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What They've Been Taught

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What They've Been Taught

Abstract

This is a film review of *What They've Been Taught* (2022), directed by Brit Hensel.

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Author Notes

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What They've Been Taught (2022), dir. Brit Hensel¹

This film explores elements of the Cherokee worldview through the story telling of an elder.

What they've been taught:

“Real humans don't do that.” We each have a responsibility for our actions. All of our actions are going to have consequences and we are responsible for those consequences. So, we do not want to do what real humans don't do.

“Acknowledge the help you get.” If you receive help from someone or something, you should make sure that the person or thing from which you have received help understands that you appreciate the help you have been given. Help is not something you are owed. It is not something you can demand. If you do not express your appreciation for the help you get today, that help may not come tomorrow.

“Reciprocity.” When the elder was sent by his mother to retrieve a plant used to make medicine, he was quite proud of himself. But his father asked him if he left something where he took the plant. Almost anything would do. Did you pray? His father asked. Life is not about “just taking.” There is a reciprocity in the universe. You take the plant, but you leave something of your own where the plant was. In your prayer you acknowledge the plant as a gift.

“Everything we have was already here.” We do not make something. We are not the creator. We make things that are already here into other things. We should approach our being in the world with humility.

“We are here as guests.” We are here to be as careful and responsible as we can be. We should treat the world around us as we would the home of a friend who has invited us in to visit. We do not own the world.

“That we can live as we do is a gift.” Every ceremony is a reminder to us to be thankful for what we have.

What a different world it would be if we had all learned what they’ve been taught.

¹ Brit Hensel, the director, is the first woman who is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation to direct an official selection of the Sundance Film Festival.