

# A Separate Peace & Film

DAN GOUGH / SPRING 2004

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## Unit Context

This unit was conceived and implemented a week into a traditional unit on the novel *A Separate Peace*. Disappointed with the level of engagement and the depth of analysis, I decided to switch from a creative writing focus to a filmmaking focus, which would allow us to study filmmaking techniques and apply these techniques to the novel in order to interpret and film scenes of our own. The audience for this unit is a tenth grade classroom in Wayzata High School. The class consists of 32 students, the demographics of which are relatively homogenous (There are 3 black students and one Arabian student). The majority of my students are from white middle class backgrounds. The unit is designed to encompass three weeks of instruction.

## Unit Objectives

Students will read and understand *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles

Students will understand the techniques used to create meaning within film

Students will be able to analyze and interpret film selections

Students will be able to storyboard and produce a short film based on the novel

Students will learn to use iMovie as a production and editing tool.

## Alignment with Standards

The following bolded standards from the Minnesota Department of Education will be addressed within this unit.

### *D. Literature*

*Standard: The student will actively engage in the reading process and read, understand, respond to, analyze, interpret, evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of fiction, poetic and nonfiction texts.*

The student will:

- 1. Read, analyze and evaluate traditional, classical and contemporary works of literary merit from American literature.**
- 11. Demonstrate how literary works reflect the historical contexts that shaped them.**
- 14. Respond to literature using ideas and details from the text to support reactions and make literary connections.**

### *A. Type of Writing*

*Standard: The student will write in narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive and critical modes.*

The student will:

- 1. Plan, organize and compose narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive, critical and research writing to address a specific audience and purpose**

### *B. Elements of Composition*

*Standard: The student will engage in a writing process with attention to audience, organization, focus, quality of ideas, and a purpose.*

The student will:

- 1. Generate, gather, and organize ideas for writing.**
- 2. Develop a thesis and clear purpose for writing.**
- 3. Make generalizations and use supporting details.**
- 4. Arrange paragraphs into a logical progression.**
- 5. Revise writing for clarity, coherence, smooth transitions and unity.**
- 6. Apply available technology to develop, revise and edit writing.**
- 8. Revise, edit and prepare final drafts for intended audiences and purposes**

## **Unit Activities**

### *Day 1*

As an introduction to the novel and the concept of film, students will engage in some activities that help establish some of the themes of the novel and lay the foundation for using a visual medium to express meaning.

- Students will begin by analyzing the front cover of the novel. Each student will spend several minutes ‘reading’ the cover of the novel and then writing a short journal entry in which they make predictions regarding what they are about to read. Students will then share their information and pertinent points will be written on the board. I expect students to notice the death of the foreground versus the life of the background, the centrality of the school, the foregrounding of the narrator, the presence of the river dividing two worlds, the presence of the tree, the ghostliness of the boys climbing the tree. From past experience, students will be able to read quite a lot into this picture, and from this discussion we will talk about how one can convey meaning visually by using space, color, light, placement etc. Students will be introduced to the focus of the unit, how we would film this novel in such a way that the deeper meaning and themes are apparent to a viewer.

- Students will next spend some time brainstorming the ideas of childhood and adulthood. A major part of the novel concerns the movement from a child's world of innocence to an adult's world of experience and knowledge. We will collect our thoughts together and place them on the board so as to demonstrate our fond associations with childhood and negative associations with adulthood. Students will be informed that this is a major theme of the novel.
- Students will next work in groups to read and connect some important exterior texts to the reading that they will soon be engaged in. Students will read selections from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *The Bible* and asked how it relates to anything that we have seen or discussed so far. The theme of transition from child to adult is very prevalent in Blake and the Bible is important for understanding the significance of the tree and the fall.
- Students will spend the remainder of class reading the first two chapters of the novel and filling in their study guide (Appendix A)

HW: Read Ch. 3

### Day 2

Students will engage in some further reading and discussion of the novel before beginning to think visually about interpreting and representing the novel.

