautiful depiction of how these adaptations can improve young lives.

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If you are interested in writing for *Connect Corner* or if there is something you would like to see reviewed, please feel free to reach out to connect@jaacap.org with your suggestions!