

An Analysis of Ariel's Fulfillment of Needs in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) Film

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ABSTRAK

Di dunia di mana tidak semua keinginan dapat dipenuhi, Ariel mencoba melewati batasan itu dengan cara yang bisa ia lakukan. *The Little Mermaid* (2023) mengisahkan tentang seorang putri duyung yang memimpikan kehidupan di dunia manusia. Hasratnya untuk diterima dan keingintahuannya tentang kehidupan di daratan mendorongnya menentang norma dan aturan yang berlaku di kerajaan bawah laut. Berangkat dari kisah ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pemenuhan kebutuhan Ariel berdasarkan teori hierarki kebutuhan Maslow, mulai dari kebutuhan fisiologis hingga aktualisasi diri. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mengeksplorasi penerapan teori tersebut dalam mengkaji perkembangan karakter dalam karya sastra. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis konten kualitatif untuk memahami pengalaman psikologis Ariel dan perkembangan karakternya. Teori karakterisasi dan struktur plot digunakan untuk menelusuri transformasi karakter Ariel, serta mengungkap bagaimana setiap tahap kebutuhan termanifestasi sepanjang alur cerita. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ariel berhasil memenuhi kelima tingkatan kebutuhan, dengan kebutuhan akan cinta dan rasa memiliki menjadi faktor pendorong paling dominan di balik keputusan dan transformasinya. Keterikatan yang kuat terhadap dunia manusia serta keinginan untuk diterima membuat Ariel berani mengambil berbagai risiko besar, yang pada akhirnya membantunya memenuhi kebutuhan dasar hingga kebutuhan tertinggi, yakni aktualisasi diri.

Kata kunci: Film, hierarki kebutuhan Maslow, karakterisasi, plot, *The Little Mermaid*

ABSTRACT

In a world where not all desires can be fulfilled, Ariel attempts to overcome those limitations in any way she can. *The Little Mermaid* (2023) tells the story of a young mermaid who dreams of living in the human world. Her desire for acceptance and curiosity about life on land drive her to defy the norms and rules of the underwater kingdom. Through the narrative of this story, this study aims to analyze Ariel's fulfillment of needs based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, ranging from physiological needs to self-actualization. Additionally, the study explores the application of this theory in examining character development in literary works. This research used qualitative content analysis to investigate Ariel's psychological experiences and her character development. Characterization theory and plot structure were utilized to trace Ariel's character transformation and reveal how each stage of need manifests throughout the storyline. The results indicate that Ariel successfully fulfills all five levels of needs, with the need for love and belonging emerging as the most dominant driving force behind her decisions and transformation. Her strong attachment to the human world and longing for acceptance lead her to take significant risks, which allow her to fulfill her needs progressively, from the most fundamental to the highest level of self-actualization.

Keywords: Characterization, film, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, plot, *The Little Mermaid*

A. INTRODUCTION

Characters in literary works are not just a tool to forward messages or meaning from the author. These characters make us feel a range of emotions; we connect with them on a deeper level than just seeing them as objects (Bennett & Royle, 2023). In addition, characters in literary

works also have psychological attributes and human characteristics, including their thought, actions, and motivations for fulfilling their needs. Through a psychological perspective, characters can be understood from the way they interact with situations, social environments, and other characters around them (Paris, 1997).

Understanding the psychological motivations behind a character's actions is crucial in literary analysis as it reveals the underlying factors that shape their behavior and decisions throughout a narrative. In this context, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can be a useful lens to analyze the motivation and behavior of characters in literary works. This framework provides insight into how characters strive to fulfill both basic and highest needs, influencing their actions, choices, and personal development within a story. This theory, which was originally developed to explore and understand the motivation to fulfill human life's deepest needs, has been proven to be relevant for analyzing the psychological dynamics of characters in literary works. This theory can help to determine which level of needs is most prominent in characters and how they strive to fulfill those needs (Southard, 2021).

