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SECONDARY STUDENTS' FILM VIEWING PRACTICES:  
A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW STUDENTS WATCH MOVIES INSIDE AND  
OUTSIDE SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

This study is about the experiences of rural high school students with watching films inside and outside of their English classes in school. It offers a rationale for the importance and benefit of thoughtfully using film as a part of English instruction. I used the viewer response framework developed by Teasley and Wilder (1997) to classify the ways in which students viewed and engaged films. Through student surveys and a few individual student interviews, I collected qualitative data about the practices students engage in when watching a movie either in school or outside of school. When I analyzed the students' responses, I found that students were responding to film mainly on a literary level, but occasionally on a dramatic or cinematic level as well, as defined by Teasley and Wilder. Regardless of the classification of their response, all students are active viewers with an interest in films. Their engagement and interest in viewing films point to wide implications in the field of English instruction as we advance further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Background.....	1
Rationale.....	4
Main Wonderings.....	9
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	11
Viewer Response Framework.....	11
Chapter 3 Methods .....	14
Purpose.....	14
Design of Study.....	14
Site.....	15
Subjects.....	15
Procedures.....	16
Data Gathering Tool.....	17
Data Analysis.....	18
Limitations.....	19
Chapter 4 Results .....	21
Data Results.....	21
Interview Results.....	25

Chapter 5 Conclusions.....	26
Implications.....	26
Implications for Teaching.....	27
References.....	30
Appendix A Student Survey Questionnaire.....	31
Appendix B Tyler's Interview Transcript.....	33
Appendix C Kasey's Interview Transcript.....	37
Appendix D Nate's Interview Transcript.....	40
Appendix E Becky's Interview Transcript.....	44

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 Number of Movies Watched at Home per Month.....	21
Table 2 Comparison of Viewing Preference by Gender.....	22
Table 3 Frequency of Post-Film Discussion by Gender.....	24

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### BACKGROUND

The lights are out and Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* is playing on the classroom TV. The teacher sitting at the desk looks out on a class of 25 students. A group of three girls whisper and pass notes to each other in the back. A boy in the front row has his head on his desk in the same position it has been in for the last twenty minutes. Another girl is trying hard to cover up the fact that she is texting under her desk. The teacher calls out something for the students to take note of in the film, and the girls chatting in the back and the girl texting look up quickly, fearing that they will be called out for not paying attention. The boy with his head on the desk does not move at all. The teacher gives the girls a stern look, and they pretend to watch the movie for the next few minutes until they feel sure that the teacher is no longer paying attention and continue their conversations. The bell rings, signaling the end of class, and as the students hurry to leave the classroom, the teacher collects the note sheet that was handed out at the beginning of the class. Only 5 students have bothered to write anything down. The teacher sighs and goes to the TV to rewind the movie in order to be ready for the next class.

The scene described above is all too common in many secondary English classrooms. I am sure you can recall a time when you were a teacher, or maybe even when you were a student, and you had just suffered through reading one of those

canonical pieces of literature. The ones like *The Crucible*, *Moby Dick*, or *Great Expectations* that are like pulling teeth to get most students interested in reading. So in a last attempt to have the students connect and to fulfill that promise made at the beginning of the unit that if they would just read the book then they would be allowed to watch the movie in class, the teacher devotes a few days at the end of the unit to let the students watch one of the movie adaptations of the novel or play they just spent the past weeks “reading.” The teacher will most likely pass out some sort of note-taking sheet to hold the students accountable in some way for paying attention to the movie, and some students will fill it out, some might jot down a few words that the teacher calls out, but most students will just ignore it. Once the movie is finished, there might be a brief discussion about the similarities and differences between the book and the movie, or the teacher might ask, “Which one did you like better?” Then it will be on to the next unit or the next novel.

Until I went to college, the scenarios caricatured above were the only experiences I had of watching movies in English class. My experiences of watching movies in class were shallow, and I certainly did not grasp the textual and artistic depth of cinema. I loved to watch movies outside of school, either at my house or at the theaters with family and friends, but I did not really view film as more than a form of entertainment. In school, a “movie day” was something to look forward to simply because it was different. Since I liked movies in general, I was always excited for the chance to watch one. These were my experiences and conceptions of films until I took a history of cinema class my freshman year at Penn State that taught me more about film as its own medium and form of communication. That class definitely piqued my interest in watching films from a

deeper and more analytical perspective, but it was not until my junior year in college, when I studied abroad for a semester in Perugia, Italy, that I really began to see film in a new way.

While abroad I took a film and literature class that focused on popular Italian films-old and new- and bestselling Italian novels. Sometimes we would watch the movie version of the book we had just read, and sometimes we would watch a movie that was not based on a book. The theme of the class was to better understand Italian culture by studying the movies and texts that were popular among Italians. Living abroad in Italy, trying to understand a culture through the texts it valued made me realize the similarities between film and literature. Our professor did not teach the novels in isolation from the films; instead, the movies and books we read played off of one another and communicated with one another as peers. Both texts-the print and the audiovisual- were used not only as an insight into Italian culture, but also as the subject of literary analysis through class discussion or formal writing.

I was used to reading a novel and then talking about literary elements such as setting, characterization, tone, and mood. After all, I had been practicing those literacy skills in my English classes for all my life. I was not used to analyzing those same elements in a movie. Because the class in Italy treated film as a peer to literature rather than a simple form of entertainment or reward for finishing a book, I realized a new potential for film in English Language Arts instruction. I learned there was a way for film to be “read” as a text. The idea of “reading” a film suggests that there are literacy skills and strategies inherent in that practice, and I became more and more curious to figure out what exactly those might be.

When I returned to Penn State, I began to think more deeply about how I might use film as a Secondary English Education major. I was curious to see if the structure of my film and literature class in Italy could somehow be incorporated into secondary English classes. Even though I felt convinced of the benefit of pairing literature and film based on my personal experiences, I was eager to see what researchers and teachers had to say about the relationship between film and texts. Before I could start thinking about a potential research study to find out more about film in the English classroom, I knew I would have to justify why I was interested in including film in English instruction at all? Why did I feel it was important to learn more about the use of film inside and outside of school?

