



Original Article

Analyzing the concept of posttraumatic growth *via* qualitative film analysis: Breathe

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Abstract

Objectives: Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is a concept that emerges with the struggles after a major life crisis and provides development after the struggle for survival. It is important for nurses because chronic diseases and losses can turn into traumatic experiences. Movies are an effective tool for teaching concepts in nursing.

Methods: This study aimed to investigate the concept of PTG and how this process can be realized through a film.

Methods: In this research, the life process of the protagonist of the movie *Breathe* was examined via document analysis within the framework of the concept of PTG. First, information about the movie was obtained, and it was found to be suitable for the analysis. The film was rewatched, and the scenes containing the related concepts were classified. At the last stage, these data obtained as a result of the analysis were discussed with the dimensions of PTG and other research findings in the literature. The reporting was guided by the Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) checklist.

Results: A total of 18 scenes related to the five subdimensions of PTG were determined. Of them, six included positive change in interpersonal relations, two included change in the belief system, three included understanding the value of life and realizing new options, and four included feeling powerful.

Conclusion: The movie *Breathe* contains audiovisual materials including PTG, subdimensions, and related concepts. It has been concluded that it can be used as an effective tool for teaching the concept of PTG. Key words: education; nursing; movie; posttraumatic growth.

Keywords: Education; movie; nursing; post-traumatic growth.

What is presently known on this subject?

- Posttraumatic growth is important for nursing as it can occur after chronic diseases and losses, although it occurs with struggles after a major life crisis. In nursing education, films are used as an effective educational tool for teaching such abstract concepts.

What does this article add to the existing knowledge?

- The illness experience of the protagonist of *Breathe* and the subsequent life process contain audiovisual material on the five subdimensions of the concept of "posttraumatic growth" (relating to others, spiritual and existential change, appreciation of life, new possibilities, personal strength).

What are the implications for practice?

- The film *Breathe* has a comprehensive content on the concept of posttraumatic growth and the subdimensions of the concept, and in this context, it can be used in nursing education as an effective teaching tool for concretizing and teaching the concept.

People have a lot of experience as long as they exist, some of which are positive experiences that make individuals feel good, whereas others are negative experiences that upset, hurt, and shake people. Trauma is among the most challenging experiences for us, both physically and emotionally. It refers to unexpected events experienced or witnessed by individuals themselves, in which there is a threat of death, threat to physical integrity, or serious injury.^[1-3] Events such as war, traffic accidents, natural disasters (earthquake, flood, etc.), physical violence, exposure to sexual assault or abuse, divorce, and loss of a loved one are called traumatic experiences.

Reactions to traumatic experiences differ from one person to another. These reactions vary depending on the severity

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and duration of the trauma, genetic predisposition of the individual, ability to adapt to stressful situations, family history, social support resources, person's perception of the trauma, existence of previous traumatic experiences, traumatic experience of the society, and perspectives of the posttraumatic events.^[4,5] Traumatic experiences create a shock effect on those who have experienced or witnessed the trauma, causing changes in individuals' coping mechanisms, making them feel that they have lost control of their lives, decreasing their sense of confidence in the future, and causing individuals to enter a traumatic process that will last until they regain balance.^[6,7] Traumatic experiences do not always cause negative consequences; the person may sometimes become stronger than in the pre-event period.^[7-9]

In the mid-1990s, positive changes experienced as a result of struggles with traumatic or very challenging life experiences began to be examined within the concept of "posttraumatic growth."^[9] Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996)^[9] defined these positive changes after trauma as "perceived benefit," "stress-induced growth," and "posttraumatic growth". They also stated that posttraumatic growth can occur in five dimensions: relating to others, spiritual and existential change, appreciation of life, new possibilities, and personal strength.^[6,9] Posttraumatic growth emerges through struggles after a major life crisis. While these struggles are an effort to survive at first, they allow growth and development later on.^[9] Posttraumatic growth is the ability of individuals to effectively cope with the trauma and posttraumatic process and grow psychologically by exhibiting positive tendencies in their behaviors and attitudes toward themselves, their communication with other people, and their perspective on life.^[1,8,10]