The hierarchy of needs theory by Abraham Maslow which studied the structure of human needs divides each need into 5 levels, from the lowest needs (biogenic) to the highest level of needs (psychogenic). The levels are, (1) physiological needs, (2) safety needs, (3) love and belonging needs, (4) self-esteem needs, and (5) self-actualization needs. This theory also suggests that human motivation is a concern of wide range internal and external influences, leading to constant shifts and changes, which states that individual motivation is progressive, moving from the most basic level of needs to a higher level.

The live-action adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film presents Ariel not just as a fantasy creature, but as a character who experiences the complexity of human needs in two different worlds. This dual identity opens opportunities to examine her transformation and psychological aspects through Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. While the animated version in 1989 emphasized the desire to fall in love and become human for the love of a man, the 2023 version shows Ariel's deeper motivations: she wants to explore the human world, seek freedom, and find her true identity. The main character Ariel in the *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film has a goal to become a human and live with the person she loves, Prince Eric. In order to live on land with Eric, Ariel makes a deal with an evil sea witch named Ursula to make her a human.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory with its five structured levels, provides a solid theoretical framework for analyzing character motivation. Numerous prior studies have utilized Maslow's hierarchy of needs to examine characters in films, specifically by identifying which of the five needs—physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization—are present in the storyline (Fajriah & Budi, 2025; Khoiriah et al., 2024; Nurlela et al., 2022; Sabiela, Kuncara, & Ariani, 2017). While most of the previous studies explained the fulfillment of each need only descriptively, the current study attempts to provide a more detailed analysis of the process of need fulfillment by integrating plot development, character transformation, dialogue, and visual elements, all of which collectively depict the psychological journey of Ariel as the main character. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to analyze how Ariel fulfills her needs based on the theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in *The Little Mermaid* (2023). Through this study, the researchers expect to provide a broader understanding of how psychological theories can be applied to analyze character development in films and other literary works.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Psychology and Literature

Psychology and literature have a reciprocal dependency, one as well as the other explores the complexity of the human mind and behavior, both of which delve into the complexities of human behavior, expression, cognition, and motivation. In the interim, psychology provides a theoretical framework for analyzing character, motivation, conflict and fulfillment of life needs that are contained in literary works (Aras, 2015). There are various subfields and branches of psychology in literature. One of them is humanistic psychology. Abraham Maslow is an important figure in the branch of humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology, with its emphasis on individual potential and subjective experience, is a very suitable framework for exploring the depth of character and conflict in literary works (Schneider et al., 2014).

2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow (2023) proposes a psychological conceptual model. He argues that every individual has a ladder-like structure of needs. These needs must be satisfied in order, starting from the most basic to the most complex. When a need has been satisfied, the individual will be driven to satisfy higher-level needs. In other words, human needs are like a ladder that must be climbed one by one, and each step of the ladder represents a different level of satisfaction. Maslow (2023) classifies human needs into five levels, from basic physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, to the need for self-actualization, which is reaching one's full potential as human being.

a. Physiological Needs

According to Maslow (2023), physiological needs are the foundation of the hierarchy of human needs. These needs, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, sex and reproduction, are considered the most basic drives that must be met before individuals can shift their needs to higher-level needs. This opinion is in line with Simons et al. (1987) that compared to other needs, physiological needs have a stronger driving force. This is because these biological needs are directly related to the survival of the individual. In addition to physiological needs, Maslow (2023) acknowledged the crucial role of optimal environmental factors, such as suitable temperature. Taormina and Gao's (2013) research supported Maslow (1965)'s idea that the importance of homeostasis or the ability to maintain a stable internal condition despite changes in the surrounding environment requires the presence of essential components such as water, and oxygen in meeting physiological needs. When there is a deficiency in these components, the body will respond by triggering biological mechanisms that encourage individuals to seek and fulfill these needs.