#### RATIONALE

Some people might think that we teach English in schools so that students can learn to read and write better, but I think English instruction has a broader purpose than that. English is more than merely fostering an ability to read and write and speak; it is the foundation to teach analytical, critical thinking, reasoning, questioning, and many more communication and literacy skills that are essential and valued in society today. It is a way for students to learn more about their own culture and history and beliefs as well as the culture, history, and beliefs of others through the many and varied texts that they explore in English class. In other words, English instruction develops and nurtures the tools all students need to be thinking, communicating citizens of the world.

We help our students become thoughtful, communicative citizens of the world by teaching and allowing them to practice the literacy skills that foster strong communication and interpretation. My personal experiences as a student in film studies classes and as a teacher using film in the classroom had shown me that film could be a valuable literacy-building tool. By literacy-building tool I mean that movies offer the possibility to develop close reading, writing, and critical thinking skills; in other words, they can develop almost all of the same skills we teach students through reading and writing instruction. However, I knew that not all English teachers viewed or understood film in the same way. In fact, some teachers believe the opposite. Teasley and Wilder (1997) cited “a widespread belief [among teachers] that students’ reading is suffering because they are watching so much television or renting too many videos.” From this perspective, film is seen as a distraction from reading. Other teachers tend to view movies in opposition to books also, and Teasley and Wilder (1997) wrote about a time when “a teacher actually stood up to say that one of the reasons she liked to show her classes a film version of the book they had just studied was ‘so they can see how the book is always better than the movie.’” This tendency to put film and literature in opposition with one another as a point of comparison is detrimental to both texts. Movies can never do all that books can, in the same way that books can never do all that movies can. Nevertheless, they can both be used as tools to help students develop the important literacy skills they need to know and use.

John Golden (2001) elaborates on the use of film as a literacy-building tool in his book *Reading in the Dark*. Specifically, Golden (2001) uses film to isolate “skills that...students can apply to any text they encounter.” With this strategy, Golden teaches

literacy skills through active reading strategies like predicting, responding, questioning, and visualizing. In his classes he has used film as a readily accessible platform to launch discussions of such elements as characterization, setting, point of view, symbol, and irony. He has “found that students are more willing to practice with film at first,” and then they can transfer their new knowledge and competency with these literacy skills to reach an improved analysis of written texts. In addition to developing the more standard literacy skills, film can be used in another capacity to help develop skills in the more modern field of media literacy.

As we move deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the basic and broad purposes of English instruction will not change drastically, but the tools that we have available to help meet those purposes will. Teasley and Wilder (1997) stated that, “English/language arts instruction has always given students skills to cope with information in their environment,” and as the environment changes, so too must the skills and tools we use to teach that information. The environment of today is driven by technology and media, and many organizations and leaders in education have realized a need to teach students a new form of literacy-media literacy. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) support the notion that students must be able to “create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts” as part of the necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies (2013). This ability to interpret and analyze all forms of mediated communication has become a pressing need in English instruction. Teasley and Wilder (1997) believe that “if we are to have students become ‘media literate,’ a good way to start is with the thoughtful use of film.”

Other researchers like Jessica Raley (2010), have said that teachers should “make better use of the variety of literacy skills...students are developing outside of traditionally sanctioned activities.” Some of these non-traditional literacy skills include sending a text message to a friend, posting a tweet on Twitter, and even watching a movie; these are all forms of media literacy, and the need to engage this background experience of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is becoming more important and relevant to meaningful English instruction. Because film can develop media literacy, which is something that reading a book can never do, it might be tempting to isolate film instruction from the instruction of literature, but in fact, it can be just as beneficial to combine the study of film with the study of literature.

I believe that film is a legitimate part of English instruction and one that will become increasingly relevant and important in our media-driven society, but I have never believed that it should be a complete replacement for literature. After all, the class in Perugia, which really served as the foundation for my interest and experience with film in English instruction, was designed so that film was used as a companion or peer to literature. There are so many similarities between films and books, and I believe that the purposes of English instruction are best met when these two texts are used in conjunction with one another.

Sadly, not everyone sees the value or connection of linking film and literature. Teasley and Wilder (1997) captured this resistance when they wondered who decided that plays are “in the canon” of English instruction while movies usually are not? John Golden (2001) structured his entire book around ways to create a dialogue between film

and literature in the English classroom. After all, “viewing a film provides opportunities for discussion and writing” just as reading a book does (Teasley and Wilder 1997). Some people might wonder if you can reach the same level of academic depth and analysis in a discussion or writing about film. However, my own personal experiences with college courses both at Penn State and in Italy showed me that there is no reason why students cannot be asked to engage in scholarly discussions about a film’s meaning, tone, or symbolism, or write critical essays about the movie’s ability to use sound and lighting techniques to enhance theme. Furthermore, using film as an instructional tool helps connect our teaching to students’ interests and background.

It is known that instruction is best when it is relevant and relatable to students. Film fulfills these two standards. Even back in 1997, Teasley and Wilder noted that “students have prior experience with film-almost all of it positive.” It would be a waste, therefore, not to tap that prior experience and interest. Film also serves as a way to differentiate instruction according to Tomlinson’s model of differentiation. Golden (2001) suggests that, “for many of our students, film is much more readily accessible than print because of the visual nature and immediacy of the medium.” English teachers can “often [be] disappointed during a discussion of literature because not everyone had read the assignment; in fact, some days only a handful of students [are] prepared. Film, on the other hand, is an immediate and a shared experience” (Teasley and Wilder 1997). The accessibility and immediacy of film makes it a valuable tool for engaging some of the harder to reach students. Also, the audiovisual nature of film accommodates multiple intelligences according to Gardner’s theory. Film is a way to connect with the visual-

spatial and auditory learners. Ultimately, when a student is able to connect with a text that they are able to relate to, they become really engaged in learning, and at the end of the day, isn't that really one of the most important purposes of English instruction?

