

Guided Viewing of Film With Gifted Students: Resources for Educators and Counselors

Since the early work of Leta Stetter Hollingworth (1926, 1942) in Manhattan's Speyer School, the gifted education community has acknowledged the need to address the social and emotional development of gifted students. Educators have come to understand that, in addition to the developmental issues faced by all youngsters, some high-ability students must learn to cope with challenges as a result of their exceptionality. These additional developmental tasks for gifted children include issues associated with asynchronous development, emotional sensitivity, camouflaging of intelligence, perfectionism, multipotentiality, and underachievement (Colangelo, 2003).

To serve gifted children in school more effectively, it is vital for teachers and counselors to have an understanding of the aforementioned issues, as well as suitable approaches for providing students with tools to address them. These approaches will likely vary, depending on the complexity of the issues young people encounter. In highlighting this complexity, Cross (2004) delineated a Continuum of Psychological Services that illustrated the wide range of needs of gifted students and the role that various groups of adults might play in facili-

tating emotional support. Within this continuum of services, he described guidance as support services that deal primarily with academic or school-related matters, such as building relationships with peers. Cross maintained that teachers and school counselors, with their professional preparation, are able to provide these guidance services to young people.

Using movies to facilitate discussions concerning social and emotional issues experienced by gifted students is a strategy that would be situated under guidance services on Cross's continuum. Hébert and Speirs Neumeister (2001, 2002) proposed guided viewing of film as an appropriate technique for addressing social and emotional issues with gifted children and teenagers, and Hébert and Sergent (2005) have further illustrated the benefits of such an approach when teachers and counselors collaborate to deliver such support to gifted students. Educators and counselors have long recognized the value of using reading materials in addressing social and emotional development (Halsted, 2002; Hébert & Kent, 2000; Lenkowsky, 1987), and movies can similarly address affective concerns (Milne & Reis, 2000). The objective behind the use of guided viewing is to have students

identify with the characters, reflect on that identification, make connections with the issues faced by the characters in the film, and experience emotional growth as a result. Further growth may then occur through discussing the film with other gifted students and a supportive educator or counselor who facilitates activities designed to guide young people toward self-understanding.

The therapeutic effects of guided viewing of film are derived for young people through a process involving several consecutive stages. Initially, young people experience *identification*, when they recognize similarities between themselves and the characters in the movie. In the second stage, *catharsis*, students vicariously experience emotional reactions similar to those they imagine were felt by the characters in the movie. In the third stage, *insight*, young people reflect on the connection between their own situation and that of the movie characters. Finally, in the fourth stage, *application* occurs when the students apply the insights gained from reflection and group discussion to address similar issues in their own lives (Hébert & Speirs Neumeister, 2001, 2002) and in the lives of their friends and classmates.

by Thomas P. Hébert and Daniel R. Hammond

Benefits of Guided Viewing

Using movies to guide gifted students toward self-understanding provides them with numerous benefits. Movies have the potential to enrich and influence the lives of gifted students in constructive ways. A good movie, for example, can become a meaningful metaphor that explains the essence of a young person's dilemma (Berg-Cross, Jennings, & Baruch, 1990). When an appropriate movie is combined with a discussion and supportive follow-up activities, gifted students may view their situation through a more positive lens, enabling them to appreciate multiple aspects of difficult situations they may encounter. With movies playing a powerful role in contemporary society and functioning as an important part of the culture of children and young adolescents, gifted students may be receptive to the notion of discussing sensitive topics through popular films.

Implementation of Guided Viewing

Before implementing guided viewing sessions in school settings,

teachers and counselors need to be aware of copyright issues related to using movies with students. In school classrooms with educational objectives determined by teachers and counselors, guided viewing falls within the copyright laws protecting the use of films with groups. The Copyright Act of 1976 (amended in 1992) permits educators to make fair use of copyrighted work for instructional purposes without having to obtain permission of the copyright owner (Elias, 1999). As long as teachers and counselors use movies for educational purposes, they are not in violation of copyright laws.