Situations such as being diagnosed with a chronic or fatal disease, caring for a relative with such a diagnosis, or loss can turn into a traumatic experience due to the effects, such as threats to an individual's life and reduced quality of life.^[11,12] For this reason, nurses, who are an important part of the health system, have important responsibilities in caring for people with traumatic experience. Nurses can positively contribute to posttraumatic growth by using their roles as educators, consultants, and caregivers to change their perspectives on the traumatic event, develop effective coping methods, and access social and economic support resources, as well as individuals directly experiencing trauma.^[1,13] Nurses gain these professional roles and develop their skills through theoretical and practical training.^[14,15] In addition to clinical internships and simulation laboratories, among the frequently used methods in recent times are film viewing and analysis techniques.^[16,17] In addition to clinical internships and simulation laboratories in applied training, among the frequently used methods are the techniques of watching and analyzing films.^[16,17]

Films are an effective educational tool that increases people's learning capacities and experiences.^[18-20] They activate many senses, such as sight, hearing, movement, and touch, allowing the presentation of information in many ways, and help

integrate images and information by influencing the auditory and visual areas of the brain.^[21,22] Visual influence in films plays a role in the formation of images, stimulation of attention, memory and thoughts, and increased motivation to learn.^[21,23] It also pushes them to think critically, allowing students to recognize their perspectives, behaviors, and attitudes toward their personal and professional lives.^[24,25] Furthermore, it pushes critical thinking to allow students to recognize their perspectives, behaviors, and attitudes regarding their personal and professional lives.^[24,25] Films that communicate all aspects of professional field-specific subjects allow discussion by transferring different training topics.^[21,26] Also, films that convey all aspects of topics specific to professional fields allow different educational topics to be discussed together.^[21,26] In a study conducted by Terzioğlu et al. (2017),^[16] students who took mental health and psychiatric nursing courses were shown a film about a psychiatric clinic with negative examples, and it was concluded that the awareness of the students increased after the application, and the students were more selfless in the care practices. In another study where the students watched the film "Patch Adams," it was stated that the practice contributed to the students' professional and personal development.^[20] It was stated that video and/or film screenings before clinical applications reduce the anxiety of students when they encounter real patients.^[27,28] Furthermore, it was stated that the use of films in patient-nurse communication, teaching the therapeutic environment, risk management, and case discussions such as ethical issues increase the impact of teaching.^[26,29]

In this study, the film *Breathe* will be analyzed as the films facilitate the learning processes by increasing students' awareness and contribute to the development of their skills and are also effective in addressing the individuals they encounter in a more holistic way. As aforementioned, the analysis of the film will be made within the framework of the concept of "posttraumatic growth," which is of particular importance for nurses. This study aimed to explain the concept of posttraumatic growth and how this process can take place through the film and also to contribute to a better understanding of the model in this way. It is thought that the study may be effective in teaching the concepts of trauma and posttraumatic growth in nursing education, in recognizing the importance of social support after traumatic experience, and in concretizing the subject. For this purpose, Robin's illness experience and subsequent life process will be examined within the framework of the concept of "posttraumatic growth." The hypothesis of the research is as follows: The film *Breathe* has contents related to the concept of posttraumatic growth.

Materials and Method

In this research, the 2017 film originally titled *Breathe* and translated into Turkish as *Nefes* was examined within the framework of the concept of "posttraumatic growth." The 2017 film, starring Andrew Garfield and Claire Foy, was di-

rected by Andy Serkis. The film is about the dramatic changes occurring in the life of Robin, a socially active, productive, lively, and cheerful character, as a result of being paralyzed due to polio. It is studied how his illness and its obstacles detached him from life and caused him to desire death and, on the other hand, how Diana connects Robin to life again with the support of the environment of her (his wife) character. In many scenes of the film, it is important to address the effects of the physical, psychological, and social aspects of a disease on the person and his/her environment to realize that the disease experience can turn into a traumatic experience. At the same time, the positive changes experienced by the people around Robin along with the main character compared with the pre-traumatic period are a concrete example that explains the concept of posttraumatic growth. In the context of these features, the film, which will be examined *via* document analysis, is thought to be suitable for the purpose of the study.