### MAIN WONDERINGS

As I started to review some of the previous research on film and English Language Arts, I saw that a lot of studies and books had been published about how best to incorporate movies or film clips into the English curriculum, but not a lot of data had been collected on students' opinions and practices regarding film. Since the ultimate goal of instruction is to help students learn, I figured it would be helpful to find out how students engage with movies inside and outside of school. I figured that if I could better understand how students watch movies, especially when they are not in school, I could see if there was any way to integrate their own film viewing practices into the classroom. I define "film viewing practices" as any behaviors, thoughts, or strategies students use consciously or subconsciously while watching a movie in any context. The concept is similar to the notion of reading strategies that good readers employ when reading a book. I wanted to know what strategies or activities-if any- students used when watching movies outside of school. By the same rationale, I also wanted to know what strategies or activities students were using when watching films inside school. Were there any similarities? Ultimately, since the purpose of my study was to better understand the use of film in secondary English classes from the students' perspectives, I thought that a good place to start would be to ask them their opinions about watching movies in English class

and ask them what they did during those instances. My curiosity led me to the following three questions, which served as the basis and root of my inquiry.

1. What are students' film viewing practices outside of the classroom?
2. What are students' film viewing practices inside the English classroom?
3. What are the similarities and differences between these two experiences?

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### VIEWER RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

I am certainly not the first person to offer research about the use of film in the secondary English classroom, and while reading some of the prior research in the field, I came to rely on the work of three researchers to ground and orient my own curiosity and research about film. The first of these researchers was John Golden, a classroom teacher whose book *Reading in the Dark* spoke to practices and instructional methods for using and teaching film in the secondary English class. The other researchers were the duo of Alan Teasley and Ann Wilder. They informed this study the most through their viewer-response framework and their three-part framework for classifying the ways in which students engage film. I adopted this latter framework as a way for evaluating and classifying my own student data about film viewing practices.

Golden's (2001) research, while it did also advocate for using an entire film as the sole curricular text in a unit of study, mainly outlined ways in which film could be used as an instructional tool in conjunction with reading literature. His philosophy was all about "isolating particular skills that we want active readers to possess and demonstrating how they can be introduced and practiced with film *and then* transferred to the written text." This philosophy both validates the practical use of film in English Language Arts instruction and is rooted in the finding that most students are more easily able to understand concepts like the effect of setting on mood or the strategy of prediction when they are allowed to practice with film first before switching to the print text. Also, "this

philosophy...reflects most classroom teachers' approach to reader-response theory in that students should try to put themselves into a text before beginning the formal analysis and synthesis"; film makes this leap easier (Golden 2001).

Reader response theory also shaped Teasley and Wilder's research because the viewer-response framework was molded and inspired by Rosenblatt's (1995) reader response theory. Teasley and Wilder explain the similarity between the two most clearly when they write,

When we read a text (or a film), we "decode" the visual (and, in the case of film, auditory) cues, simultaneously giving the words (images) meaning and creating a coherent and satisfying interpretation. The broad, long-range goals of literary (film) study is for students to continue to read (view) long after they leave school and for them to take responsibility for comprehending increasingly sophisticated texts (films). For students to develop as empowered readers (viewers), the teacher's role is one of being a model reader (viewer), promoting students' active engagement with the text (film), clearing up obvious misreadings, and encouraging clear thinking and articulate responses (1997).

This theory was influential in shaping the philosophy behind their research, and subsequently mine, because I guided my research around questions about how students view and respond to the films they watch. I was curious about how students make meaning from their viewing of film and what kinds of active "reading" strategies they engaged in while watching movies. I also liked that reader response theory allows for students to be the creators or "experts" of meaning or interpretation of a text rather than

relying solely on the teacher to provide the *one* correct answer or interpretation. Because film is a field that I went into my research already believing that students had a lot of prior experience with, I knew that it would require a framework that allowed for students and teachers to be co-creators of meaning so that students would be encouraged to use their prior experiences and viewings of film in their classroom analysis and discussion.

Furthermore, “the most obvious advantage of the viewer-response approach is that the approach calls for students to be active viewers,” and this advantage was another component that guided my research questions because they were grounded in the belief that students were indeed active viewers of film; I just needed to figure out in which way.

Teasley and Wilder (1997) designed a three-part viewing framework to distinguish the three different ways in which students could actively view films; they termed those “lenses” literary, dramatic, and cinematic. As might be fairly obvious, “the literary aspects are those aspects that films share with literature: plot, characters, setting, themes, point of view, recurring images, and symbols.” Thus, when a student engages with the literary aspects of a film, he or she is most able to make the connection between the two literary texts of film and literature. The dramatic viewing focuses on the dramatic aspects, which are those elements that film shares with live drama. In this framework, students are encouraged to note how actors’ portrayals, dialogue, and directing choices affect a film’s meaning. Finally, “the cinematic aspects of films...include technical terms that describe cinematography, sound, editing, and special visual effects”; in other words, the elements that are unique to film only. This lens is the one that students are least familiar with, and the one in which they have the most to learn.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study was to discover what activities and practices students engage in while watching movies in the English classroom and at home. I wanted to give students a chance to tell their side of the story in regards to how they view film because so far a lot of the relevant research has been written from the perspective of teachers describing successful teaching techniques and lessons that use film without including any student thoughts or opinions (Golden 2001). No one had really thought to discover how students are watching films inside and outside of class. I wanted to see if any patterns or skills came to light when students started to describe how they watch movies. Essentially, I wanted to discover what students' film viewing practices were. Then, I would be able to evaluate their descriptions to see if there were any active or literary strategies they used (either consciously or subconsciously) to understand and analyze the film.

### **DESIGN OF STUDY**

This research used individual students as the unit of analysis. I chose to use a qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing student data because I was less concerned with quantifying students' practices for watching films and more interested in being able to collect more detailed information and responses from a few students. I wanted the unquantifiable but descriptive detail that the students would be able to provide in their interviews with me (Check and Schutt, 2012).

## SITE

The student participants for this study were from a public high school in a small, rural district in central Pennsylvania. This site was chosen because it was where I was placed for my pre-service student teaching field experience. My familiarity with the school and the students aided the data collection process by allowing me easy access to the students and a place to conduct the interviews. Based on my personal observations and conversations with teachers at the school, I would describe the student population as predominantly Caucasian. The surveys were passed out in my mentor teacher's two morning English classes and one Creative Writing class. Again, these classes were chosen because I was familiar with the students as their student teacher.