Guided viewing of film allows teachers and counselors to support gifted students in a sensitive manner. To ensure this sensitivity, teachers and counselors should familiarize themselves with the content of the film and how it might reflect the emotions, attitudes, or beliefs of the students before sharing it in the classroom. Additionally, it is critical to watch the movie in its entirety to determine if the material is appropriate for classroom use and for the developmental level of the students involved. Finally, educators must consider the community's value system when making decisions

about which films will be appropriate. After previewing the movie, educators need to be prepared to facilitate a discussion about potentially sensitive issues. Here, a little preparation can make a big difference in ensuring a successful experience. Before facilitating a guided viewing lesson, it is crucial to generate a substantial menu of discussion questions written in a way that will help the young people involved in the discussion feel comfortable sharing their own experiences with the emotional issues presented in the movie. Teachers or counselors should begin the conversation with nonthreatening questions to establish a comfort level before pursuing follow-up questions that focus on issues that might be central to the personal lives of the students.

Empathic teachers and counselors working closely with gifted students realize that healthy discussions may involve conversation about difficult issues that trigger emotional responses within the students. It is important, therefore, to include follow-up activities that allow the participants to process their feelings. Such activities may be individual or collaborative, and may include artistic expressions, role-playing, creative writing, poetry,

journaling, or creative problem solving. The activities need to be enjoyable and allow time for introspection. Moreover, the activities should provide the students opportunity to continue discussion of the issues explored through the movie and to offer each other empathic support.

Guided viewing of movies may be implemented in a variety of ways. Films available for use with children and teenagers present many affective issues that teachers may want to address, such as friendships, identity development, gender issues, peer-group pressure, and parental and family expectations. Sharing these movies with young people can reinforce prosocial messages that are incorporated into the curriculum, while simultaneously enabling a teacher or counselor to meet curricular or guidance objectives. Additionally, breaking up the viewing into short segments over the course of several days and following the viewing with discussions and a culminating activity allow for great flexibility in scheduling and management.

Using guided viewing with small, select groups of students struggling with a specific issue, such as perfectionism, giftedness combined with a learning disability, or underachievement, is another approach educators may want to consider. Through experiencing discussion together, these students may find more comfort in a setting where there are only students present who have shared similar experiences. Teachers and counselors could also consider using this approach with gifted children and their parents, facilitating healthy dialogue among families over issues they may face together. To support teachers and counselors considering guided viewing, a sample lesson plan is included below and a bibliography of films for use with gifted students is provided at the end of this article.

An Example of Guided Viewing

The following discussion presents an example of how an educator may use a film in facilitating guided viewing sessions with gifted elementary students using the movie entitled *Because of Winn-Dixie* (Albert, Singleton, & Wang, 2004). Based on the best-selling novel by Kate DiCamillo (2000), the movie features the story of an intelligent young girl named India Opal Buloni. Opal and her father, a preacher, arrive together in Naomi, FL, to begin a new chapter in their lives. Opal's mother had deserted the family when Opal was only 3. As she struggles to understand her mother's disappearance, she continues to yearn for her mother's presence in her life. At the same time, Opal is frustrated with her father, who seems emotionally isolated from the rest of the world. She decides she must somehow find more happiness in her life, and she begins her search for new friends. Her search gets off to a good start when she adopts a stray dog in the local supermarket. Together, she and her new canine friend Winn-Dixie begin to build community. In applying her strong emotional intelligence in her adventures with Winn-Dixie, she creates new friendships with several adults in Naomi whose lives have been filled with loneliness. Through her new circle of friends, Opal brings together people who also are in need of others. In building this circle, Opal learns several significant lessons about what truly matters most in life and is able to help others also reach a similar understanding.

Teachers and counselors will discover that *Because of Winn-Dixie* is an appropriate movie to use with gifted elementary students. The film features an emotionally sensitive, intelli-

gent, and free-spirited young girl with whom many gifted young people can identify. Opal's interpersonal gifts and talents are applied to solve her problems and overcome the sadness in her life. The transient lifestyle that Opal has lived as the daughter of a preacher may be similar to the single-parent home situations of some gifted children. Young people from all cultural backgrounds will appreciate Opal's story and will learn important lessons from Opal that can be applied to their own lives. The movie highlights a number of issues faced by gifted children and provides teachers and counselors with rich material for enlightening classroom discussions.