Document analysis is a qualitative research method used to systematically and meticulously analyze the content of written documents.^[30] This method can be used to review and evaluate all documents, including electronic (documentaries, TV programs, videos, motion pictures, sound recordings, music broadcasts, radio broadcasts) and printed materials (texts, books, encyclopedias, reports, dictionaries, magazines, journals, diaries, photographs, posters, maps). This method requires the following five stages to be carried out: 1. access the document, 2. ensure the originality of the document, 3. understand the document, 4. examine and analyze the document and use the 5th data and follow these stages as a directive.^[31] There are many film analysis studies in the literature using the document analysis method. For example, Yam (2021) examined the film *The Science of Sleep* using this method according to the concept of “maladaptive dreaming” and stated that maladaptive daydreaming behaviors were embodied by the film analysis method.^[32]

Furthermore, Yam (2021) reviewed the same film based on the concept of “incompatible dreaming” *via* document analysis and indicated that incompatible dream-building behaviors are mutated by film analysis.^[32] Another example is the study in which Derin and Çetinkaya Yıldız (2018) examined the film *The Kid* using the Adler approach with the document analysis method. They stated that the analyses could be used in theoretical course materials.^[33] Document analysis is a preferable method for film analysis as it facilitates the classification of data by proceeding in a systematic manner; allows to examine the document within the environment, time, and limits determined by the researcher; and is free of the problems of the participants’ reactivity because it does not include the interview process with real people.^[34,35] Due to these benefits, the document analysis method was preferred in this study, which aimed to analyze the film *Breathe* within the framework of the concept of posttraumatic growth.

According to the determined steps of the document analysis method, the film to be analyzed in the study, we found the

film from a website to watch. In the second stage, information about the filming year, shooting place, screenwriter, actors, and script was reached. In the third stage, the film was examined in terms of its suitability for analysis within the framework of the concept of posttraumatic growth. The events experienced by the characters and the behaviors they exhibited were evaluated within the scope of relating to others, spiritual and existential change, appreciation of life, new possibilities, and personal strength related to the posttraumatic growth process, and it was concluded that the subject and leading roles had features suitable for analysis in this context. In the fourth stage, the film was re-watched, and the scenes and contents related to traumatic experiences and posttraumatic growth were analyzed and classified. In the final stage, these data obtained from the analysis were discussed with the dimensions of posttraumatic growth and other research findings in the literature. The data were evaluated *via* document analysis, and the reporting of the research was made based on the COREQ checklist.^[36] There is no separately developed COREQ form for document analysis. In a similar study in the literature, the original COREQ was revised and used.^[37] Accordingly, the original COREQ was used in this study (Annex 1. COREQ).

Results

In the film, 18 scenes related to the five subdimensions of posttraumatic growth (relating to others, spiritual and existential change, appreciation of life, new possibilities, personal strength) were identified (Table 1). The scene contents will be given under the heading of each subdimension.

Positive change in interpersonal relationships: The first subdimension of the concept of posttraumatic growth includes behavioral patterns such as receiving support from other people in difficult times, trusting and being close to others, willing to express feelings, and striving for relationships. The first scene examined under this component is the one in which Robin talks to his wife in the hospital. In this scene, Robin tells Diana that he is no longer useful and that she should leave him in the hospital and stop loving him. When Diana expresses that she loves and understands him and that he will live connected to the machine for a while, Robin states that he is sorry for what he said and that he is having a hard time. Later in the scene, Diana asks Robin what she can do to make the situation bearable; Robin asks her to get him out of the hospital. In the second scene examined in this context, Robin and Paddy (his friend in the hospital) make a £5 bet about whether Robin can survive. Another scene examined in this context is that where Robin was brought home by his wife, friends, relatives, and son and then laid to his bed and connected to a respirator. Everyone excitedly waits for Robin’s reaction; he then laughs and says that he feels much better. The fourth scene is the birthday scene of Jonathan (Robin’s son). Throughout this scene, Robin is seen talking cheerfully to those at the party, making imitations, and even making jokes about dying if his respirator

Table 1. Analysis of the film *Breathe* within the five subdimensions of posttraumatic growth