## SUBJECTS

The high school serves roughly 635 students in grades 9-12. Roughly 38% of the students are in the free or reduced lunch program. The majority of the study participants were 10<sup>th</sup> graders, but there were a few 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders in my mentor teacher's classes as well. 20 boys and 19 girls received the survey questionnaire (Appendix A) with only one female student absent on the day of distribution. All of the participants responded to the questionnaire because they were told to complete it in class. After I analyzed the survey responses, I selected 4 students (2 male and 2 female) to participate in a more in-depth interview with me. The verbatim transcripts of these interviews can be seen in Appendices B-E. All student names were changed to pseudonyms to keep responses anonymous.

## PROCEDURES

Because my study required human participants, I was required to receive IRB training and approval before I could start collecting data. Once I received IRB approval, I verbally informed the students about the details of the study and asked for their voluntary participation. Typed consent forms were also provided for the students and their parents. The study used a passive, opt out consent, but none of the students opted out of participation. After receiving voluntary consent, I distributed the typed survey questionnaires to the students in class, and my mentor teacher encouraged the students to fill them out immediately and turn the completed surveys in to me. Once I had all the surveys collected, I knew I would need a way to organize and analyze the data. I decided to group the surveys by gender, grade, and number of movies seen in a typical month, which was one of the survey questions. I wanted to separate responses by gender in order to see if responses differed greatly between the sexes. Likewise, I decided to separate responses by grade level in an attempt to minimize the effect of uncontrolled variables. Most importantly though, I needed to separate the responses based on number of movies seen in a typical month because I planned to select the students for the interviews based on their movie-viewing frequency. In other words, I wanted to interview at least 1 high frequency movie viewer, which I deemed anyone who responded that they watch 7-10+ movies in a month, 1 medium frequency viewer, or anyone who reported watching 5-6 movies a month, and 1 low frequency viewer, which was anyone who reported watching 0-4 movies a month. Since the ultimate purpose of this study was to learn more about student film-viewing practices, I felt that my study would be most beneficial if it had in-depth data from students with varying levels of movie-watching

experience.

Once I had separated the students by gender, grade, and movie-viewing frequency, I went through and highlighted the names of students that I thought would be good potential interviewees based on their class participation and my observations of them in school. I wanted to try and select students who would be willing to talk and share their opinions with me in order to collect details and information that would be meaningful and relevant to the study's purpose. I was not too concerned about sacrificing a controlled study design or a data collection process free from bias because I was more interested in having specific, student-generated data that might not be generalizable, but that would at least help me understand the film viewing practices of a few select students on a much deeper level.

Finally, I arranged with my mentor teacher to come in one day and conduct the individual student interviews with the students I had selected. All of the interviews took place outside the classroom in the hallway. I audio-recorded the students' interviews, and then I transcribed the conversation at a later date.

#### DATA GATHERING TOOL

I designed a paper-based survey questionnaire in order to gather data on how often students watched movies outside of school, what genres of films they liked to watch, their opinions about reading books versus watching a movie or watching a movie based on a book, and their general interest in movies. I passed out these paper surveys to all of the student participants so that I would have a general pool of information from which I could select a few participants to collect further data. I decided to use a paper-based survey method rather than surveying online or via phone because I had access to

the students in my classes, and it was much easier to simply give them the survey to fill out right then and there. I was not planning on running any advanced statistical analyses on the information collected so I was not concerned with having to organize the responses by hand rather than have an on-line program sort and analyze the responses. I also chose to collect the individual and more detailed data from short, face-to-face interviews with the students because it was also easier to meet with them in person rather than through e-mail or phone. I also wanted to be able to gauge their emotions and facial expressions as they answered the interview questions to see if there was any nonverbal communication about their film viewing practices that was worth noting. I audio-recorded the interviews using the AudioNote LITE application downloaded on my computer. I chose that tool because it was free and had space to transcribe the interview in sync with the actual audio-recording.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In order to figure out which of the students I wanted to interview, I had to first analyze all of the individual student responses from the survey questionnaire. There were 40 students total in the participating 2 English classes and 1 creative writing class. On the day that I handed out the surveys, 1 girl was absent, which left a total of 39 student participants. Of that 39, there were 20 boys and 19 girls, a roughly even divide. Again, a copy of the student survey can be found in Appendix A. The first question I chose to compile data for was the reported number of movies students watched at home in a typical month. I separated the responses by gender and grade level. 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade were grouped together since the majority of the participants were in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and there

were not enough 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade students to justify their own separate categories. I described the movie-viewing frequency as follows: greater than 7 (>7) movies a month is high-frequency, 5-6 movies a month is middle-frequency, and less than 5 (<5) movies a month is low-frequency.

The next question I wanted to analyze was whether students preferred to watch movies alone or with others. I was not as concerned with the differences in responses based on grade-level this time so I only grouped responses based on gender because I was curious if more boys or girls would prefer to watch movies alone or with other people, if there was even a noticeable difference in responses at all.

Finally, I wanted to analyze how often students discussed a movie with someone else after they had watched it. Again, I was only interested in seeing the gender differences in responses, not the grade-level differences.

In addition to analyzing the data from the survey questionnaire, I also used the interview transcripts to collect more data and details about secondary students' film viewing practices. The data analysis from the survey was a good general foundation for understanding students' film viewing practices and was also a tool for me to select potential interview participants.

## LIMITATIONS

This study was not without regrets or limitations. In an ideal world I would have had all the time I needed to complete the study design and data collection process, but given my tighter time restraints, there were several parts of the study that had to be rushed or condensed. For example, because I was interviewing students after they

finished their in-class tests, I was limited in who I could interview based on which students finished the test early. Sometimes I was not able to interview the student I had wanted because he or she did not finish the test early enough. Likewise, I was limited in the amount of time for the actual interview by two things. First of all, by the time students finished their tests, there were only a few minutes left of the class period to conduct my interview. Secondly, the AudioNote Lite app I was using to audio-record the interviews had a 5 minute recording limit so if I had an interview last longer than 5 minutes I would have to pause the interview in order to start a new recording and continue. At first I did not realize that my audio recording device cut off after 5 minutes, so one of my interviews was cut in the middle, and I had to quickly write down what the student said before I forgot. Therefore, part of his interview data was lost.