Teachers and counselors would want to determine the focus of the discussion accompanying the viewing of this movie and highlight several important issues in subsequent discussions. Key issues that emerge in *Because of Winn-Dixie* are finding emotional support from older mentors, applying one's intelligence to overcome adversity, and creativity and problem solving in gifted young females. Each of these issues may serve as a discussion theme throughout the entire movie. With the issues for discussion determined, teachers should prepare discussion questions to pose in facilitating conversation with students. Educators are advised to prepare introductory questions that appear nonthreatening to young people, followed by more sensitive questions focusing on the problematic situations faced by both the movie characters and the students involved in the discussion. A menu of discussion questions for use with *Because of Winn-Dixie* is provided below:

- How does Opal feel about her move to Naomi, FL? Why?
- Opal explained that when her father sent her to the Winn-Dixie

grocery store, her life changed. How?

- Opal was a smart girl in many ways. What do you think were her special gifts and talents?
- Opal described her father saying, “Sometimes the preacher looked just like a turtle hiding inside its shell in there thinking about things and not ever sticking its head out into the world.” What did she mean by that? Why do you think Opal thought of her father that way? Was she justified to feel this way? Why?
- At first, Opal thought of Amanda Wilkinson as a girl “whose face is always pinched up like she’s smellin’ something real bad.” Later she learned why Amanda appeared that way. Why was this an important lesson for Opal? Have you ever had first impressions of other people that were wrong? What did you learn?
- Opal made some wonderful new friends that summer. What was special about her friendship with Ms. Franny? Miss Gloria Dump? Otis? How did she help each of her new friends? How do you think this made her feel? How do you feel when you’ve reached out to other people in friendship?
- Did you agree with Opal when she said, “Just about everything good that happened that summer happened because of Winn-Dixie.” Why? Why not?
- What were the 10 things that Opal learned from her father about her mother? Why do you think it was so important for Opal to learn that information?
- What was the important lesson that Miss Gloria Dump taught Opal when she showed her the Big Mistake Tree? How can you apply that important lesson in your life?

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- Ms. Franny believed that the people of Naomi had “lost each other.” How did Opal’s conversations with Ms. Franny influence her thinking about her plan for the summer?
- What did Opal and Amanda Wilkinson learn from Ms. Franny and her Litmus Lozenges? When they tasted the candy, how did they feel? Why do you think this happened?
- What were all the important lessons that Opal learned that summer? How can we learn from her experiences?

Teachers and counselors facilitating guided viewing sessions should recognize that the discussion of difficult issues revolving around a movie may elicit emotional responses with the students. Therefore, it is important that facilitators of guided viewing sessions implement follow-up activities that provide young people the opportunity to process through their feelings. These activities should be enjoyable, and students appreciate having the chance to select their

own follow-up activity to pursue individually or with others in the group. Hébert and Speirs Neumeister (2002) highlighted two reasons why such follow-up activities are critical to the success of a guided viewing experience. First, the activities are designed to provide gifted students time for introspection and reflection on the similarities between the lives of the film’s characters and their own lives. Second, the enjoyable activities provide students the opportunity to continue their conversation revolving around the issues explored in the group discussion. This time is when they may feel comfortable offering each other emotional support and empathy. The following is a suggested menu of follow-up activities to use with *Because of Winn-Dixie*.

- Pretend that you are Opal. Write a poem about moving to a new community.
- With Opal’s party as your inspiration, design an invitation to a party for the important people in your life. Plan the menu and the

entertainment for your celebration of friendship.

- Pretend that Opal and Winn-Dixie visit the Oprah Winfrey Show. Design and role-play the interview with Oprah.
- Create a collage of photographs that represent the important lessons you have learned from Opal's story.
- Create a recipe for a candy to replace the Litmus Lozenge. What are the ingredients in your new candy? What do these ingredients represent?
- Design a Tree of Mistakes for the classroom. What will you have friends hang in the tree that represent their mistakes?
- Reflect on the following prompt in your journal: What was the most important lesson that you learned from the movie *Because of Winn-Dixie*? How does this apply to your own life?

Selected Bibliography of Films for Guided Viewing With Gifted Students

The following annotated bibliography contains selected movies that may be used in guided viewing sessions with gifted students. In addition to considering age appropriateness, teachers and counselors will want to consider the community's value system and select movies that are appropriate for use in school settings with children and adolescents. The following films were selected with this consideration in mind. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rating is provided for each film, along with a suggested audience and key issues that might become the focus of a guided viewing lesson.