- The point of the study guide is to have students paying close attention to their own reading. Students are responsible for selecting quotes from each chapter in order to stimulate discussion. Students will begin the day by sharing their reading and quotes in small groups. Students will then proceed to read chapter 4 by themselves or within their group.
- As a class we will share some of the things that have come out of the reading and discussion so far to ensure that we are all on the same page. The first 4 chapters are very rich with detail and event and students will next spend some time creating visuals based on scenes from the novel. We will brainstorm important scenes from the reading so far. Students will be reminded of the techniques that were used to convey meaning in the front cover that they analyzed. Students will then make a poster of a scene of their choosing in which they attempt to capture the mood, power and theme of the scene. Students will share their poster with the class.

HW: Read Ch.5

### Day 3

Today we will begin to explore the concept of film in more detail with an eye to having students analyze and eventually produce their own films. The work we do with analyzing film will draw on the book *Reel Conversations* by Teasley and Wilder.

- Students will spend some time journaling or listing their favorite films. We will share these lists and students will use them to explore the literary and dramatic aspects of film as discussed by Teasley and Wilder. Students will be briefly lectured on the literary aspects of film before answering questions concerning this concept and a film of their own choosing. Students will then be lectured briefly on the dramatic aspects of film before answering questions related to a film of their own choosing.

- Students will next be shown a clip from *Legends of the Fall*. We will watch the scene and then students will apply their knowledge of the literary and dramatic aspects of film to what they have just viewed.
- Students will next return to the posters that they made the day before and apply these two film concepts to their 'scene'. Each group will write on the back of their poster about how they could use the literary and dramatic aspects of film to add meaning to their scene in a film version.

HW: Read Ch.6

#### **Day 4**

It is important that we don't lose sight of the novel while we spend time looking at film, so today we will spend some time discussing and analyzing what we have read recently.

- Students will break into groups and share their information from their study guides. Students will then work in groups to answer questions on the reading before we discuss the questions as a class
- Students will spend some time in class reading chapter 7 of the novel.

HW: Read Ch. 8

#### **Day 5**

Students will continue to work closely with the text in order to ensure comprehension, but today we will also return to the study of film to set up an activity where they analyze clips of their own.

- Students will work in groups to answer questions on chapters 7 and 8. We will go over the questions as a class.
- Students will be briefly lectured on the cinematic aspects of film (Teasley and Wilder). Students will be given a handout of technical terms relating to camera shots, angles and movement, and the use of sound, color, lighting and editing to add meaning to film. Students will re-view the clip from *Legends of the Fall* and different groups of students will be assigned different technical aspects of film to watch out for and report back on. As a class we will analyze the different aspects of the clip in which camera angles and shots, lighting, color, sound and editing are very noticeable.
- Students will return to their posters for a final time charged with considering how, if they were filming their scene, they would employ cinematic techniques to convey the necessary themes and emotions within their selection.
- Students will be introduced to an assignment to be completed over the weekend where they analyze a film clip of their own (Appendix B). Students have a choice of writing an essay on a clip or working with a partner to show and analyze a clip in class (as per CI 5472).

HW: Read Ch.9

## *Day 6*

Today will be spent showcasing the clips that students selected.

- Students will present their clips in five minute segments. The presentations will be graded by myself and by the other members of the class (Appendix C). Before presenting and viewing, we will discuss what makes a good presentation and what constitutes effective public speaking. Students will be given sheets on which they can evaluate the length, content, analysis and presentation of each clip. The students' grades will be averaged and then averaged again against my grade to give a final score.
- Time permitting, students will read Ch.10 and complete the reading for homework.

HW: Read Ch.10

## *Day 7*

We will return to the novel again to ensure that we share our understanding at this critical point of the story.

- Students will work in groups, sharing their study guide information and answering questions on their reading. We will share and discuss this work as a class.
- As a class we will read Chapter 11.

HW: Read Ch.12

## *Day 8*

Chapter 12 is the climax of the novel, so it is important that we discuss the events as a group.

- Students will begin by reviewing the chapter and their study guides in order to formulate a good open-ended discussion question regarding the reading. Students' questions can be directed at the chapter they've just read or the novel so far. Students will next share their question with their neighbors before we bring the discussion together as a class.
- Together we will read the last chapter of the novel. Students will write a journal on their study guide concerning what they see as the theme of the novel. What is the overarching point of the story? What did they learn?
- Students will now be introduced to the final project for the class. In groups, students must create a storyboard for a film version of a scene in the novel. The storyboard will be a group construct, but each student will need to hand in an individual reflection on the assignment as well. The storyboard doesn't need to be artistically brilliant, but it should reflect an understanding of both the novel and the aspects of film that we have studied. The storyboard will then be used as a basis for filming a scene. Students will be lectured briefly on the use of storyboards before being presented with the assignment (Appendix D).
- As a class we will brainstorm the most significant scenes within the novel. Students should select a scene and begin to make a rough draft of their storyboard, remembering to write explanations and justifications of shots and other techniques that they are using.