## Chapter 4: Results

### SURVEY RESULTS

In reviewing the student responses from the survey and the individual interviews, a few things became readily apparent. First of all, my survey showed that most students watched a variety of movie genres and watched movies frequently. I compiled the number of movies students reported watching at home in a typical month in Table 1. I separated the responses by grade and gender because I was interested to see if there were any differences in viewing frequency between the different grades or genders. It might look like 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders watch movies less often than the 10<sup>th</sup> graders surveyed, but that is due to the make-up of the classes I polled, where the majority of the students were 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and I only had 9 participants from 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. However, it can be noted that all of the student groups except for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade girls had a majority of high-frequency viewers, which tends to support the idea that students do in fact have significant experience with watching movies outside of school.

Table 1

*Number of Movies Watched at Home per Month*

Grade and Gender	>7 movies	5-6 movies	<5 movies
10 <sup>th</sup> grade boys	8	3	5
11 <sup>th</sup> /12 <sup>th</sup> grade boys	4	0	0
10 <sup>th</sup> grade girls	7	3	4
11 <sup>th</sup> /12 <sup>th</sup> grade girls	1	2	2

In addition to how often and what kinds of movies students were watching outside of school, I was also interested in some of their movie-viewing preferences, particularly whether they preferred to watch movies alone or with other people. I was interested in this question because I wanted to compare viewing practices outside of school and viewing practices inside school, and I knew that you watch movies with other people in school so I was curious to see if students also preferred to watch movies with others outside of school. Following is the table that displays the data for how many boys and how many girls prefer to watch movies alone or with others. I did not separate responses by grade this time because after analyzing the movie-viewing frequency by grade and gender I realized that separating responses by grade was unreliable due to the large gap in the number of participants from the grades above 10<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, comparing responses across grades would not present a valid picture.

Table 2

*Comparison of Viewing Preference by Gender*

Viewing Preference	Girls	Boys
Alone	4	6
With Others	12	9
Both	2	5
No Preference	1	0

The most popular response by boys and girls was that they prefer to watch movies with other people. However, more boys than girls said they prefer to watch movies alone and more girls than boys said they prefer to watch movies with others. Going off of the

raw numbers alone, it is interesting to note the differences in response. The main reason students gave for preferring to watch movies alone was that they do not like to be distracted when watching a movie, and if they watch with other people, they can tend to talk to them and distract them. Therefore, in order to keep the movie-viewing practices outside of school and inside of school more consistent, these results would tend to support the notion that distractions should be limited when watching a film in class.

For those students that said they both like to watch movies alone *and* with other people, some of them clarified their answer by saying that their preference was dependent on the context, meaning whether they were watching the movie at home or at a theater, and on the genre of the film. For example, Nate, whose full interview transcript with me can be found in Appendix D, said that he prefers to watch serious movies alone but does not mind watching comedy movies with others. The fact that some students distinguish their viewing preference based on the genre of the movie they are watching seems to argue for the conclusion that students are active enough viewers to adapt their viewing practices to the context at hand. Just as an active reader approaches reading a fiction novel and a nonfiction newspaper article with different strategies, so too do students vary the strategies they use when viewing different types of movies.

Going along with the idea of wanting to compare the experiences of watching films inside and outside of class, I was curious to see how many students would say that they discuss a movie with someone else after watching it. The following table organizes the student responses, grouped by gender, about post-film discussions.

Table 3

*Frequency of Post-Film Discussion by Gender*

Frequency	Girls	Boys
Always	2	5
Frequently	6	4
Sometimes	7	6
Rarely	2	3
Never	2	2

I found it interesting to note that outside of school, students talk to others about movies they have watched more often than not talking about them. These responses also seem to advocate for the notion that students are not usually passive viewers of film. Rather, they think about the movie while watching it and are able to discuss it after watching it. One of the students, Kasey, whose full interview transcript with me can be found in Appendix C, said that she likes to try to predict what will happen next when watching a movie, and prediction is a strategy that active readers use when reading a text. Furthermore, when I asked her to explain *how* she makes predictions while watching a movie, she was able to point to her notice of the literary aspects of films to aid her predictions.

## INTERVIEW RESULTS

In total I interviewed 4 students, 2 male and 2 female, individually so that I would be able to get some more in-depth and detailed answers about their film-viewing practices. Most importantly, I needed to ask them questions that would help me determine the way (literary, dramatic, or cinematic) they engaged films inside and outside of school. Again, the full interview transcripts, listed under student pseudonyms can be found in Appendices B-E, but I would like to point out a few significant quotes in this section too.

All of the students interviewed are experienced in noting the literary aspects of films when watching movies at home. For example, Tyler (Appendix B) said that he likes to think about how the movie will end before the actual ending is revealed. When I asked him to clarify how he thinks about that, he said he thinks about “the conflict and the resolution of the conflict.” All of the students also said that they would like to see more film use in their English classes. I was not too surprised that Becky (Appendix E) was the only student who spoke about an experience noting the cinematic aspects of movies, and even that experience was in school, not on her own, because the cinematic side of film is the one that is most often overlooked in film instruction in English classes, and it is also the one with which students are the least comfortable.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

The responses from my student participants from the surveys and interviews showed that they are active and conscientious viewers of film; viewers who take into account the genre and context of the movie to select the strategies and practices they use to understand and make meaning of the text. The research I consulted for this study made me a little more hopeful that perhaps educators were willing to reconsider the academic value and use for film in English instruction, but then some of the student responses in the interviews showed me that some teachers are still using film merely as a reward for finishing a novel in class. Consequently, some students are still having a hard time seeing a film as a text in its own right; they only see it as a point of comparison to the books they read in class. However, all is not lost because the interview responses made it clear that outside of school students are able to note the literary aspects of films; therefore, we can use that experience as a building block for teaching students to see the dramatic and cinematic side of film as well.