Films Suggested for Use With Elementary School Students

🌀 *Because of Winn-Dixie* (Albert et al., 2004)

When Opal Buloni arrives in Naomi, FL, with her father, the community's new preacher, she is faced with the challenge of creating a new life for herself. Having been abandoned by her mother, she struggles to understand her mother having left her. With this void in her life, this sensitive and free-spirited young woman realizes that she must build important relationships. When she adopts a stray dog in the grocery store, her life begins to change. Together she and her new canine friend Winn-Dixie enjoy their summer adventures together and make important new friendships with several adults in the community who are also in need of happiness. Opal and Winn-Dixie are successful in building a new community of friends as they learn important life lessons.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Applying one's intelligence to overcome adversity; influence of significant emotional mentors; creativity and problem solving in young gifted females

🌀 *Ellen Foster* (Erman, 2002)

This movie features the story of a gifted, resilient young girl who is left alone following the death of her mother. She draws inner strength from her loving memories of her mother as she is forced to move from relative to relative in search of a family to replace her mother and abusive father. Her wealthy and bitter grandmother eventually takes her in, although Ellen's life in her grandmother's house becomes even more emotionally desolate than before. This intelligent young girl takes her situation into her own hands, designing a plan that she hopes will provide her happiness. In the end, Ellen's remarkable inner strength and determination enables her to free herself of her dysfunctional relatives and the emotionally traumatic events of her childhood.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Developing resilience to overcome adversity; influence of a significant mentor; creativity and problem solving in young gifted females

🌀 *I'll Remember April* (Colichman, Harris, & Clark, 1999)

Against the backdrop of anti-Japanese sentiment in America, this movie follows the lives of Pee Wee, Duke, Tyler, and Willy, a group of 10-year-old boys growing up on the coast of California during World War II. Duke has an older brother serving in the Marines, and much of what his brother shares with him in his wartime letters becomes part of the daily military reenactments of the four young boys. Willy is a Japanese American whose family is being sent to an internment camp. When he and his family experience racism directed at Japanese Americans, his friends come to his support. After hearing of Japanese submarines off the Pacific coast, the boys enjoy fantasizing about being Marines in search of the enemy. While patrolling the beach, they discover a Japanese sailor who is stranded and wounded. Determined to become heroes, they take him prisoner and keep him a secret from their parents. When the sailor rescues Duke from drowning, the boys befriend their prisoner and struggle with a pact that could betray their country.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: G

Key Issues for Discussion: Moral development in young gifted males; influence of peer groups; children coping with social injustice and bigotry

🌀 *The Journey of Natty Gann* (Lobell & Kagan, 1985)

America is mired in the Great Depression, a time when families are often forced to live apart when jobs are available in another part of the country. In this adventure set during this time period, an intelligent and courageous young girl confronts overwhelming odds when she embarks on a cross-country journey in

search of her father. During her quest, she forms a close bond with two traveling companions: a protective wolf and a hardened drifter. This film offers a moving story of courage, perseverance, and applying one's intelligence to solve life's problems.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Creative problem solving in gifted young women; development of resilience to overcome adversity

✪ **Matilda** (DeVito, Dahl, Shamberg & Sher, 1996)

Matilda Wormwood is a bright, sweet young girl whose desire to read books and learn about the world around her is virtually the only thing about which she can think. Unfortunately for her, she faces obstacles in almost any direction she turns, from her bratty brother, to her evil parents, to quite possibly the meanest school principal in history. While at school, Matilda befriends a teacher named Miss Honey, whom she later learns was terrorized by her evil principal. Using her remarkable intelligence and a gift for telekinesis, Matilda vows to set things right for Miss Honey and outwit the evil adults in her life.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Need for acceptance; influence of a teacher as mentor; family issues for gifted children


✪ **My Girl** (Grazer & Zieff, 1991)