## Day 9

Students will spend today completing the rough draft of their storyboard. Students are required to have a minimum of 12 frames within their scene but can produce more if necessary. Students will be regularly reminded to think about the deeper meaning of the scene that they are constructing and how they can use color, sound, lighting, angle etc to convey this meaning. Students will be given questions to ponder such as:

Who do we like?

Who has the power?

What is the mood?

Who should be in the frame? Why?

Who/What should we be focused on?

Is there a theme?

- Students will turn in their rough drafts at the end of class so that I can review them and make comments in order to guide the production.

## Day 10

Students will spend today completing their storyboards for submission. Students will have the weekend to work as well, but this will be their last class time to work on the project. The final storyboard should leave nothing to the imagination. Students will be reminded of the grading criteria and the need to explain what techniques they are using and why.

HW: Students should work on the written reflection that is due on Monday along with the finished group project.

## Day 11

Having completed their planning, today will be spent actually filming their scenes. One of the best ways to learn about filmmaking is to actually engage in the process, so we will checkout the digital video cameras from the media center and film the novel that we have just read.

- Students will be shown in class how to use the cameras and will practice filming in the classroom in order to get up to speed before we engage in filming properly.
- Student groups will now combine to form larger groups that will work together in filming each others' scenes. In part this is to compensate for the small number of cameras that we have, but it also serves the purpose of giving each group a larger cast with which to work.
- For logistical purposes, half of the students will spend today filming with me, while the other half of class remains in the classroom and watches the movie version of *A Separate Peace*. I have been told by other teachers that this film is particularly bad, and I want students to see this and analyze why it doesn't work, where it fails, etc. Students should look for their own scenes and compare it to their perception of the scene.

### *Day 12*

Today will be a reverse of the day before. The students who filmed will stay in class and watch the movie, while the rest of the class will engage in filming their scenes. By the end of the day, each groups should have some footage which they can use with iMovie in the computer lab.

HW: Students will write a journal discussing the movie version of the novel.

### *Day 13*

Today will be spent in the computer lab working at editing together the clips of film that were shot over the last couple of days.

- Students will be introduced to iMovie by being shown some examples of finished iMovies, possibly from colleagues of mine within the cohort.
- I will model the process of downloading film to the computer and separating it into clips. I will also model how to add transitions, sound and graphics to the film so that students have a basis from which to proceed.
- Students will next download their own film and begin to edit it together. Most groups are made of four students, so the groups should split in two and download the film twice, essentially making two different versions of the same scene. This serves a logistical purpose but also allows students to compare and contrast their understanding of how the same scene should look.
- Students will spend the remainder of today and tomorrow completing their movies ready for presenting them to the class on Friday. Students should demonstrate their ability to make an iMovie and use transitions, graphics and sound within their movie; they will be graded on this basis.

### *Day 14*

Students will complete their iMovie and convert it to a Quicktime document for viewing the next day. Students will be reminded of the grading criteria and minimum requirement for their movie and will work to complete it.

### *Day 15*

Students will present their finished movies to the class. Students should pay attention and take notes, because as a conclusion to the unit, each student will be asked to write a reflection on the movies they watch, making comments about the techniques they noticed and the meaning that they were able to take from at least three of the scenes.

## **Grading**

Journals and Group Questions - 10

Analyzing Film Assignment - 20

Storyboard Group Project -20

Storyboard Individual Reflection - 10

iMovie – 20

*Appendix A – Study Guide*

***A Separate Peace* Study Guide**

Name:

For each chapter that you read, please briefly summarize the main events of that chapter in no more than two sentences. Make note of anything that interests, upsets, confuses or strikes you in any other way; this could be a comment, an observation or simply a question. Look for **one quote** that you think is **particularly important** and include it beneath your summary.

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

## *Appendix B – Cinematography Assignment*

### **Cinematography Assignment**

Filmmakers have many techniques for creating and enhancing meaning within their art. Take your knowledge of techniques such as shots, angles, movement, editing, lighting and sound and apply it to a movie that you are familiar with, but have not analyzed closely before.