### IMPLICATIONS

My conclusion that students are active viewers of film is a little revolutionary in and of itself. Even Teasley and Wilder (1997) believed that students were passive viewers outside of school and could only be taught how to be active viewers through guided activities, practice, and instruction with film in the classroom. However, I think it is clear that students already know how to be active viewers of film on the literary level; we just need to foster their ability to see film from a dramatic and cinematic perspective, which will hopefully also help them see that film is a valid text in its own right.

What would help extend the research and discussion in this field would be a more current book on the use and benefit of film instruction in the English class. Golden's and Teasley and Wilder's books are both over a decade old, and while there has been some research and discussion about film in more recent scholarly journals, such as publications by NCTE, there has not been a comprehensive research book about the way film is being used and viewed in 2014. I think the research focus can shift from proving the validity of film study in the English classroom to a more practical and detailed approach of how exactly to do it. Also, moving forward I would like to see more of the research focused on students' opinions and conceptions of film use in the English classroom. Again, too much of the current research is lacking that personal student voice; I hope that some researchers will be able to include individual interviews like I did in my study to solicit meaningful and informative student responses. Aside from the research perspective, this study has left me with many implications for my own practice as a secondary English teacher.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

I was fortunate enough to be able to incorporate film into my instruction during both of my student teaching field experiences. In my pre-service practicum, which was the site of all of my data collection for this study, I was even able to teach a unit where the main text was the movie *Bend it like Beckham*. It was really neat to be able to teach a film as a text while I was conducting my research and shaping my own thinking about film use in the English classroom. It also meant that when I was doing the individual student interviews I knew at the very least all of the students would have had the experience of watching a movie with me in an English class that they could speak to if

they had never watched a movie in another English class. My instruction with *Bend it like Beckham* validated students' ability and willingness to respond to discussion and analysis immediately following their viewing of the film, which did not always happen with the print texts we watched in class.

In my regular student teaching, I showed the movie versions of *Twelve Angry Men* and *The Outsiders*. I showed clips throughout the reading, rather than the entire movie at the end of the text so students would constantly be able to compare and contrast the two texts. However, I went beyond a simple comparison and contrast of the two texts to get to a more meaningful level in asking them *why* the director made the changes he did. This practice allowed me to encourage students to move beyond the literary aspects of films into the dramatic aspects. With *Twelve Angry Men* I focused their attention on the actors' portrayals and movement in the scenes as a way to enhance their understanding of the characters and plot that were harder for them to visualize and understand when we read the play as a class.

I was able to encourage my advanced students to note the cinematic aspects of film in Coppola's *The Outsiders* through guided discussion about how the score choices sometimes enhanced and sometimes contradicted the mood or action in a particular scene. We also talked about lighting choices and camera angles and their effects on mood. I never asked them which form of the story was "better," and all of the questions were focused on getting the students to see the connection and start a dialogue between the two texts. Of course my students were always excited to watch the movies in class and would even try to talk me in to letting them watch the movie even on days when we were not scheduled to. I never gave in to their requests, but it made me happy to see that

on the days that we did watch the movie, they were just as willing to discuss it and analyze the literary, dramatic, and cinematic aspects of the film as they were to watch it.

In light of all this research and my own personal observations and experiences, I believe more than ever that it would be a waste and a pity to leave the prior experience and interest our students have with actively viewing films untapped. We can no longer continue to downplay or ignore the validity and usefulness of film as a text worthy of study and discussion in an English language arts class. I look forward to the day when I can teach a full movie as the main text for a unit in my English classes, and I hope to one day expel forever the notion that film is only the lazy teacher's tool for "getting out" of instruction.

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**Appendix A**  
**Student Survey Questionnaire**

This appendix contains the survey I designed and distributed to all students.

Name:

Grade:

Film Viewing Practices

In a typical month, how many times do you go to the movie theaters to watch a film?

0                      1-2                      3-4                      5 or more

In a typical month, how many movies do you watch at home or at a friend's home?

0              1-2              3-4              5-6              7-9              10 or more

Do you prefer to watch movies alone or with other people?

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being you hate them and 10 being you absolutely love them, how much do you like movies?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

True or False: I would rather watch a movie than read a book.

T                                      F

True or False: I like to watch movies based on books I have read.

T                                      F

After watching a film, how often do you discuss or debate things that were in the movie with someone else?

Always              Frequently              Sometimes              Rarely              Never

Have you ever been so interested or confused by a film that you decided to watch it again to see if you could understand it better the second time around?    YES        NO

If YES, please briefly explain.

Please rate the following based on Strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree(D), or strongly disagree (SD)

I like to watch romantic movies.

SA            A            N            D            SD

I like to watch science fiction movies.

SA            A            N            D            SD

I like to watch action movies.

SA            A            N            D            SD

I like to watch comedy movies.

SA            A            N            D            SD

I like to watch a range of different movies.

SA            A            N            D            SD

I like movies that challenge my thinking in some way.

SA            A            N            D            SD

I like movies that are easy to understand.

SA            A            N            D            SD

## Appendix B

### Tyler's Interview Transcript

This appendix includes the verbatim transcript of Tyler's interview with me. All student names have been changed to pseudonyms.

#### Start of interview

Me: First of all um can you describe for me in as much detail as possible what you do when you watch a movie at home?

Tyler: Umm I try to make sure my parents don't talk cuz that's the most annoying thing. I...like to take like note of the specific details. Like I like movies that make you think. Ummm I look for most movies that have a lot of action so I like to watch action movies...that's pretty much it.

Me: So I noticed that you said um you don't really like your parents to be there because they talk.

Tyler: Right.

M: And you like movies that make you think.

T: Mmhmm.

M: So what do you think about when you're watching those kinds of movies?

T: How it's gonna end. I like to figure out the ending before the actual ending is revealed.

M: Okay. What kind of things do you look for in order to figure out the ending?

T: Umm the conflict and the resolution of the conflict I guess.

M: Okay great. Um and then after watching a movie what do you do?

T: Uhh I guess I think about it for awhile...yeah.

M: Do you usually do the thinking on your own? Do you like to talk to other friends or someone else about it?