The film presents the story of one summer's experiences in the life of Vada Sultenfuss, a gifted 11-year-old girl growing up in the 1970s. Vada lives with her widowed father and elderly grandmother in their home, which is attached to her father's funeral parlor. Vada, a creative writer, is delighted when she learns her heartthrob, a fourth-grade teacher, is offering a summer poetry class. She enrolls in the adult class and spends her summer struggling with her schoolgirl crush on her teacher. She enjoys her summer with her best friend Thomas J. Sennett, but her days become more complex when her father announces his engagement. Vada struggles to accept a replacement for her mother. Moreover, she must overcome the tragic loss of Thomas J. when he dies from an allergic response to being stung by a hive of bees. With emotional support from family and friends, Vada ends her summer by writing a memorial poem in honor of her beloved friend, enabling her to apply her creativity in dealing with her grief.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Appreciating intelligence in young girls; importance of close friendships; nurturing one's imagination and creativity; dealing with the tragic loss of a loved one; father-daughter relationships


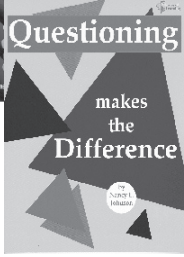
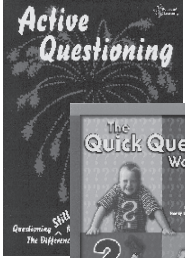
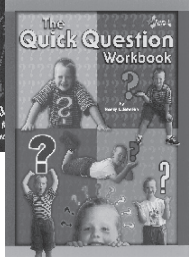


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✪ **A Painted House** (Welsh, Shields, & Arau, 1998)

During the long hot summer of 1952, 10-year-old Luke Chandler experiences a chapter in his life that will shape him as an adult. As the grandson of a cotton farmer in the Arkansas Delta, Luke observes two groups of migrant workers and two very dangerous men working on his family's farm. During that summer, several horrific events take place and Luke must shelter dark secrets that could shatter lives. From his stoic grandfather, Luke learns important lessons. As the young boy experiences this complex summer, someone is furtively painting the bare clapboards of the Chandler farmhouse, slowly bathing the dilapidated farmhouse in gleaming white.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: G

Key Issues for Discussion: Being true to self; moral development in gifted boys; importance of emotional support from family

✪ **The Red Sneakers** (Stephenson & Hines, 2002)

Reggie Reynolds is the dedicated manager of his urban high school basketball team. His problem is that he wants to be a

basketball superstar, but his dreams of becoming a college player seem impossible because Reggie is intellectually gifted, but not athletically talented. When the neighborhood junkman sells him a magical pair of red sneakers, he becomes an overnight sensation who leads his team to the New York City high school finals. As Reggie enjoys his instant success, he struggles with the jealousy of his teammates, his mother's changing views of his intellectual abilities, the high scholarly expectations of his math teacher, and a new set of adoring female admirers. In addition, sport scouts descend upon Reggie to offer him a golden future. In the end, Reggie acknowledges his academic gifts and remains true to himself and those he loves.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: G

Key Issues for Discussion: Talent development in urban youth; anti-intellectualism; influence of peer group; societal pressure to be athletic

❖ *Ruby Bridges* (Rees, Hopkins, & Palcy, 2004)

This movie presents the inspirational story of Ruby Bridges, a gifted 6-year-old girl chosen to be the first African American child to integrate the New Orleans public schools in the 1960s. Though she is subjected to traumatizing racism for the first time, the love and emotional support of her devoted parents, combined with the deep religious faith of her family, enables her to develop the resilience she needs to cope with the stress she experiences each day. This little girl's story of her heroic struggle for a better education is a story of a gifted child displaying exquisite dignity and courage as she continues to believe in herself, her family, and the important mission for which she was chosen.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Key Issues for Discussion: Developing resilience to overcome adversity; internal strength and courage in gifted young children; importance of family support

❖ *Wide Awake* (Konrad, Woods, & Shyamalan, 1998)

Joshua Beals, a highly sensitive, intelligent fifth grader, attends an all-boys Catholic school. Josh is a teacher's delight with a reputation for having a nonstop series of questions to ask. The movie begins following the death of Joshua's grandfather, who was also his best friend and role model. With his grandfather's passing, Joshua feels lost, despite the fact that his family and friends offer emotional support. This poignant film examines the young boy's struggle to understand mortality and his preoccupation with knowing whether or not his grandfather is in heaven. Throughout the movie, Joshua faces typical adolescent issues such as coping with a schoolyard bully, discovering girls, and developing empathy for boys who are not appreciated by their peer group. Through these experiences, Joshua confronts his issues, reaches self-understanding, and realizes that he is "wide awake," with a new awareness of life.