b. Safety Needs

Maslow (2023) refers to this stage as the need for safety that covers various aspects, including physical safety, legal protection, freedom from violence, and emotional stability. In other words, after the basics of life are fulfilled, humans will seek to create an environment that is conducive to growth and development. According to Zalenski and Raspa (2006), the need for safety is one of the basic human needs that must be met before individuals can fulfill higher needs. A sense of safety not only includes a sense of physical safety from danger, but also includes a sense of psychological safety, such as a sense of safety in social relationships and the surrounding environment. This finding is in line with Maslow (1965)'s idea that when

individuals feel safe and secure, they will be more confident to explore their surroundings, build social relationships, and reach their full potential. In contrast, if the need for security is not met, individuals are more prone to anxiety, stress, and difficulty in establishing relationships with others to fulfill their love and belongings needs.

c. Love and Belonging Needs

Humans are essentially social beings that always interact with others. The fulfillment of safety needs leads to deep and intimate interactions until we reach the stage of the need for love and belonging, which reflects our social instinct to connect with others. Through social relationships, we gain a sense of acceptance, love and self-worth. Maslow (2023) stated that at this stage, individuals begin to truly understand the importance of being able to have a close relationship in their lives. They feel satisfied when they are loved and needed, whether by family, friends, or a romantic partner. The desire for love and belonging can be so intense that people are willing to do anything to fulfill this need. When this need is not met, it can lead to feelings of loneliness and depression.

d. Esteem Needs

When individuals feel secure and satisfied with their basic needs, their focus shifts towards seeking respect, appreciation, and a sense of accomplishment. Every individual in society has a strong drive to be recognized and valued. Maslow (2023) identified two types of needs related to self-esteem. The first is categorized as self-esteem, which is the intrinsic need to feel competent, strong, and independent. This includes the desire to achieve, to master new life skills. The second is categorized as external esteem, which reflects the human need to be recognized and valued by their social environment. This drive is reflected in the need for reputation, status and recognition from others. In other words, humans have a need for external validation of themselves. In conclusion, when individuals feel that they are competent and valued, they will be more encouraged to reach their full potential. In contrast, a lack of recognition can hinder personal growth and lead to feelings of dissatisfaction, weakness, and insecurity.

e. Self-Actualization

The highest need for self-actualization will emerge when all basic needs have been met. This indicates a greater need for self-actualization. Every individual has unique potential that needs to be expressed and developed. A musician, for example, will feel most fulfilled when creating music, as this activity is in line with his or her natural talents and interests (Maslow, 2023). Self-actualization means to experience fully; it can also be interpreted as a state of “being in the moment”. Self-actualization enables an individual to live fully in the present and experience a complete sense of personal fulfillment as a human being. Moreover, it is a lifelong process that consists of a series of daily decisions, no matter how small, each contributing to personal growth. The continuous alignment of daily decisions with personal values and passions enables individuals to progressively achieve their full potential. This ongoing journey requires continuous intellectual and emotional development, where individuals actively cultivate their abilities, seek new experiences, and embrace opportunities for growth, ultimately achieving higher levels of satisfaction and fulfillment (Maslow, 1965, pp. 111–114).

3. Plot

A storyline or sequence of events in a literary work that is interconnected through the cause-and-effect principle is called plot. Plot is an important intrinsic element in building stories, whether in novels or films. The idea of “plot” is more than just a series of events. A sequence of events can be considered a story when it exhibits clear progression and development. Freytag (2004) proposed that "the plot rises from the introduction through a series of complications to the climax and then falls to the catastrophe" (p. 36). There are five basic plot structures that shape the narrative arc of a story according to Freytag.

a. Exposition

The exposition, also known as the introduction, gives the audience an understanding of the time setting, location, characters, and atmosphere of the story to be told.

b. Rising action

In this section the story begins to take shape and become more engaging. The main conflict begins to be faced by the main character who is struggling to fulfill his or her desires. This section will also bring in new characters such as antagonists and other new obstacles that complicate matters for the main character.

c. Climax

The climax is the highest point in the plot structure. At this stage, the central conflict reaches its peak, and the fate of the main character begins to be determined. It foreshadows either the success or failure of the main character. The decisions made at this point lead to consequences that drive the rest of the narrative.

d. Falling action

This part presents the aftermath of the story’s turning point. The conflict between the main character and the antagonist moves toward resolution, and the falling action guides the plot toward its conclusion by showing the effects of the climax.

e. Resolution

The last part is also referred to as denouement, which is a series of conclusions from catastrophic moments and the end of the story. It can be a happy ending with the main character realizing what he or she has been striving for or a tragic ending, in which they fail to overcome the primary conflict.

