

## Film Analysis: James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009)

Honors English II/English II (Carrington)

### Learning Objectives:

- Cite textual evidence to support analysis and inferences
- Determine theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development
- Analyze how complex characters are developed over the course of a text
- Analyze how structure creates certain effects (e.g., suspense, mystery, tension, etc.)
- Determine and analyze the importance of point of view or cultural perspective
- Delineate and evaluate implicit arguments made in non-traditional texts

**Rationale for Viewing:** Over the course of the past few weeks, we have read and analyzed a few texts that center around the concept of imperialism/colonialism. As we view *Avatar*, consider how this film could be considered an extension of these ideas and the texts we've read. Moreover, consider how James Cameron's film might be considered a social criticism for world affairs of the past, present, and future.

**Essential Questions:** As you're viewing the film as a whole, keep these questions in mind. You do not need to answer them anywhere; I just want you to be thinking about them as you view the film and be prepared to discuss them in small-group or whole-class discussions.

- The nature and essence of freedom
- Complex moral decision-making and ethical choices: Where is the line between right and wrong? When is an action always wrong?
- Do the ends justify the means?
- The use of force for material gain, profit-taking, and greed
- Imperialism, greed, ecological disregard and corporate irresponsibility

### ***CHAPTERS 1-5 (ENDS WITH JAKE WAKING UP)***

**Characters:** In the opening scenes, we are introduced to a number of characters—some major and others not so much. Despite their varying degrees of importance to the story, each of these characters reveals something about a specific group of people in society. To understand whom (or what) they represent, however, you must first be able to understand how the filmmakers are trying to portray the individual characters. To assist you in doing this, you will need to view the opening scenes and take notes on characterization. Essentially, you will describe (in note-taking format) the characters below based off of their appearance (clothing/costumes, stature, etc.), actions, words, thoughts, etc. On a separate sheet of paper, make a chart like the one below (or something similar) that will enable you to track the previously mentioned manners of characterization.

Character	What he/she looks like	What he/she does	What he/she says or thinks	Misc./Other
Jake Sully (main character)				
Dr. Grace Augustine (scientist)				
Parker Selfridge (chief administrator for RDA)				
Colonel Miles Quattrich				
Trudy Chacon (combat pilot)				
Neytiri (female Na'vi)				

### ***CHAPTERS 6-12 (ENDS WITH LUNCH TABLE CONVERSATION WITH JAKE AND GRACE)***

**Setting:** During the next set of scenes, the film shifts to describing/presenting the land of Pandora. How do the filmmakers portray this land (cite specific textual evidence—sights, sounds, etc.). How do the characters (both the scientists/soldiers and the Na’vi people), the landscape, and the animal life contribute to this depiction? On the same sheet of paper you’ve used before, make a chart like the one below (or something similar) that will enable you to track the ideas below.

Items to Observe	Descriptions/Observations
Pandora (the place)	
Na’vi (the people)	
Humans (impersonating Na’vi)	
Other life forms (the animals and plants)	

**Conflict:** Through Jake’s experience with the clan leader and the other village warriors, the audience learns a lot about the central conflict that has been alluded to previously in the film. Discuss the emerging conflict as you see it. Explain who the principal parties are and what interests seem to be at stake. Attempt to identify at least one quote from the clan encounter that you think summarizes the conflict (or at least a part of the conflict).

**CHAPTERS 13-18 (ENDS WITH JAKE AND COLONEL’S DISCUSSION IN CAFETERIA...WHILE IT’S RAINING)**

**Conflict:** In the opening scene with the military specialists and the “company men,” the conflict is further developed. How so?

**Character Development:** Pay attention to Jake’s voice-over narration and his interactions with Neytiri. What does his commentary reveal about his personal beliefs and relationships (past and present)? Does his relationship seem to be changing with Neytiri? With Grace? With Colonel Quatrach? What evidence from the movie (actions, thoughts, words, etc.) supports your claims? On the same sheet of paper you’ve used before, make a chart like the one below (or something similar) that will enable you to track the ideas below.

Jake’s Relationship With...	Observation (what you see/notice)	Analysis (what the observation shows)
Neytiri (and Na’vi people)		
Dr. Grace (and the scientists)		
Colonel (and the militants)		

**CHAPTERS 19-23 (ENDS WITH THE NA’VI FLEEING THEIR SACRED LAND)**

**Archetypal Dichotomies:** A *dichotomy* is a division or a contrast between two things that are supposed to be opposed or completely different (e.g., light and dark, good and evil, peace and conflict, etc.). Below you will find sample archetypal dichotomies on display in this section of the film. On the same sheet of paper you’ve used before, make a chart like the one below (or something similar) to track evidence from the film that supports/illustrates the dichotomies mentioned below. Feel free to think of your own dichotomies, as well.

Dichotomy	Evidence of Dichotomy
Trust and Deceit	
Nature and Industry	
Good and Evil	

Innocence and Guilt	
Freedom and Oppression	

### **CHAPTERS 24-29 (ENDS WITH JAKE AND NEYTIRI'S EMBRACE)**

**Imagery:** Answer the following questions with support from the movie. Your evidence/support will come largely in the form of visual images (what you see).

1. What are the effects of the military's decisions to "occupy" Pandora? How do the filmmakers "show" this as opposed to just saying or "telling" it?
2. How have the relations between the Na'vi people and humans changed?
3. How are the two conflicting groups (the Na'vi and the military) juxtaposed visually?

### **CHAPTERS 30-36 (THE END)**

**Story Development:** Look back over the notes you've created and begin thinking of things that have changed. In thinking of things that have changed (e.g., relationships, people, places, situations, etc.), consider the rationale for the change—or the lack thereof.

### **REFLECTION ON THE FILM AS A WHOLE**

Now that you have seen the film in its entirety, it's time to reflect on what this all means. What is the filmmaker trying to get you to see? What comment is he making on society? On humanity? On imperialism? What is the take away? To address these questions—and many others—you will write discussion posts using Subtext and respond to the thoughts of your peers.

**Allegory:** As you should already know, an allegory is a story in which the characters, settings, events, etc. represent/symbolize something bigger. In a well-developed post, explain: 1) how this movie could be considered an allegory and 2) what it allegorizes. At least two allegorical concepts should be addressed.

**Themes & Central Messages:** In another well-developed post, explain what the central message of this film is. Compare this message to the themes/messages of other texts we've studied (Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, Orwell's short story "Shooting an Elephant," and Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden").

**Music:** Listen to Leona Lewis' song "I See You" (the movie theme song). Carefully analyze the lyrics and construct a post in which you explain how the song connects to the film.