



The Jungle Book (1967)

Director: Wolfgang Reitherman (1967)

Content advice: very mild threat, violence, discriminatory stereotypes



The Jungle Book (2016)

Director: Jon Favreau (2016)

Content advice: mild threat

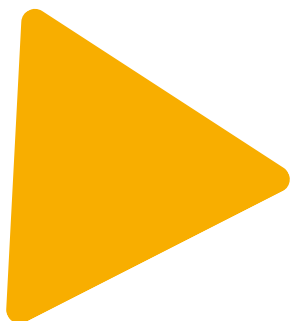


Synopsis

The Jungle Book is a children's adventure based on Rudyard Kipling's collection of stories in which a boy - or 'man-cub' - called Mowgli is raised in the Indian jungle by wolves.

About the films

Disney has produced two musical versions of the story - the animated original from 1967, and the 2016 live-action production. Both films follow Mowgli as he learns that a tiger called Shere Khan wishes him dead, and so must reluctantly leave his wolf family for the 'man village' where the tiger will no longer be a threat.



BBFC Classification and Content Advice

Classification Issues

The Jungle Book (1967)

The original animated version of *The Jungle Book* was submitted to the BBFC for theatrical classification in 1967 and again for video release in 1993, and on both occasions it was rated U. In 2013, this animated version was submitted to the BBFC again for a modern theatrical rating, so that it can be viewed in line with the Classification Guidelines of the time. The Guidelines are updated every four to five years to ensure that we remain in step with people's views. *The Jungle Book* is currently still rated U, along with the content advice of 'very mild threat, violence, discriminatory stereotypes'.

In the 1967 animation, Mowgli travels through the jungle accompanied by Bagheera the panther and Baloo the bear. Despite their protection, Mowgli encounters some shady characters along the way. In one scene, for example, while Bagheera is asleep, a snake called Kaa hypnotises Mowgli with the intention of eating him. The BBFC Guidelines state that at U,

'Scary or potentially upsetting sequences should be mild, brief and unlikely to cause undue anxiety to young children. The outcome should be reassuring.'

There are elements to threatening scenes which help to lighten the tone and alleviate any heightened sense of danger, such as when Kaa makes his first attempt to eat Mowgli. Kaa slinks down from the tree and hypnotises Mowgli, causing the boy's eyes to swirl around in a cartoonish fashion. Kaa coils his tail around Mowgli's entire body, but Bagheera quickly wakes and swats the snake away. Even when Kaa attempts to do the same to Bagheera, Mowgli forces the snake's body off the tree so it falls in a clump on the ground, causing Kaa to slink off in embarrassment. Kaa's powers are undermined in this scene and he's made to look rather silly with a knot in his tail, putting the emphasis on these slapstick elements rather than the initial danger the main characters found themselves in.

The Jungle Book (2016)

Disney's live-action version of *The Jungle Book* presents Kaa, now with a (rather familiar) female voice, as a realistic looking giant python. The creature is visually more frightening, with a creepy voice that softly echoes and entices Mowgli towards her, convincing him that she's a friend.

The film was submitted to the BBFC in February of 2016, and was rated PG for 'mild threat'. There is a sense of threat when Kaa slowly wraps her body around Mowgli and opens her mouth to take a bite. In this live-action version, the scene is more heightened, with 'jump-scare' moments and lacks the musical and comical elements present in the scene from the 1967 animated version. However, the threat is quickly over because Baloo the bear comes to Mowgli's rescue, pouncing on the snake and saving the boy's life. At PG, the Guidelines state that,

'Frightening sequences or situations where characters are in danger should not be prolonged or intense. Fantasy settings and comedy may be mitigating factors.'

The greatest threat to young Mowgli in both versions of Disney's *The Jungle Book* is, of course, Shere Khan himself. Similar to the differences discussed in relation to Kaa above, Shere



Khan's screen incarnations have a bearing on the films' classifications. The 1967 version does not portray the villain as particularly aggressive, but instead comically suave and sinister. For example, at the climax of the animation, Mowgli comes face-to-face with the tiger and although the scene could have the potential to be frightening, Mowgli stands up to the predator, asking "Why should I run from you? I'm not scared of anything." Such bravery from a vulnerable hero can prevent younger viewers from feeling anxious. The tiger is quickly defeated when lightning strikes a tree and Mowgli grabs a burning branch, which he ties to Shere Khan's tail - who then flees into the distance.



The 2016 version of *The Jungle Book* depicts Shere Khan as a realistic-looking tiger, and the character is thus more frightening. His character is intimidating with an aggressive voice, and there is no comedy in his scenes that might counterbalance the threat that he poses to the heroes. Mowgli is confronted by the villain in more than one scene; however, in each case there are factors introduced to ensure that these scary sequences are not prolonged or too intense. At the climax of the film, for example, Shere Khan stalks the young hero through the burning jungle. Although the fire adds intensity to the scene, it is established that Mowgli is the one who started it, as a way of trapping the villain. When Shere Khan finally lunges at the boy, the animal breaks a branch and disappears into the flames below.

Key to its classification at PG, the film presents a reassuring outcome. The young hero uses his resourcefulness to save the day and receives help from his animal companions. And indeed, both versions of the family film present a moral message about working together to defeat evil, despite our differences.

Discussion Points

- ▲ What are some of the main differences between the two adaptations of *The Jungle Book*? What impact do these differences have on the age ratings for both films?
- ▲ The 2016 adaptation of *The Jungle Book* is rated PG for 'mild threat'. The BBFC PG rating is benchmarked for children aged 8 years of age. Do you agree with the age rating or do you think the film is suitable for younger audiences?
- ▲ Consider the differences in production for the two *Jungle Book* films. How might these production contexts have influenced the final product? Can you see any similarities with other live-action Disney remakes?

Further Viewing

Maleficent (Roger Stromberg, 2014) 
Star Wars: The Force Awakens (J.J. Abrams, 2015) 
The Lion King (Jon Favreau, 2019) 