4. Character

In literary works, character refers to a fictional entity who is the actor in a story. Abrams and Harpham (2009) define characters in literary works as the persons that are described as having certain characteristics and feelings such as morals, intelligence, and emotions. According to Petrie and Boggs (2018) in their book entitled *The Art of Watching Films*, characters in films can be categorized into three main categories: stock characters and stereotypes, static versus dynamic characters, and flat versus round characters.

5. Characterization

Characterization is the author's technique or way of "bringing to life" and developing the character. According to Boggs and Petrie in their comprehensive study, *The Art of Watching Films* (2018), characterizations in film narratives can be classified into eight primary categories: characterization through appearance, characterization through dialogue, characterization through external action, characterization through internal action, characterization through reactions of other characters, characterization through contrast, characterization through caricature and leitmotif, characterization through choice of name.

C. METHOD

1. Research Design

In this research, qualitative content analysis is employed, allowing for a systematic and detailed examination of meaning through the interpretation of content such as dialogue, actions, and context. This approach is essential to show how the categories are reflected in the data, especially in film analysis where meaning is contained not only in words but also in visual and narrative elements (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis is chosen for its potential to offer a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how Ariel's psychological development and needs are fulfilled as framed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. This research design is in line with the researchers' objective to analyze Ariel's character development and how she fulfills her needs based on her experiences and journey in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film. The findings are presented through textual description, narration, and visual elements.

2. Data and Source of Data

In conducting this research, the researchers used a film titled *The Little Mermaid* (2023), directed by Rob Marshall and produced by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, as the data source. The data were in the form of dialogues and scenes containing the hierarchy of needs of the main character, Ariel. The researchers also collected relevant dialogues, actions, and parts of scenes that reflected how each level of needs appeared throughout the story.

3. Research Instrument

The main research instrument in this study was the researchers, who directly played a role in collecting and analyzing the data. The researchers obtained data from *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film and carried out several stages, such as watching the film intensively, taking notes, collecting and categorizing dialogues and scenes, underlining important quotes, and evaluating parts that reflected the hierarchy of human needs. The researchers also expanded their understanding by interpreting the meanings behind the character's actions and dialogues throughout the storyline.

4. Data Collection Technique

In collecting the data for this research, the researchers began by watching *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film several times to closely examine the content related to the hierarchy of human needs. The researchers took note of key dialogues, character actions, and important quotes that reflected different levels of need. These data were then organized according to Maslow's

hierarchy of needs, ranging from physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem needs, and self-actualization.

5. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researchers followed the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. These steps are applied to organize, simplify, and interpret the collected data systematically to analyze the research problem.

a. Data Reduction

The first step in analyzing the data was data reduction. Based on the concept by Miles and Huberman (1994), data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing data that are considered important for the research. In this study, the researchers selected data from *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film by focusing only on the main character, Ariel. The focus was on the actions, conversations, and behaviors of the main character, which contained the implementation of the fulfillment of needs. The data were transformed and simplified carefully.

b. Data Display

The second stage of data analysis was data display. Based on the concept by Miles and Huberman (1994), data display is the process of organizing and presenting data in a way that makes it easier to draw conclusions. In this study, the researchers descriptively presented selected dialogues, actions, and scenes from *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film. The data were organized and presented by describing the quotes, time markers, types of needs, plot stages, and characterizations in a detailed explanation.

c. Conclusion Drawing

The final stage of data analysis involved drawing conclusions. At this stage, the researchers summarized the findings and interpreted the data obtained from Ariel's character in *The Little Mermaid* (2023). This interpretation specifically aimed to explain how Ariel fulfills her needs based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Through this process, the researchers also interpreted Ariel's character development and systematically organized the data to deliver a valid and justifiable conclusion.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the findings and discussion of the study on the fulfillment of Ariel's needs in *The Little Mermaid* (2023). The data were taken from the film's plot, dialogues, characterizations, and behaviors that reflect the stages of need fulfillment based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These findings aim to analyze the research problem regarding how Ariel, as the main character, fulfills each of her needs throughout the story.