Audience: Elementary School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Dealing with the loss of a loved one; sensitivity in gifted young males; importance of friendship

Films Suggested for Use With Elementary or Middle School Students

❖ *Little Man Tate* (Rajski, Rudin, & Foster, 1991)

Fred is a highly gifted 7-year-old boy being raised by a single mother in New York City. Having trouble fitting in with other children and struggling to make friends, Fred garners the attention of Dr. Jane Grierson, a psychologist who runs a program that specifically addresses the needs of gifted children. Fred's mother Dede agrees, but has second thoughts as she becomes further and further removed from Fred's upbringing. As he is pushed through Dr. Grierson's program, Dede fears that he is missing out on a normal

childhood, and must learn to be the mother that Fred has needed all along.

Audience: Elementary–Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Asynchronous development; importance of friendship for gifted children; importance of parental support for talent development

❖ *The Sandlot* (de la Torre, Gilmore, & Evans, 1993)

Fifth grader Scott Smalls is finding it difficult to make new friends after he moves to California with his mother and his athletic stepfather. He idolizes a group of baseball-playing kids in the neighborhood, but fears that he may be a little too awkward and nonathletic to play with them. After the group's best player takes Scott under his wing, however, Scott learns valuable lessons about friendship, honesty, and being a 10-year-old.

Audience: Elementary–Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Importance of friendship; creative problem solving in gifted males; balancing academics and athletics; parental influence on gifted males

❖ *Searching for Bobby Fischer*

(Horberg, Rudin, & Zaillian, 1993)

The story of the world champion chess player Bobby Fischer serves as a backdrop for this movie. In this story, 7-year-old Josh Waitzkin becomes intrigued with men playing chess in a New York City neighborhood park. When his parents recognize his fascination for the game and his natural talent for chess, his father is successful in finding a chess teacher for his son. Under the guidance of his mentor, Josh brings home impressive trophies from multiple competitions. Joshua's father, a sports journalist, becomes overly enthusiastic about his son's abilities as a competitor while his mother, recognizing Josh's sensitivities, points out to her son what is most important in life. Joshua's mentor begins to build the competitive edge in his young protégé, insisting that he have contempt for his opponents; how-

ever, Josh resists, pointing out that he is not Bobby Fischer. The tensions between his parents mount over the values instilled in the competitive culture of chess tournaments, and Joshua fears disappointing his father.

Audience: Elementary–Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Influence of a significant mentor; importance of healthy competition; dealing with parental expectations

✪ *Selma, Lord, Selma* (Seitz & Burnett, 1999)

This uplifting true story presents the childhood of Sheyann Webb, a charismatic young African American girl living in Selma, AL, during the turbulent civil rights movement. Sheyann sneaks off from her fifth-grade friends before school begins and meets Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who is visiting her community. Inspired by Dr. King, she becomes involved in the marches for freedom. Sheyann finds herself the only elementary school student involved in the movement and remains committed to the cause despite the admonitions of her parents and teachers. She finds support in the friendship of a young White seminarian, a Freedom Fighter from the North struggling to get the Black community members registered to vote. Eventually, Sheyann's passion for the cause convinces her teachers to become active in the movement. Throughout the events surrounding the historic "Bloody Sunday" of 1965 Sheyann displays leadership, commitment, resilience, and remarkable courage.

Audience: Elementary–Middle School

MPAA Rating: G

Key Issues for Discussion: Developing resilience to overcome adversity in life; importance of courage in pursuit of a goal

✪ *Shrek* (Katzenberg, Warner, Williams, Adamson, & Jenson, 2001)

Shrek is an ogre who, as a result of his less-than-normal appearance, inspires

fear in the hearts of the residents of nearby Duloc. Shrek doesn't seem to mind, however, as he has always enjoyed living alone just outside the town and appreciates the peace and quiet. After Shrek's home is taken from him and the beautiful Princess Fiona is kidnapped by the evil Lord Farquaad, however, Shrek is forced to abandon his life of solitude in order to save them both. Along with his dear friend Donkey, they discover the value of persistence and learn an important lesson about appearances in the midst of their quest.

