

Disney's film, *The Little Mermaid*, portrays the character, Ariel, as a stereotypical rebellious American teenager. This is further compounded as a result of an ongoing father/daughter battle for setting rules and learning the ropes of parenting. The filmmakers changed this aspect of Hans Christian Andersen's 1836 story to adapt the character to the 1989 American times and make the character culturally relevant. The shaping of Ariel's development also changes her motivation to actually see the sea witch. In the film, Ariel goes to Ursula out of anger and resentment about her father's treatment. In the story, the mermaid wants to be human for a day and learns from her grandmother that a human man must love her to establish an immortal soul.

The film has no grandmother character. This leads to another point about the mermaid's circle of trust. Andersen writes that the mermaid learns about the prince's whereabouts from her sister and the details of human life from her grandmother. In contrast, the film depicts Ariel as independent from her family. She never even talks to her sisters as she is the youngest and refuses to spend time with them or learn from them. Instead, Disney creators make her dependent on humorously personified sea creatures: Flounder the fish, Sebastian the crab, and Scuttle the seagull. Her education about humans and her information about Prince Eric come from Scuttle rather than from her family members. This is also an adaptation of the ideology of the independence of American youth. It encourages independent decision-making and personal determination of which both characteristics are particularly American for the relevant target audience.

In the original text, the mermaid's sisters hear of the prince's engagement to a princess and swim to meet her explaining that they gave up their hair in exchange for a knife which the girl would have to use to stab and kill the prince in order to regain her fish's tail. This violent detail was completely overlooked by the Disney team and altered to show the mended relations between King Triton and his daughter by having him fight Ursula head-on. To placate the ongoing disputes and redeem himself as what Disney wanted to convey as a loving father, King Triton martyrs himself for Ariel by replacing Ariel as Ursula's slave.

Moreover, the film alters the role of the sea witch to the extent that the sea witch becomes evil rather than a magical scientist. In the text, the sea witch makes a draught for the mermaid to drink in exchange for her beautiful voice. As payment, the sea witch takes the mermaid's voice by cutting off her tongue. The sea witch stipulates no time limit on marriage and explains that if the prince marries another, the mermaid would become foam on the waves. Here, the sea witch's interactions with the mermaid are over. The film depicts the sea witch, Ursula, as a cruel villain who targets Ariel, as her father is the king of the ocean. Her two cruel eels approach and groom Ariel to visit the sea witch with bad intentions. Later, Ursula throws a cut tongue, not Ariel's into the caldron and sucks out Ariel's voice as payment. Where the film over extends the malicious behavior of the sea witch is when Ursula incarnates a human and uses Ariel's voice via seashell to hypnotize the prince and purposefully ruin Ariel's life. Ursula abuses her magical powers by becoming Ariel's only obstacle and destroying all possibility for Ariel's success. The film also included a three-day time limit, a detail that was likely added to

adapt the tale to the length of a movie. Disney needed a villain so the filmmakers chose the sea witch. The original text is a story about the trials and tribulations of a young mermaid and her dream of becoming human, but that was not likely enough to be considered marketable. Disney needed drama so filmmakers enlivened the elements of evil via the character of Ursula.

Furthermore, Disney added love via the lovely ending where Ariel and Prince Eric live “happily ever after.” Andersen did not wish this as he wrote that the mermaid was rejected and had to vie for her own life and manage her choices. By not stabbing the prince for her fish’s tail, she was rescued by daughters of the air and was in line for a 300-year life with the possibility of an immortal soul. In this story, Andersen demonstrates that the mermaid does not waste her love on a human who does not love her, but learns to love herself and take responsibility for her own decisions. Disney, on the other hand, shows that the mermaid is only happy and successful being loved by a human and escaping the violent consequences of her actions by luck. Luck being of course, Prince Eric, heroically slaying Ursula with a wrecked ship. What Disney perpetuates here is that young women can be “saved” by the love of young men and only then does the possibility of happiness arise. It is a poor lesson for any young woman as it teaches that blindly loving a man that one knows nothing about is worth risking one’s own life and the lives of others. There is no lesson about self-love and understanding one’s own accountability and is therefore a disloyal depiction of Andersen’s original moral.