Sub-dimension	Display time	Sub-dimension content
1. Relating to others	29.21-31.57	- Increase in rapport in interpersonal relationships
	37.19-37.35	- Open yourself more comfortably and share your feelings
	39.26-41.59	- Increase in empathic behavior
	46.54-48.40	
	01.02.12-01.02.57	
	01.13.48-01.14.07	
2. Spiritual and existential change	27.03-27.55	- Reshaping of religious beliefs
	01.12.31-01.13.10	- Deepening of existential experience after the event
3. Appreciation of life	35.15-36.15	- Reviewing and redefining priorities in life
	01.03.11-01.03.49	- Understanding the value of ordinary, everyday things too
	01.25.46-01.29.16	
4. New possibilities	49.25-50.20	- Review of objectives
	50.44-51.53	- Choosing between achievable purposes and unattainable purposes
	57.27-58.05	
5. Personal strength	37.46-39.12	- A stronger self-perception
	44.32-46.25	- Increased self-confidence in being able to cope with a difficult event
	01.16.58-01.19.11	- Adoption of new roles that had not been tried until then
	01.19.18-01.20.35	

breaks down. The next scene is a similar party scene. At the costumed party, Robin listens to the problems of many of his friends' wives and lovers and tries to find solutions for them. The last scene under this title is the scene where they sit by the fire, They are waiting for Professor Teddy, who will arrive with the supplies needed to repair Robin's ventilator. In the place where they meet different people and have fun, Robin tells Diana that he is thinking of Paddy and that he would want to be there.

Change in the belief system: This subdimension is about individuals' better understanding of spiritual issues and the reshaping of religious beliefs. The first scene evaluated under this component involves Robin's dialog with Paddy. On stage, Robin spits at the priest as the priest speaks about God inflicting pain on his favorite people. Paddy then jokes about Robin spitting at the priest and his view of God. Robin asks Paddy how he lived with this situation, and Paddy jokes that he has become accustomed to it over time and that if he is not accustomed, he will have a coffin of his own. Robin smiles surprisingly at Paddy's approach and realizes that he can also get used to it. The second scene is that where a priest speaks during a trip to Spain. The priest sitting opposite Robin tells him that God is a joker and that they have the opportunity to meet each other, thanks to Robin's struggle. Robin is happy with this answer.

Recognizing new options: The third stage of posttraumatic growth is associated with the development of new interests, a new direction in the individual's life, and a greater willingness to change. The first scene examined is the one where Robin talks to his friends at Jonathan's birthday party. When Robin states that a bell will facilitate his communication, Teddy (the

professor) is seen developing a ringing mechanism that rings with head movement in the following scenes. The second scene shows Robin seeing his son's stroller and having an idea; he calls the professor and they make a wheelchair together. In the last scene examined in this context, Robin designs a vehicle that allows him to travel with Jonathan, who listens to the memories of his parents' trip. A vehicle's front passenger seat is removed, Robin's chair is fixed, and the family makes the desired trip.

Feeling strong: The first scene examined within the scope of the fourth subdimension of posttraumatic growth, which includes realizing that he is stronger than he thinks, knowing that he will cope with difficulties, and increasing his self-confidence, is that where Robin is kidnapped from the hospital. Diana, Dr. Khan, and the two nurses secretly take Robin out of the hospital, although the hospital administrator says that he will not allow this and that Robin will not be able to live if he leaves. Robin said, "Is this place a prison? Am I a prisoner? And you have no right to keep me here." The second scene is that where, after Robin gets home, their dog Bengy is running while Robin is plugged into the respirator, causing the plug to detach. Robin cannot *Breathe* after the plug is pulled, and his eyes close. When there is no response from Robin, Diana runs and plugs in the device, shakes Robin, and continues to call his name. Robin wakes up and laughs; he says "It was a very interesting experience." In the third scene, Robin and Diana are seen seeking financial support to make wheelchairs for other patients. First, they go to the bank. After the bank rejects their offer, they reach out to a woman known for her helpfulness and receive the necessary support to make five more seats. The final scene is the one where Robin and the other patients

leave the hospital in wheelchairs. The director of the Foundation for Research on Persons with Disabilities (Dr. Klent) gives a speech to reporters when they leave the hospital. Robin asks Klent how many people like them are in the world, and he tells him that there are many, and Robin wants to reach them.