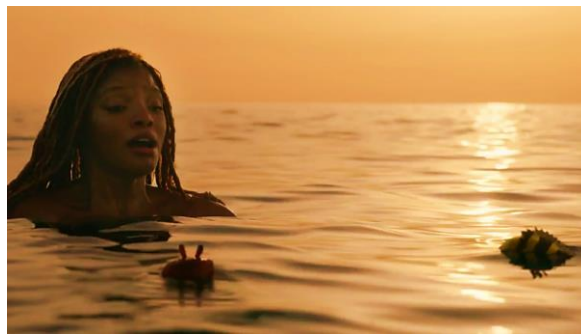
1. Ariel's Fulfillment of Physiological Needs

The Little Mermaid (2023) film depicts Ariel successfully fulfilling her physiological needs as a mermaid. As the daughter of King Triton, she has unlimited access to food, shelter, and a safe living environment in the ocean. The narrative shows her swimming freely, interacting with sea

creatures, and exploring her surroundings without any signs of hunger, deprivation, or discomfort. In addition, her ability to breathe underwater eliminates the basic human need for air, allowing her to survive naturally in her aquatic environment.

However, when Ariel transforms into a human after making a deal with the sea witch Ursula, her physiological needs change. Unlike her life in the sea, she now needs air to breathe, food to eat, and a safe place to rest. Several scenes in the film highlight this shift by showing her struggling to adjust to her new body and meet these basic survival needs on land. One of these scenes occurs when Ariel, having transformed into a human, can no longer swim or breathe underwater and must fight to reach the surface to survive.

DATA 1



**Figure 1. Ariel tries to swim to the surface to breathe
(00:59:15 – 00:59:40)**

(ARIEL PANTING HEAVILY)

Sebastian : *Oh, Ariel. Well, come on, gal. It's either sink or swim.*

(ARIEL SWIM)

This fulfillment scene occurred during the rising action, the phase where Ariel began to face greater challenges after transforming into a human. Since she was no longer a mermaid, she struggled to swim to the surface for oxygen, having lost her ability to breathe underwater. Unlike before, her survival now depended entirely on reaching the surface in time. As panic set in, Sebastian urgently told her to keep swimming before it was too late. This moment emphasized Ariel's realization that, as a human, she now relied on physiological needs she had never experienced as a mermaid, and her transformation had altered her basic survival instincts. From a characterization perspective, this scene depicted Ariel's development through external action. Her desperate struggle to reach the surface vividly illustrated her urgent need for oxygen, highlighting her newfound human limitations. Instead of verbalizing her distress, her frantic swimming and gasping for air effectively conveyed her immediate physiological struggle.

Fulfilling physiological needs as the foundation of Maslow's most basic level was also supported by previous studies before progressing to higher needs. Novianti *et al* (2025) explicitly emphasized the main character Fahri's physiological needs in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* through indicators such as food and drink, sleep and rest, and physical health and recovery. Similar findings were also reported in *The Whale* (2022), where Charlie's fulfillment of physiological needs was shown through his food consumption, although he struggled with the psychological effects of his broken

relationships (Fajriah & Budi, 2025). These studies indicate that physiological needs form the core of Maslow's hierarchy, typically represented by essential survival factors such as food, rest, and health. In *The Little Mermaid* (2023), Ariel's physiological needs are evident, particularly in scenes where she has to adapt to the human world and relies on food, shelter, and physical assistance after becoming human. Thus, similar to Fahri and Charlie, Ariel's journey highlights that satisfying physiological needs is a vital first step before aiming for higher-level needs.

2. Ariel's Fulfillment of Safety Needs

After basic physiological needs are met, a new group of needs arises, generally classified as safety needs, which include security, stability, reliance, protection, and freedom from fear, anxiety, and confusion, as well as the need for structure, order, laws, boundaries, and strength in a protector (Maslow, 2023). In *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film, Ariel's safety needs are fulfilled through various events that show her efforts to achieve protection, safety, and stability. As a mermaid who lives under the sea, Ariel remains in a safe environment under the supervision of her father, King Triton. However, her curiosity about the human world often leads her into dangerous situations that threaten both her physical and emotional safety.

