
The Educational Oceanography Layer of the Finding Nemo

In 2003 Pixar produced Andrew Stanton's script of Finding Nemo. This movie tells of the journey of a clown fish, named Marlin, across the ocean to find his son, Nemo. Along the way he encounters many different dangers, marine environments, and organisms. He is not alone on his journey across the vast ocean, for most of his journey he is accompanied by a forgetful tang fish named Dory. Throughout the course of the movie these two become close friends and bring out the best in each other, all in an effort to find Marlin's son, Nemo. This was a great success for Pixar, but is there any truth to the movie? Can this journey be made, and are the environments, organisms, and dangers accurate for their journey? Also, should this film be shown for educational purposes in schools? I believe that this movie can serve as a very good educational tool. There are many great aspects of this movie and there are many points that can be expanded upon for classroom discussion. Also, I believe that this movie would be best suited for middle school classes between the grades of second and eighth.

There are many aspects of Finding Nemo that hold true to facts of oceanography and have supporting evidence from researchers. Going in order of appearance, the position and depth of the coral reef is correct. Coral reefs lay within the photic zone in the top 50m of water and are almost always positioned close to a drop off point. This is because the drop off creates agitation in the water, allowing nutrients to flow throughout the reef, also being positioned in the photic zone allows the corals zooxanthelle to absorb light for photosynthesis. The next major educational point is the songs of Mr. Ray. Mr. Ray is the scientist manta ray, when he takes the children off to the drop off, he sings of the zones of the ocean. He sings each of the zones correctly and in order. Mr. Ray sings, "Lets say the zones, the zones, lets say the zones of the open sea! The epipelagic, mesopelagic, bathypelagic, abyssopelagic, all the rest are to deep for you and me to see!" As you can see in the graph, all the layers are in the correct order.

This may be a little more in depth than a sixth grade class will go, but it can be a broad topic that they could explore more in depth later. Next comes Marlin's epic journey across the ocean to find his fish-napped son Nemo. While this journey is long, it is possible. If the fish is not eaten, it has the ability to swim across the ocean and once it finds the East Australian Current, it would be easy for him to ride the current to Sydney. This journey can be proven by other small fish that make the same journey. The yellow Chaedontidae, is a small fish that makes its way to the EAC in order to ride the warm fast flowing current south during the winter months (1). In the movie the EAC is depicted as a fast, warm, narrow current flowing just off the coast of Australia. This is the correct depiction of the current, because if warm water currents are found at the top of the ocean, and they are fast and narrow.

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Finally while Dory and Marlin are in the EAC they meet a group of sea turtles. Sea turtles are known to rid through the EAC because they do not swim very fast and the current gives them a nice boost. When they exit the EAC Marlin asks Crush the sea turtle how old he is, and Crush replies, "I am 150 and still young." While most will live to be about 50, some species of sea turtle can live to be more than 150 years old. Although there are many good educational points throughout Finding Nemo there are also a few scenes that do not fit and are good for the story, but have no truth behind them.

One major flaw is Dory's ability to read the words on the mask. Although tests have been done to show that fish can find their way through mazes to obtain food, there have been no tests that show fish have the ability to read. The second is that when the mask falls down the trench, Dory and Marlin could not have swum down to the bottom to get the mask. The pressure at that depth would have crushed their bodies. Also the anglerfish is only found in the trenches of the Atlantic Ocean. Finally when the blue whale eats Dory and Marlin, they would have been digested, not shot out of the whale's blowhole.

As you can see, the movie is not one hundred percent correct in all aspects. It is designed to be a comedy for a younger audience, so the entire movie could not be academically correct. Even though there are scenes that are not backed by evidence, I believe that there is enough good information that is supported, to justify the scenes that are not accurate. This movie may not be a good movie to show for educational purposes to high school or college oceanography classes, but for the beginning learners this movie can be a good educational tool. It is accurate enough to clearly convey major environmental, geographical, and marine life concepts while still maintaining a fun enjoyable movie. The balance between fiction and non-fiction will keep middle school learners interested, while still teaching them major concepts of oceanography.

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