Understanding the value of life: The last subdimension of post-traumatic growth involves reviewing and changing one's priorities in one's life after the experience of trauma and realizing that every moment experienced is valuable. The first scene discussed in this context is the scene where Robin and Diana talk to the doctor. In this scene, Robin is seen saying that he has a choice to live in the hospital until he dies or die once he gets out of the hospital, and he says, "What are we waiting for?" indicating that this is worth trying. The second scene is the one where Robin talks to his friend. The friend talks about how difficult it was for him to divorce his wife, that something happened in an instant, and that something changed everything. Robin tells his friend that it is difficult, then smiles and says, "To the new beginnings," and raises a toast. The final scene is that where Robin speaks at a conference for people with disabilities in Germany. He tells the participants to see people with disabilities like him as healthy people, that many people support him in this process, that he is at risk of dying every day, and that he wants to live not only to survive but also to live in a real sense. He also tells the participants to support and free their patients.

Discussion

In this study, the movie, which was originally called *Breathe* and translated into Turkish as *Nefes*, was examined within the framework of the "posttraumatic growth" concept. This movie, starring Andrew Garfield and Claire Foy, was directed by Andy Serkis. The film is about the dramatic changes in the life of Robin, who is a socially active, productive, lively, and cheerful character, as a result of stroke due to polio. In the movie, it is discussed that the disease and its many obstacles detached him from life and caused him to desire death; in addition, it is discussed how Diana (his wife) reconnected Robin to life with the support of her acquaintances. In many scenes of the movie, the effects of the physical, psychological, and social aspects of a disease on the individual and their acquaintances are discussed; this is important in recognizing that illness experience can turn into a traumatic experience. Also, the positive changes experienced by the protagonist along with the people around him compared with the pre-traumatic period are a concrete example that explains the concept of posttraumatic growth. In the context of these features, the film, which was examined using the document analysis method, is thought to be suitable for the purpose of this study.

According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004),^[6] after a painful event, a person can realize posttraumatic growth by rediscovering himself/herself, his/her relationships, and his/her life with the thanks to his/her personal characteristics and the support he/she receives from the people around his/her.

It is stated that interpersonal relationships change in the first stage after trauma. This stage is explained by the subdimensions that individuals who have experienced trauma establish close relationships with those who have experienced trauma like them, have more empathy in their communication with people in their lives (spouse, child, friend, etc.), express their feelings more clearly and frequently, and spend more time with their loved ones.^[6,9] In the movie, Robin's being friends with Paddy and other patients, struggling to get them to have wheelchairs, continuing to spend time with his family and friends, getting support from those around him, and expressing his feelings are evaluated within this scope. Studies also demonstrated that social and emotional support and interpersonal relationships affect each other positively and contribute to posttraumatic growth.^[38,39]

Forgeard (2013)^[40] stated that expressing negative emotions reduces sensitivity to these emotions and ensures positive gains. Expressing how people are affected by the situation can be part of acceptance, and a traumatic experience cannot be considered as an experience that can be overcome by ignoring but as a situation that can be coped with through acceptance. In the movie, Robin starts to feel better again after he starts telling his experiences and thoughts to his wife; he also talks to other people around him and starts to establish closer relationships as he sees that they support him. It can be seen in these scenes that Robin experiences changes in his relationships after trauma.

The second dimension of posttraumatic growth is spiritual and existential changes that include the individual's religious beliefs, value systems, and perspective. After experiencing trauma, people can reconsider their religious, moral, behavioral, and emotional values and acquire different perspectives on these issues. In the movie, Robin spitting at the priest and questioning his religious beliefs in the conversations he had with Paddy and later the priest during the Spain trip, about God making bad jokes and being a bad joker, can be evaluated as related to this subdimension. In addition, Robin's perspective on traumatic life in these scenes is thought to be related to spirituality. Hall (2013)^[41] stated that spiritual dimension affects individual's moral and ethical attitudes, values, interaction with others, and relationship with God or godlike power. It is seen that Robin exhibits angry behavior toward God and the priest. Erten and Kocakaya (2020),^[42] in their case study, evaluated posttraumatic growth on a person who had a traffic accident; they discussed the spiritual change dimension and demonstrated that praying and increasing gratitude behaviors are a spiritual strength for the person. After meeting different people and having a good time with them, Robin gained strength from them and began to see the event as an opportunity, not a bad joke made by God.