#### **Option 1:**

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you analyze a movie of your choice in terms of the cinematic techniques that are used. Your essay should explain how the filmmakers have used specific techniques to add meaning to their work. The essay should include an introduction and conclusion and at least three body paragraphs in which you describe and analyze three different cinematic techniques that are used in the clip. The essay will be graded according to the existence of the necessary parts, the validity, accuracy and depth of its analysis, its grasp of mechanics, and its structure.

#### **Option 2:**

With a partner, select a movie clip and prepare a brief presentation in which you teach the clip to the class. Your presentation should include analysis of at least 3 film techniques that are evident within your clip and should aim to demonstrate how and why these techniques are being used by the director; what meaning is being created for the audience through these techniques? If accessing film is a problem, then you can apply the principles we learnt in class to television productions or still photography (still shots from movies for instance).

Presentations should be **no longer than 5 minutes total**, including the airing of the clip and the discussion. You will be graded **by your peers** according to:

Appropriate length of presentation

Coverage of at least 3 film techniques

Effective and valid analysis/explanation of clip

Effective public speaking

All assignments are due on Monday. If your essay is not handed in or if your group is not ready to present then the assignment will be deemed late.

***Appendix C – Peer Grading Sheet***

**Cinematography Presentation Evaluation Sheet**

Name:

For each presentation, complete the following evaluation of the presentation's length, content, analysis and performance.

Name of presenter(s):

On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high);

How appropriate was the length of the presentation, given that the assignment was to present for no longer than five minutes?

1      2      3      4      5

How effective was the presentation in covering the minimum requirement of three cinematic techniques?

1      2      3      4      5

How effective was the explanation and analysis of the clip?

1      2      3      4      5

How effectively did the presenter(s) address their audience? (Did they make eye contact? Did they address the whole class? Did they speak clearly?)

1      2      3      4      5

Comments:

## ***Appendix D – Storyboard Assignment***

### ***A Separate Peace – Final Project***

#### **Storyboarding a Scene**

You have spent the last few weeks studying the novel, *A Separate Peace*, and learning about the use of cinematic techniques to enhance meaning in films. It is now time to demonstrate your combined knowledge of these two things by planning out a film version of a scene from the novel.

In groups of no more than four people, select a scene from the novel that you think is critical to the story. Your task is to think, discuss and demonstrate how you would film this scene in order to capture and convey the appropriate meaning and theme to a viewing audience. ***Create a storyboard in which you map out the different shots that you would use in filming your scene, and explain how each shot is working to express the meaning of the scene.*** Consider framing (who or what will be seen on camera), lighting, colour, sound, camera angle and different types of shots.

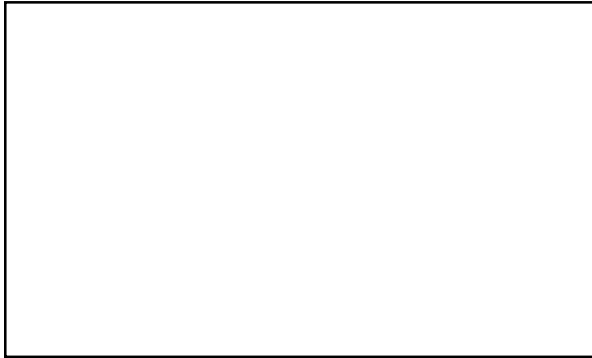
You will receive a group grade (out of 20) based on:

- The effort and creativity evident in your work
- The use of at least five of the cinematic techniques we have studied
- The depth of meaning and analysis of the scene evident in your work
- The presentation of the project (neatness, not artistic brilliance)

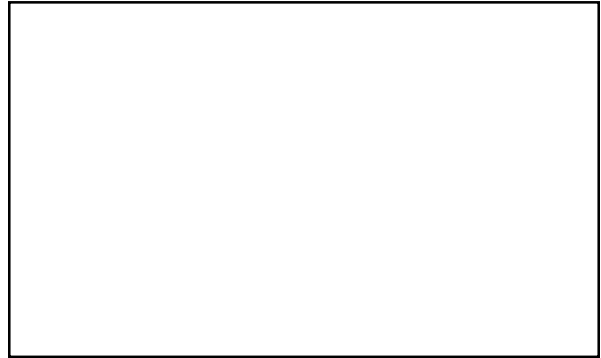
You will receive an individual grade (out of 20) based on writing a three-paragraph reflection of the project. The reflection should contain:

