**Film Analysis: *Dead Poets Society* (1989)**

*“They're not that different from you, are they? Same haircuts. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they're destined for great things, just like many of you, their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable?”* – Mr. John Keating, *Dead Poets Society*

Directions: Read each of the following questions before the start of the film. After previewing the questions, be prepared to answer the following questions while watching the film. You do not have to write in complete sentences; however, your thoughts should be fully fleshed out. In addition to answering the questions below, you must also look for examples of conformity and rebellion within the film. It doesn’t matter how big or small – just look for anything that might be examples of conformist or rebellious behaviors. Make a chart like the one shown below to keep track of the examples you pick out.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Examples of Conformity** | **Examples of Rebellion** |
| * *School uniforms*
 | * *Smoking in dorm room*
 |

1. What words are on the banners that the young men are carrying? Why would the filmmaker open with this scene? What type of atmosphere does it create?
2. What is the purpose of the dorm room scene? Think of it in relation to the previous scene (the ceremony with the boys carrying the banner)? What might this scene be trying to highlight?
3. Notice the short scene with the flock of birds flying and the scene that directly follows (the boys making their way down the stairs of their dorm room). What might this symbolize?
4. Based on the short clips inside different teachers’ classrooms right after the scene with the boys in the stairwell, what can be inferred about the teachers at Welton Academy? How does Mr. Keating (Robin Williams) compare?
5. What does the Latin phrase *carpe diem* mean?
6. Why does the filmmaker focus in on the redheaded kid using his ruler to replicate the chart that Mr. Keating is drawing on the board? Why do we need to see him doing this? What does it highlight about the “Welton way”?
7. What does Mr. Keating ask students to do to the “Understanding Poetry” section of their textbooks? What might this action symbolize?
8. According to Keating, why was language developed?
9. What is the purpose of the “stand on top of the desk” exercise?
10. Why is it significant that the boys are made to practice reading quotes from poetry?
11. Why is Todd’s poetry scene significant?
12. What is the purpose behind the scene in which the boys are marching in the courtyard? What does Keating hope to prove about human nature?

1. What gift does Todd get from his parents for his birthday? What might it symbolize?
2. How does Neil’s father respond to learning that Neil has been acting?
3. Who does Neil turn to for advice upon speaking with his father? What advice does he receive?
4. Pay close attention to the scene where Knox visits the school Chris attends. How is Chris’ school different from Welton Academy (Knox’s school)?
5. What do you notice about Neil’s costume in the production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*? What might it symbolize and foreshadow?
6. Describe the mood in the scenes that following the discussion scene in the library (where Neil’s parents criticize him for wanting to pursue acting instead of the life they’ve planned for him). What helps to establish this mood?
7. How might Neil’s final action be seen as symbolic?
8. Who is ultimately blamed for Neil’s fate? Is this fair?
9. What is significant about the final scene involving the boys standing on the desks?

**\*\* Be prepared to discuss this film as a class (and maybe even complete a writing assignment). The questions mentioned above will serve as a guide to assist you in finding material to discuss.\*\***