The third subdimension is new possibilities. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004)^[6] explained the discovery of a new way in life as a new philosophy of life that changes past assumptions and core beliefs, leading to new possibilities and opportunities

that did not exist before the trauma. It can be thought that Robin's ability to determine his needs to adapt to daily life despite his disability and to reach people he can ask help from by making plans for these needs is related to this dimension. Improving functionality to be included in the process of life is an important factor that positively affects the well-being of people and facilitates the adaptation process.^[1] In these scenes, Robin presented ideas for his problem and resolved it with the help of the professor. It can be said that Robin started to generate ideas for his own life, that is, he took a step toward posttraumatic development. Ferris and Forest-Bank (2018),^[43] in their study on Syrian refugees, concluded that after a traumatic event, people cope by evaluating new options in the posttraumatic growth process. After realizing his own needs, Robin observed his surroundings and reached out to people he could get support from; he also supported other people.

The other dimension is personal strength, which includes knowing the negative effects of the traumatic event, being more attentive to the people around, being sensitive, defending oneself, being self-confident as a result of coping with the negative event, and acquiring new roles in life.^[6] In the movie, Robin's saying that he was not a prisoner and that they had no right to keep him there forcibly while leaving the hospital, laughingly saying that it was a different experience when his ventilator broke down, looking for solutions by thinking about other people with disabilities and breathing apparatus, and making jokes about his disability can be evaluated within the scope of personal empowerment. In their study on parents who lost their children, Bogensperger et al. (2014)^[44] concluded that parents were more tolerant and able to fulfill their personal potential after the negative incident. Robin chose to leave the hospital that limited him with the support he received from the people around him, and he became hope for other people with paralysis. Ramos and Leal (2013)^[7] demonstrated that when the vulnerability perceptions of individuals and the adverse effects of the experienced trauma are fully understood, personal power will develop in the individual. Although Robin had to deal with many physical and psychological problems after the stroke, he came out of this situation as a person who gave hope not only to himself but also to others.

The last dimension is appreciation of life, which includes becoming more sensitive after the trauma experienced by the person, realizing that he/she cannot control everything in his/her life and cannot predict sudden events, changing his priorities, and appreciating life more often.^[6] It is thought that Robin's making jokes about his death, not delaying the things he wants to do, spending time with his loved ones often, and dying peacefully after living every moment to the fullest are related to understanding the value of life. In the growth process after trauma, people look for solutions to their problems so as to be included in life again after accepting the event.^[6] In the studies, it has been observed that posttraumatic growth occurs by making sense of life again and using positive coping methods after the traumatic event.^[45,46] Robin realizes that his wife and friends still value him and will fight with him, and he

accepts his situation and is happy for everything he can do with the people he loves. Similarly, in the literature, it has been observed that after trauma, people enjoy the things in their lives more and have positive change in their perspectives on life.^[1,47] After the stroke, Robin felt worthless at first and withdrew from his surroundings, but over time, he began to make every moment of his life worthwhile.

Although this is the first research examining the concept of posttraumatic growth using an audiovisual material, it has some limitations. The first of these limitations is that the research analysis was conducted by a single researcher; it can be thought that this situation reduces the diversity of data. In addition, the posttraumatic growth process can be handled with different steps in various sources; the content of the material used in this study has been examined using only one approach. Furthermore, the movie includes different concepts related to nursing. In this study, only posttraumatic growth was examined. The relevance of this movie, which has a rich content in terms of nursing, with other concepts and/or theories related to the profession can be discussed in different studies.

Use of Results in Practice

Illness experiences often lead to reactions such as anxiety, fear, and withdrawal, which turn into a traumatic experience. This experience can cause the individual and his/her family to have difficulties in issues such as the effects of the disease on their lives, existence of treatment options, socioeconomic problems, role changes, and effects on the social environment. In this process, it is important that nurses, as one of the professionals who interact with patients most frequently, have a high awareness of traumatic experiences and their effects. Nurses can facilitate this process for the individual and their families and positively contribute to the posttraumatic growth process with their interventions. Providing information about the disease, explaining the supporting institutions that can be reached for social and psychological support, and developing effective coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills are all part of nursing care. In this context, it is very important to include trauma and associated concepts in nursing education. In this study, in which the movie *Breathe* was examined using the document analysis method, it was concluded that the movie has a comprehensive content related to the concept of posttraumatic growth and its subdimensions, and within this context, it can be used as an effective tool for teaching the concept by embodying it.

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