

Runtime: 1 hour and 34



After watching the movie, please take some time to discuss the following questions. Please try to keep your answers brief so that everyone has a turn to share their thoughts. It's okay if you don't have time to get through all the questions.

## History Break!

The people of ancient Scotland practiced variations of Celtic Polytheism, a nature-focused faith with many gods and goddesses like Lugh [LOO], Brigid [BRIH-guhd], and Rhiannon [ree-ANN-un]. Druids were the scholarly and priestly class of ancient Celtic society, serving as religious leaders, judges, teachers, healers, and political advisors, responsible for spiritual rites, legal rulings, education, and preserving lore, often focusing on nature and astronomy.

Christianity was first introduced to what is now southern Scotland during the Roman occupation of Britain, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. During this time, the population of Scotland, Ireland, and England were converted to Christianity through the strategic replacement of pagan sites and symbols (like building churches and monasteries over sacred sites and integrating nature imagery into church masonry and holy books). Celtic Pagan festivals like Samhain [SAH-win] and Bealtaine [Bee-AWL-tin-a] later blended into Christian holidays that were brought to Britain by the Romans. Also, the powerful monastic system often incorporated Celtic artistic flair into Christian art (like the Book of Kells).

1. Brave takes place in 10<sup>th</sup> century Scotland after this transition, when there were more Catholics than Pagans in Scotland. However, examples of Pagan imagery, folklore, and values can still be found in the kingdom, and it's people. What are a few examples that you noticed?

- **Will-o'-the-Wisps:** These glowing orbs guiding Merida (and previously her mother) are straight from Celtic folklore, spirits or fairies leading travelers, sometimes to their doom, but here they guide toward destiny and understanding.
- **The Witch:** She's a powerful figure connected to the natural world, bears, and ancient magic, suggesting a pagan priestess or guardian of old ways, not a typical Christian "evil witch".
- **The Curse:** Queen Elinor turning into a bear echoes Celtic myths of shape-shifting (like selkies)
- **The Standing Stones:** The film's pivotal scenes occur at a stone circle, reminiscent of real-world sites like Callanish and Stonehenge. In pagan traditions, these locations were used for religious ceremonies and are often considered thin places where the veil between the human and spiritual worlds is permeable.
- **Ancestor Veneration:** Queen Elinor emphasizes the importance of learning from those who came before us and shares a story about the importance of balance, family, and using power responsibly.

## Power and Responsibility

2. Merida tried to use magic to change her mom's mind about the marriage. Why is it bad to use power to influence people?
3. Is using power to influence people's decisions any different from using words and discussions to change the way that people think or feel?
4. Was it wrong for Elinor to use her power and authority as a mother to force Merida to marry a stranger? Why or why not?
5. The witch in the film turns two people into bears, though she was more bumbling than cruel. She did not (as far as the movie reveals) intentionally turn Mor'du into a demon bear forever, nor did she intentionally nearly cause Elinor to become a permanent bear. Even though she didn't mean to cause harm, her actions hurt Merida and Elinor, and caused chaos for the royal family. Does this make her a bad person? Why or why not?
6. We all make mistakes. We might have hurt others in our past, even if that wasn't our intention. What could the witch have done to take responsibility for her actions? How could she have healed the harm she caused?

## Destiny and Decisions

7. The story grapples with fate, a concept central to Paganism, but suggests that personal choices and mending broken bonds can change its course. Do you believe that each person has the power to decide their fate and change the story of their lives? Why or why not?
8. No one can control the family or circumstances that they are born into. We also can't control how we were raised. We can not change our past. What decisions can we make today to decide our own fate?

### Learn More About the Spiritual History of Scotland:

- <https://www.theclanbuchanan.com/religion-spirituality>
- <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/online-exhibitions/places-for-prayer/the-arrival-of-christianity-in-scotland/>



This discussion guide was created by Tree of Knowledge Community Coven for the women of Madison Correctional Facility and encourages personal reflection around the topics of myths, culture, and theology. For more Pagan prison ministry resources, please contact support@treeofknowledgeindiana.com