T: If I go to the movies I'll talk to my friend about it, but I usually do it by myself.

M: Okay, and then can you think of one time you watched a movie for an English class other than *Bend it Like Beckham*, which you just watched? Um can you tell me about another time that you watched a movie in English class?

T: Ummm last year we watched uh *Our eyes are watching god* [sic]. It's about uh...it's (trying to describe the film).....I can't think of it....it was last year.

M: That's fine. Did you guys read the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* before watching the movie?

T: Yeah

M: Okay great. Uh what did you do... so before watching the movie you read the book. Did you do any other activities before watching the movie?

T: Yeah we had a lot of embedded assessments on it.

M: Embedded Assessments on it?

T: Mm hmm.

M: So you were still using Springboard?

T: Mmm hmmm.

M: Still using Springboard. What did you do while watching the movie? Did your teacher have you take guided notes?

T: Uh-uh. No we got everything done, and then he just let us watch the movie as uh I guess consolation prize (laughs).

M: Okay great. And then after the movie were you guys asked to write a paper on it or anything?

T: Uh-uh. Movie was the last thing.

M: Movie was the last thing you did. Okay great. So can you give me three adjectives to describe that experience of watching the movie *Their Eyes Were Watching God*?

T: Mmm.....boring (laughs) uh thought-provoking and....uhh I'd say like I guess... sad.

M: Okay. And then do you think that there are any similarities between film or movies and literature... like books?

T: I mean they have the same story, but I think books give you the story better than the movies. Movies change it a lot.

M: Okay great. And then would you like to see more or less film use in your English class?

T: I wouldn't mind it.

M: You wouldn't mind more?

T: Yeah.

M: Okay and why?

T: It's different than having to read a book everyday or something like that.

**End of interview**

## Appendix C

### Kasey's Interview Transcript

This appendix includes the verbatim transcript of Kasey's interview with me. All student names have been changed to pseudonyms.

#### **Start of interview**

Me: Can you describe for me in as much detail as possible what you do when you watch a movie at home?

Kasey: I just like sit there and like try to figure out like what's going on and like predict what's gonna happen next.

Me: Okay great. So I heard you say that you like to try to predict what's going to happen next so what do you look for? How do you do that?

Kasey: Just I guess if it's like an action movie somebody like if like uh somebody like who's in charge like a general or somebody gets shot then that person just passed...

M: Okay. Okay great. Um so before watching a movie do you do anything specific? Do you like to be alone...with other people?

K: Umm no.

M: No. So after watching a movie what do you do? When the movie is finished?

K: Talk to it about my parents [sic].

M: Talk about it with your parents. Okay and what kind of things do you guys talk about?

K: Just like what happened or things that like people could've made a different

decision and like did differently.

M: Okay great so you kind of like evaluate how people did...Uh can you think of one time that you watched a movie in English class other than *Bend it Like Beckham*? Is there another time you watched a movie?

K: I don't know.

M: You don't know. Okay then you can talk about the experience of *Bend it Like Beckham* in this class. So what did we do before watching the movie?

K: I don't even remember... like reading like about what the cultures... and something like that.

M: And then during the movie? What did you guys do while watching the movie?

K: Wrote down like cultural conflicts and internal and external conflicts and stuff.

M: Uh and then after the film what did you do?

K: Wrote an essay on it.

M: So can you give me three adjectives to describe that experience?

K: What's an adjective? Is that like a describing word? (thinking) Uhhh probably not.

M: Okay that's fine. And then do you think there are any similarities between film and literature? Film meaning like movies and literature, books.

K: Um like the main ideas are like the same and like certain things that like the important things that happen I guess.

M: Great. That sounds good. And then would you like to see more or less film use in your English classes?

K: Definitely more cause it would help me understand a lot more things (confidently and quickly).

M: Okay good I heard you say that it would help you understand more things. Can you maybe be a little more...what kind of things would it help you understand?

K: Just like with at the beginning like internal and external conflicts I didn't understand what they were at first but then after watching the movie then I understood what they were.

M: Okay so like meaning when you had read about internal and external conflicts in those essays that we read.

K: Mm hmmm.

**End of interview**

## Appendix D

### Nate's Interview Transcript

This appendix includes the verbatim transcript of Nate's interview with me. All student names have been changed to pseudonyms.

#### Start of interview

Me: Can you describe for me in as much detail as possible what you do when you watch a movie at home?

Nate: Ummm mainly just sit down and watch it like I don't really tend to like use my phone or like any distractions like if I'm gonna watch a movie I usually just sit down and put all my attention towards it.

Me: Okay great so I heard you say that you don't really like distractions...

Nate: Right.

M: So do you prefer then to watch movies by yourself?

N: Ummm depending on the movie like if it's like a more like serious tone movie like like good movies than yeah but like if it's like a comedy or something that like everyone's just going to enjoy then yes a movie that isn't taken too seriously I would watch with other people.

M: Okay. Great. So I heard you describe serious movies as good movies.

N: Right right.

M: Could you maybe give me an example?

N: Umm like my favorite like *The Green Mile* or umm Tom Hanks in *Forrest Gump* or *Shawshank Redemption* any of those especially since they're long and if

I watch it with other people other people tend to find it like just boring after awhile so it's just not fun to watch with other people.

M: Could you maybe give me some of the elements in those movies that you enjoy?

N: Ummm mainly realism. Like whenever I watch them they actually sound like like of course it has some sort of fiction added to it but it like the best way to describe it would be umm they all seem to take place in like before like the current day so like I guess just because it's taken more seriously than most movies.

M: Great. So while you're watching those movies do you think about anything in particular as you're watching the movie?

N: Ummm I mainly like I said before just try to focus on the storyline and try to piece things together and try to understand it as much as possible that's pretty much all.

M: Okay great. And then finally after watching a movie at home do you do anything specific? Talk to anyone about it...?

N: Um if there's something I find really interesting or and something relatable to the person I'm talking to I might ask them something about the movie or tell them something that I saw from the movie but usually I just keep to myself just watch it just for the fun of it.

M: Okay great. And then can you think of one time that you watched a movie for an English class in school?