- A paragraph discussing the storyboard. Explain what shots you used in the scene and why you chose these. What techniques did you employ and why? What meaning were you trying to convey? Etc.
- A paragraph reflecting on your group. How well did your group work together? What did the group do well/not so well? What problems did your group encounter? How did you solve these problems? How did you divide up the work so that everybody played a part?
- A paragraph reflecting on your own performance in the group. What did you contribute? How did you help the group to accomplish its goal? Is there anything that you could change for next time in order to make the group work even better?

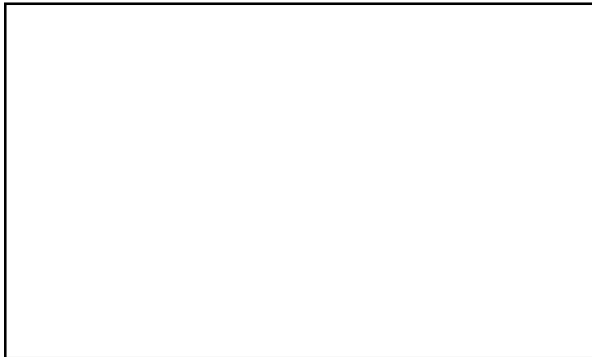
*Appendix E – Storyboarding Sheet*



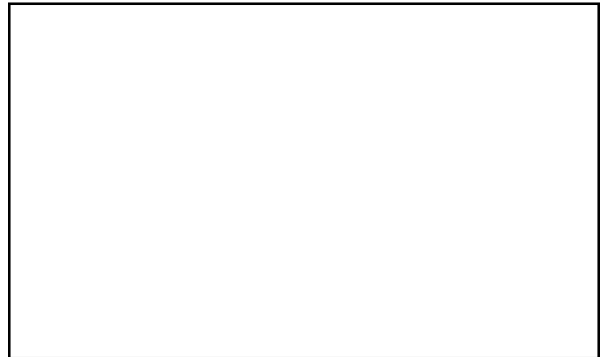
Notes:



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## *Appendix F – Group Study Questions (Sample)*

### ***A Separate Peace – Group Discussion Questions.***

Group Members –

In groups of 3 or 4, share the information on your study guides for chapters 5 and 6 before discussing and answering the following questions **in paragraph form**. Your group should thoroughly discuss each question with each group member contributing to the discussion before writing your answers. Group members should take turns to write. This sheet should be handed in and will be graded for accuracy and thoroughness. Each group member will receive the same grade.

- Why doesn't Gene tell Phineas the truth (that he bounced on the limb and caused the fall) Should he have done?
- What is Finny's reaction when Gene does confess? Why do you think that he acts this way?
- In chapters 5 and 6 Gene acts somewhat strangely, wearing Finny's clothing and then taking a job he clearly doesn't want? Why do you think he does these things? Do the actions have anything in common?
- Compare the two rivers that are used in the story. How is the Naguamsett described? How is the Devon described? What might each river symbolize?
- "This must have been my purpose from the first: to become a part of Phineas." What do you think about this quote? How does the quote relate to other events in these chapters? (think about question 3)

### ***Appendix H – iMovie***

Having read the novel, studied film, created a storyboard and filmed scenes, it is now time to put all of this together and make a movie. Using the software, iMovie, your group is expected to produce a short film of your scene from the footage that you recently shot. Your movie will not be graded on cinematic excellence or its ability to be a box office smash, but rather on its demonstration of your ability to use the software and apply the techniques of film that we have discussed.

Your completed iMovie will be graded out of 20 based on the following criteria:

- Is the iMovie complete, saved and converted to Quicktime format? (5 Pts)
- Does the iMovie demonstrate an understanding or usage of sound? (5 Pts)
- Does the iMovie demonstrate an understanding or usage of editing/transitions (5 Pts)
- Does the iMovie demonstrate an understanding or usage of graphics (title page, etc.) (5 Pts)
- Does the iMovie demonstrate an understanding or usage of the cinematic techniques (camera angle, movement, shot, color, framing etc) that we have studied? (5 Pts)

Don't worry if you don't recognize some of these terms, you will be shown how to use iMovie in class.

Good Luck.