One example of Ariel's attempt to fulfill her safety needs comes when she and her best friend, Flounder, explore a shipwreck in search of human artifacts. Before they realize it, a large shark has been stalking nearby, watching their every move. In this scene, Ariel must quickly find a way to protect herself and Flounder from the threatening danger. She responds by tricking the shark, using surrounding objects and mirrors to create a distraction and avoid the attack.

DATA 2



Figure 2. Ariel tries to avoid and trick the shark
(00:09:42 – 00:10:51)

Ariel : Will you relax? It's just your reflection. Calm down. Nothing is going to happen.

(ARIEL SHOUTS)

Ariel : *Flounder, look out!*

(GRUNTS) (ARIEL DROPPED THE WOODEN TANK)

Ariel : You okay, Flounder?

This scene was part of the exposition in the film's plot that introduced the underwater world and Ariel's character, including how she faced dangers in her surroundings. Ariel was portrayed as a mermaid with high curiosity. Although her father and natural environment had guaranteed all her safety needs in her mermaid form, she still encountered threats in the ocean. One scene that reflected the fulfillment of her safety needs was when Ariel dived into a sunken shipwreck to collect human objects with her best friend, Flounder. She asked Flounder to stay alert and watch their surroundings to anticipate the appearance of predators, such as sharks. When danger appeared, Ariel responded quickly by swimming away, pushing a wooden tank, and tricking the shark with her reflection in the mirror to protect Flounder and herself. In terms of characterization, this scene illustrated Ariel's caution. Through dialogue, she asked Flounder to be on guard, reflecting on her awareness of potential threats and her need for safety.

By means of external action, she instinctively swam away and created a way to escape the shark, illustrating her protective instincts. In addition, her alert facial expressions and tense gestures underscored her emotional state in response to the threat. Thus, this scene not only represented the fulfillment of Ariel's safety needs but also demonstrated how her character instinctively responded to danger in her environment. The drive to meet safety needs is also clear in August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson* (Alifuddin & Jwalita, 2023). In this play, the piano serves not just as a musical tool, but also as a symbol that showcases the characters' deeper desires for safety and stability. Their conflict over the piano highlight various safety-related needs, including the wish for freedom, personal security, financial stability, and steady jobs. These studies show that safety needs are not limited to physical protection but also include the pursuit of stability, security, resources, and freedom from fear.

3. Ariel's Fulfillment of Love and Belonging Needs

In *The Little Mermaid* (2023), Ariel's love and belonging needs are fulfilled through her journey in building and maintaining relationships with the people around her. In both her mermaid and human forms, Ariel aims to find emotional connections that give her a sense of acceptance and love. Her efforts to fulfill these needs are seen in her interactions with family and friends, as well as in her romantic relationships, which have become essential parts of her character development.

Two important moments in the film strongly illustrate the fulfillment of these needs. The first occurs when Ariel, after fully transforming into a human, successfully marries Prince Eric. This moment marks the culmination of Ariel's long struggle to be accepted in the human world and to build a meaningful romantic relationship. The second appears in the final scenes of the film, where Ariel hugs her father, King Triton, before leaving the underwater world. Although she has chosen to live as a human, this farewell moment shows that Ariel remains loved and accepted by her family and the merpeople.

DATA 3



**Figure 3. Ariel marries Eric
(02:00:35 – 02:01:20)**

This scene was part of the resolution in the film, where after going through various conflicts and challenges, Ariel finally achieved the happy ending she had longed for. King Triton's decision to turn Ariel into a whole human was a form of love and sacrifice from a father who wanted to see his beloved daughter happy. This showed that family affection and support were essential in fulfilling Ariel's love and belonging needs. This also confirmed that the fulfillment of the need for love and belonging was the main factor that drove Ariel on her journey, and this resolution illustrated how these needs were finally met in the fullest form.