N: A movie for an English class? Uhh... I remember I was going to watch *To Kill a Mockingbird* because that's something we were reading, but I didn't end up watching it. I did end up watching *The Outsiders*; it was for English class as well, the same English class in 9th grade last year.

M: Okay great. What did you do before you watched *The Outsiders*?

N: Uh well first I finished reading the book, and then I just watched it mainly to like see just out of curiosity to see how closely related movies are to the book.

M: Okay and when you say "I," did the class watch it as well or did you kind of watch it on your own?

N: Uh no. I just watched it by myself at my house yeah like we didn't watch it in class.

M: You didn't watch it in class?

N: Right because other people got assigned different books to read so.

M: Okay so it was from like an independent reading assignment...

N: Mmhmm

M: That then you decided to see how the movie compared to the book.

N: Right.

M: Right. Uh what did you think after watching *The Outsiders*?

N: Umm like any other book and movie or any movie based off of a book there's like so many differences and like things taken out or things added in so overall I probably enjoyed the book better even though I'm more of a movie person if I would've watched the movie before reading the book I think I would probably enjoy the movie more.

M: Okay interesting. Um so you have not watched a movie specifically in class. Um for an English class correct?

N: Right.

M: Okay so the next question is do you think there are any similarities between film and literature?

N: Umm both that they are a form of art I guess but they're like two completely different animals I would have to say because literary works I just couldn't get into like I find them too tedious and long and like I need something to visualize so in the sense of them being like comparing if you want more detail and like a more in-depth story I would say read a book, but if you want something more like enjoyable and something that you can really like visualize than definitely a movie.

**Recording cut off**

## **Appendix E**

### **Becky's Interview Transcript**

This appendix includes the verbatim transcript of Becky's interview. All student names have been changed to pseudonyms.

#### **Start of interview**

Me: Describe for me in as much detail as possible what you do when you watch a movie at home.

Becky: Mmm when I watch a movie at home I usually uh watch it alone because I like to watch movies alone so I don't get distracted. Um I usually get comfortable and lay down in my bed sometimes I have a snack when I'm watching a movie but not always and I usually I just kinda(...) watch it sometimes I get distracted and get like depending on whether like I've seen the movie or not before or um whether it's just not interesting to me I will like get on the internet at the same time while I'm watching it and not really watch it. Other times I'm actually focused on the entire movie.

Me: Okay great so I kind of noticed you like setting up two different scenarios if you've seen a movie before or if you haven't seen it before. So if you haven't seen a movie before what do you think about while watching it?

Becky: If I haven't seen a movie before I usually think about like I kinda try to like make guesses about what's going to happen.

M: How do you do that?

B: Like...like take what's going on in the movie and just make connections.

M: Okay great thanks. And after watching a movie do you do anything specific... talk to anyone or...?

B: Well depending on whether I like the movie or not I'll ...well most times I'll like I'll usually say like go ahead and see this movie and if I didn't really like it I'll be like oh I recommend that you don't see it because it's not very good but if I really like it I'll like just talk and talk about it.

M: Okay so you like to give people your opinion on the movie.

B: Yeah.

M: Okay and then can you think of a time when you watched a movie for an English class maybe besides "Bend it Like Beckham" in school?

B: For an English class? Uh last year we watched a couple of different movies for our Unit 2 it was like we watched *Edward Scissorhands* and *Corpse Bride*.

M: Okay um what did you do before watching that film in English?

B: Before watching it? What do you mean?

M: Um so for example did you do any class activities? How did the teacher introduce the movie?

B: Oh uh well it was a unit on like uh we had to take notes while we watched the movie on like the oh what's it called oh you know when the director uses like those certain things (trying to describe cinematic techniques)... yes...yeah cinematic techniques yeah that's what we had to do.

M: Great. Uh did you have to do anything after watching the movie?

B: What?

M: Did you have to do anything after watching the movie?

B: After watching the movie uh we yeah we had to write an essay on the cinematic techniques.

M: Great. So can you give me three adjectives to describe that experience overall of watching a movie in an English class?

B: Adjectives are like...ok..uh...hmmm it was it was fun it was fun just to get to watch in class and they were pretty like they were good movies uh it was kind of I'm gonna say like I don't know if this is the right word to use but kinda like stressful because like how we had to like sit there and like I really wasn't like too sure like at the time like I wasn't very familiar with cinematic techniques so I was kinda like oh I just wanna watch this movie I don't really want to sit here and have to be expected to write every cinematic technique down that I can so stressful uh and at the same time it was..... interesting.

M: Great no that definitely works.

**Audio cut off. Started new audio recording.**

M: We'll start again. Do you think there are any similarities between film and literature?

B: Film and literature? Like...?

M: Yeah movies and like books.

B: Yeah yeah.

M: Okay and the final one. Would you like to see more or less film use in your English class and why?

B: Umm I'd like to see more because like I enjoy it and it helps me understand

things better.

**End of interview**

**ACADEMIC VITA**  
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**Education**

The Pennsylvania State University May 2014  
Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education  
English/Communication  
Schreyer Honors College

The Umbra Institute, Perugia, Italy Aug-Dec 2012

- Courses in Italian language, film, and literature

**Association Memberships/Activities**

Pi Lambda Theta  
Pennsylvania State Educators Association  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

VIPS Tutoring, State College, PA 2010-2012

- Tutored 3 high school students in Algebra I
- Fostered confidence in a child with OCD to succeed in his math studies

Springfield THON, University Park, PA 2010-2014

- Volunteered as part of the largest student-run philanthropy in the world
- Solicited funds for families fighting the burdens of pediatric cancer

**Student Teaching Experience**

Philipsburg-Osceola High School, Philipsburg, PA Sept-Nov 2013

- Taught 50 rural 10<sup>th</sup> graders in an academic, Pre-AP, and creative writing class

Lenape Middle School, Doylestown, PA Jan-Apr 2014

- Taught 150 suburban 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 3 academic and two advanced sections of English
- Assistant coached the JV Girls' Softball team

Summer Study Programs, Melville, NY Jun-Aug 2013

- Created and implemented a 6-week syllabus for an expository writing class
- Taught 30 international and national high school students