

Inside Out 2 (2024)



Inside Riley (at top) her emotions survey her. (c) Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

It has been about 9 years since Pixar's innovative [*Inside Out*](#) helped children and their families understand the emotions that dwelt within them, sometimes controlling their reactions to the external world. Like many fans of that film, I wondered if a sequel could live up to high quality of the original, and am glad to report that it does. No doubt much of the credit belongs to co-writer Meg LeFauve, who also co-wrote the original, and the veteran storyboard artist Kelsey Mann, who takes on the direction. (Though I must confess, I am vague about how someone directs an animated feature!)

A sequel is certainly in order, with our heroine Riley (Kensington Tallman) now entering her 13th year, adolescence being perhaps the stormiest years of a person's life, no matter how well-adjusted one's childhood has been. Riley has been a kind, caring girl, with good parents and two dear friends, but as parents of teenagers can testify, the teen period is like a minefield. Anyone remember the much discussed "generation gap" of yesteryear?

Riley continues her obsession with ice hockey, as do her best friends Bree and Grace. All three are invited to hockey camp where a high school coach will teach and decide if they are good enough to make the high school team The Firehawks next term. The friends tell her that they have been assigned a

different high school, so at camp Riley's loyalty is tested when senior members of the Firehawks befriend and invite her to join them, thus leaving her friends behind.

Meanwhile, in her mind's Headquarters her core emotions—Joy (Amy Poehler), Sadness (Phyllis Smith), Disgust (Liza Lapira), Fear (Tony Hale), and Anger (Lewis Black)—seek to guide her. They have created a "Sense of Self" that harbors memories. Joy seeks to fill this only with positive memories by inventing a mechanism that banishes bad memories to the back of her mind.

During the night before hockey camp a Puberty Alarm goes off at Headquarters. A group of maintenance workers rush into Headquarters and upgrade the emotion console to make it more sophisticated. The emotions, led by Joy, notice that now their charge overreacts to any of their inputs. Also, a new group of emotions appear— Envy (Ayo Edebiri), Embarrassment (Paul Walter Hauser), Ennui (Paul Walter Hauser), and Anxiety (Maya Hawke)—and introduce themselves.

The emotions quickly clash over how they should approach Riley. Joy wants her to have fun and enjoy the camp, whereas the competitive Anxiety wants to be chosen for the high school team. What amounts to a war between the newer and older sets of emotions breaks out, with the new ones led by Anxiety gaining the upper hand and imprisoning Joy and companions in a jar, which is taken to a huge vault. Their struggle to return to Headquarters becomes an epic journey. There's a lot of humor, with the emotions riding Riley's "stream of consciousness" which is indeed a stream. And sarcasm becomes "sar-chasm," a deep chasm that threatens to engulf them. During all this Riley is buffeted back and forth, especially during a hockey game when her temper leads to her being ordered into the penalty box. While the emotions counter each other, causing chaos, Riley suffers a panic attack.

How this all works out and the emotions discover how to work together, with Riley's Sense of Self becoming more complex as

she enters highschool and is accepted by the older hockey players while still keeping intact her friendship with Bree and Grace, makes for both informative and amusing viewing. There is plenty of action and color to entertain young members of the family and lots of humor and visual puns mixed with good psychology to interest adults. The latter will no doubt be highly amused by the grandmotherly figure who enters Headquarters several times carrying a cup of tea, only to be told that it's "too early" for her. She is Nostalgia (June Squibb). She makes me hope that there might be a third film following Riley into at least middle age.

The film is created for a secular audience, but at times it seemed to me to be informed by the insights of two ancient Hebrew sages who gave us what is called the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. Both the current filmmakers and the ancient writers are concerned with how to live, how to live a life guided by our emotions but also in control of them. Of course, the Hebrew writers believed in a higher creative Power that controlled their destiny, something that we should not expect filmmakers aiming to entertain to go into.

As with the first film, this beautifully crafted film can provide many opportunities for adults to discuss emotions and their consequences with children.

This review will be in the December issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.