DATA 4



**Figure 4. Ariel hugs her father
(02:01:20 – 02:05:24)**

King Triton : And I will always be here for you.

King Triton : We all will.

Ariel : *I love you, Father.*

This scene was also part of the resolution, where Ariel was very grateful to her father for granting her wish and turning her into a human. This moment not only signified the fulfillment of Ariel's desire to live on land with Eric but also showed her acceptance by her family and the

rest of the merpeople towards her decision. The support she received from her closest people strengthened the fulfillment of her love and belonging needs because Ariel no longer felt alienated or had to choose between the sea and the land. The presence of family and community who accepted her decision provided emotional validation that strengthened her identity.

The characterization shown by Ariel in these two scenes was depicted through external action and dialogue. Through external action, Ariel expressed her affection by kissing Eric and hugging her father, which showed her emotional intimacy and happiness after various struggles. In addition, through dialogue, Ariel explicitly stated that she loved her father, which clarified the emotional connection between the two and confirmed that even when she chose to live as a human, her love for her father never diminished. The needs for relationships, affection, family, intimacy, friendship, and love were also illustrated through the character Pollyanna in the novel *Pollyanna* (Virginia & Satria, 2022). These findings suggest that Ariel's journey is not only defined by her desire for freedom and identity, but also by her emotional connections with the people she loves. Similar to Pollyanna, whose story also highlights the importance of companionship and emotional support, Ariel's character reinforces Maslow's concept that love and belonging are fundamental human needs that continue to shape motivation and behavior even after safety and physiological needs have been met.

4. Ariel's Fulfillment of Esteem Needs

In *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film, the fulfillment of Ariel's esteem needs plays a crucial role in her transformation journey. As a character who undergoes a significant shift from mermaid to human, Ariel tries to prove her abilities to herself and seeks recognition and appreciation from her environment. Her success in fulfilling this need becomes important in her development since the more she feels valued and recognized, the greater her confidence and motivation to achieve higher goals. One of the most important moments that illustrates Ariel's esteem needs occurs when Queen Selina, Prince Eric's mother, initially disapproves of their relationship. At the time, Ariel was still a mermaid, and her status as a sea creature caused problems for the royal family. However, after Ariel successfully transformed into a human and overcame the conflicts she faced, the queen's attitude changed.

DATA 5

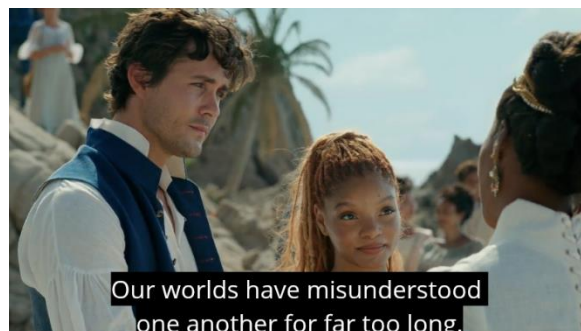


Figure 5. Ariel gets recognition from the queen
(02:01:38 – 02:01:47)

The Queen : Our worlds have misunderstood one another for far too long.

The Queen : *Your marriage marks a new beginning for us.*

Ariel : *Yes. A beginning.*

This scene was part of the resolution in the film's plot, where the central conflict had been resolved and the story reached its conclusion. Ariel successfully became fully human and married Prince Eric, achieving the dream she had long pursued. This decision not only changed Ariel's life but also marked the beginning of a new relationship between humans and sea creatures. One significant moment in this scene occurred when the queen, who had previously opposed Eric's decision to marry Ariel because of her mermaid status, finally gave her blessing. When she stated, "*Your marriage marks a new beginning for us,*" it symbolically acknowledged Ariel as part of the human world. This recognition fulfilled Ariel's esteem needs, particularly external esteem, as she was accepted as a human being and recognized as someone capable of bringing positive change to both worlds.

