

## Dances with Wolves

It is difficult to imagine what it would be like to watch an entire people and their way of life vanish within a lifetime. It is even harder to imagine being a part of that culture, knowing only a certain amount of time is left before everything previously known to that lifestyle is terminated. This predicament comes face to face with the characters in *Dances with Wolves*, an outstanding movie based on the unjust expulsion of the Sioux plains' Indians. Directed by and starring Kevin Costner, the story follows Civil War-era soldier John Dunbar deep into the American Frontier and the lives of the people who once occupied it. The film's unforgettable story, outstanding cast, and beautiful soundtrack make it both enjoyable and moving.

Perhaps the most distinguishing of all features in the film is its story. Both novel and screenplay written by Michael Blake, *Dances with Wolves* allows viewers a better understanding of the Sioux. The story, through many carefully crafted segments of daily lives and personal conundrums, gets the audience to care deeply about the characters. The film begins by following Kevin Costner's character John Dunbar, who self assigns himself to an abandoned soldier post in the American Frontier. He is alone with his horse Cisco for various scenes in the movie, introducing viewers to his habits and narrated thoughts. One scene shows Dunbar shortly after having encountered a Sioux member for the first time. Writing in his journal, his thoughts become narrated. He explains the peculiar Indian adding that he seemed like a marvelous man. There are many other scenes of narration only, which gives viewers an insider's perspective throughout the film. He is eventually discovered by a near Sioux Tribe and learns of their policies and culture. In time, he falls in love with a white woman living with the Sioux and even becomes a member of the tribe himself. He receives a new outlook on life, love, and happiness but is ultimately at risk along with the tribe when faced with the ever-annexing white American government. One of the most memorable scenes in the film is a short conversation between Dunbar and the tribe's Holy Man, Kicking Bird (played by Graham Greene). Kicking Bird tells Dunbar that he thinks he (Dunbar) is now on the trail of becoming a true human being. After this is said, the audience becomes fully aware that Dunbar's change is indeed one of the main concepts in *Dances*. This short, thought-provoking scene is only one of many small key pieces that add to the story and its meaning.

Another amazing aspect of the movie is its acting. For a large portion of the film, the characters other have no understanding of each other's language or are alone. This makes the ability to project appropriate countenance crucial. The expressions used by Kicking Bird, Wind in His Hair (Rodney A. Grant), and Dunbar during their first attempt at conversation are vital and spot on. Not only do the actors emote flawlessly in expression, but also in tone alone. Costner's character Dunbar is narrator of the film, and each word described by him is filled with image and meaning. Without this skill of emoting, the movie could possibly lose the audience's interest in Dunbar's narration and consequently much of the movie's dialogue. Eventually, Dunbar better understands the Sioux language, and as the characters speak with each other, viewers can expect to be anything but unimpressed. One scene that really stands out is when Dunbar speaks with Kicking Bird about how many white people will inhabit the plains. Costner pairs each of Dunbar's words with a wince as he truthfully informs Kicking Bird of what is to come. Lines of crinkled skin emerge on Dunbar's forehead for the first time as his eyes flicker back and forth from Kicking Bird and his own feet. This informs viewers that there is a significant amount of shame and grief he feels in the words that are spoken. The blank, pale face and pierced lips generated by Greene, who has until now always been composed, is quite startling. The movie's superb acting gives it a realistic quality that lacks in many other films.

Not only does *Dances with Wolves* consist of great acting and an award winning story- it has a soundtrack that binds the two together harmoniously. Written and conducted by John Barry, the music fills nearly every scene with beautiful melodies. The songs alone tell a tale of happiness, love, despair, and curiosity. During the buffalo hunt, the music becomes upbeat and exciting. When the feared Pawnee tribe are on the doorstep of the Sioux' homes, it is correspondingly frightening. The music is so influential in the film that many of the songs are dedicated to one scene exclusively. Nearly every mood

in the movie is emphasized by its varying scores, and the effect gives the film an individuality of being slightly poetic.

In brief, *Dances with Wolves* is more than a movie solely geared towards the audience's entertainment. Instead, it stands as a reminder of an inequitable and unfortunate event in American history. The film manages to promote acceptance and sympathy for the Sioux and is told in a way that makes viewers feel included. Furthermore, the ability to move audiences through its accomplished acting, distinguished story, and unblemished soundtrack makes *Dances with Wolves* a pleasure all viewers should enjoy.

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