In a similar manner, the fulfillment of self-esteem needs is not solely rooted in formal recognition, but also in his personal effort, perseverance, and sense of capability as illustrated by Fahri in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Novianti *et al.*, 2025). External acknowledgment—such as graduation—serves as validation from the social environment, whereas internal satisfaction emerges from overcoming challenges through discipline and integrity. Taken together, both Ariel and Fahri's self-esteem is realized when a person feels valued by others and confident in their own abilities. This aligns with Maslow's argument that self-esteem develops through a balance of external appreciation and internal mastery.

5. Ariel's Fulfillment of Self-Actualization

The highest needs in Maslow's hierarchy are those of self-actualization, which involve the need to fully realize one's potential across intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social aspects. In *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film, Ariel, as a mermaid, manages to fulfill all her basic needs, from physiological needs to safety, love and belonging, and esteem. She lives in a secure environment under the sea, surrounded by her loving family, and holds a respected status as King Triton's daughter. However, although her basic needs are hierarchically fulfilled, Ariel still feels that something is missing. In various scenes, she explicitly expresses a desire for something greater beyond her limits as a mermaid. This inner desire represents Ariel's need for self-actualization, where she strives to realize her full potential and live a life in line with her true self. The most important moment of this fulfillment occurs at the end of the film, when Ariel finally transforms into a full human being and chooses to leave the ocean.

DATA 6



**Figure 6. Ariel becomes a whole human being
(02:01:38 – 02:01:47)**

Eric : You ready?

Ariel : *Yes, Yes I'am ready.*

In the resolution of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) film, Ariel ended the story by becoming fully human. After overcoming various challenges, she finally achieved the life she had always dreamed of and was no longer bound by the limitations of being a mermaid. One of the most symbolic moments in this scene occurred when Ariel looked at the ocean, the place that had once been her home. This moment reflected her memories of the past and her personal journey. Rather than gazing with doubt or regret, Ariel looked at the sea with full awareness that it was a part of her she had left behind to pursue something greater. When Eric asked, “*Are you ready?*” and Ariel answered, “*Yes, yes, I am ready,*” it marked a bold declaration that she had reached the highest stage in her self-actualization process, fully realizing and accepting her identity.

Overall, Ariel’s emotional expressions, decisive dialogue, and achievement of her long-desired goals illustrate that she has reached the stage of self-actualization. Her transformation is not limited to gaining a human form, but represents the fulfillment of her potential, independence, and personal purpose. Similar findings are reflected in previous studies, in which characters such as Agatha and Sophie in *The School for Good and Evil* achieve self-actualization by balancing their ideal and real identities (Bungan, Asanti, & Ariani 2025), while Fahri in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* reaches self-actualization through academic achievement and long-term ambition (Novianti et al.,2025). These comparisons strengthen the argument that self-actualization is achieved when individuals are able to realize their personal goals and embrace their true selves—an outcome clearly demonstrated in Ariel’s character development.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted, Ariel, a mermaid who transformed into a human in *The Little Mermaid* (2023), successfully fulfilled Maslow’s five levels hierarchy of needs. Through her journey, motivations, actions, and interactions, she gradually met her physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs. This process reflected her evolving motivations and character as she adapted to new circumstances and goals.

The fulfillment of basic needs such as physiological and safety was met with ease. However, the biggest challenge Ariel faced was fulfilling the needs of love and belonging. This happened

because of a change in motivation in its fulfillment, where initially Ariel was driven by her love for human life in general, but then her focus changed to her love for someone, namely Eric. This change in motivation had an impact on how Ariel fulfilled her needs for esteem and self-actualization, because her fulfillment at higher levels of need could not be separated from how she fulfilled her love and belonging needs.

While the fulfillment of Ariel's needs does not occur sequentially within the plot structure, the analysis in this study adheres to the hierarchical stages of Maslow's theory. The plot functions as a supporting element to demonstrate the manifestation of each need in the character's journey. Ariel's character journey reflects sequential psychological development, as demonstrated by the progressive fulfillment of needs ranging from the most basic to the highest level of self-actualization. Thus, these findings reinforce that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can be effectively applied in analyzing character development in literary works, especially in examining the role of needs as the motivation in character transformation, both physically and how each level of need is fulfilled by the character.

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