Audience: Elementary–Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Importance of friendship; acceptance of individual differences; importance of courage in pursuit of a goal

✪ *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*

(Williams & Miner, 1991)

Living in the 1930s, young Sonora Webster dreams of becoming a "diving girl," who rides a horse as it dives into a deep pool of water below. After leaving her home in Georgia to pursue this dream, a tragic accident leaves Sonora blind, forcing her to question the possibility of making her dream a reality. Overcoming her disability and a striking lack of support from the other individuals involved with the diving horse act, Sonora proves that persistence and dedication can go a very long way.

Audience: Elementary–Middle School

MPAA Rating: G

Key Issues for Discussion: Overcoming a disability; gender issues for gifted females; creative problem solving; developing resilience in the face of adversity

Films Suggested for Use With Middle School Students

✪ *Amazing Grace and Chuck* (Field & Newell, 1987)

Chuck, a pitcher for his little league baseball team, learns about nuclear weapons and decides that he will refuse to pitch

as a form of protest against them. Chuck's story makes its way through the press to a star basketball player from the Boston Celtics, who agrees to join Chuck's protest and refuses to play, as well. One by one, athletes from around the globe follow suit, earning Chuck the chance to sit down and talk with the President of the United States about eliminating nuclear weapons altogether. A powerful story about one boy's firm commitment to his beliefs, *Amazing Grace and Chuck* is an uplifting film for children and families to enjoy together.

Audience: Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Being true to self; influence of a significant mentor; sensitivity and emotionality in gifted students

✪ *Annie O* (Sugar & McClary, 1996)

After her exceptional talent in basketball is discovered, Annie Rojas, a Hispanic high school female, is recruited by Coach Cody to try out for the varsity team. Her decision to play causes significant tension for Annie with her family and friends at school. Annie's mother, a Hispanic woman with traditional values, is unwilling to accept her daughter's passion for athletic competition. Meanwhile, she also faces resentment from her older brother Freddy who was hoping to become the varsity team's star during his senior year. To add to her problems, Annie also realizes that her female friends are turning against her, as they do not want to be associated with a female athlete out of a fear that it may tarnish their attractiveness to potential boyfriends. As she struggles with these issues, her coach provides her constant emotional support and encouragement to develop her talent on the court. Annie eventually emerges as a team leader, earning herself the nickname Annie O, reflective of the Wild West female character, Annie Oakley.

Audience: Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Gender issues for gifted females; family expectations for culturally diverse students; setting high aspirations; balancing academics and athletics

✪ *Fly Away Home* (Baum, Veitch, & Ballard, 1996)

After her mother's tragic death, 13-year-old Amy moves from New Zealand to live with her father in Canada. While struggling to adjust to her new surroundings, Amy's life is transformed when she discovers a nest of abandoned goose eggs. After they have hatched, Amy takes care of the young geese, raising them with the care that one would expect from a new mother. When the authorities inform her that it is illegal to raise wild geese without clipping their wings, however, Amy decides that someone must teach them to fly away to safety rather than permanently grounding the entire flock. With the help of her father and a pair of hang gliders, Amy attempts to do just that.

Audience: Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Dealing with the loss of a loved one; creativity and problem solving; paternal influence on gifted females; finding friends in a new environment

✪ *Frankie & Hazel* (Hockin & Williams, 2000)

Francesca "Frankie" Humphries and her best friend Hazel Perez are two multitalented middle school girls growing up in a small New Jersey town. Frankie is an accomplished ballerina who wants to pursue playing baseball. The daughter of an internationally renowned prima ballerina, Frankie has lived with her grandmother following the tragic loss of her parents. Frankie's grandmother, a dignified woman with an authoritarian parenting style, has

definite plans for her granddaughter's future in ballet. Frankie is torn emotionally as she attempts to please her grandmother while also following her own interests. Meanwhile, the charismatic Hazel has aspirations of becoming the first teenager elected mayor of her community. She dives into her role as a community activist and gains community support for her campaign to improve her town.

Audience: Middle School

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Key Issues for Discussion: Gifted girls supporting each other; gender expectations for gifted young women; coping with familial expectations; leadership talent in young women

✪ *Lucas* (Nicksay & Seltzer, 1986)

Lucas is an awkward, eccentric high school freshman who has always struggled with his desire to be popular, admiring the trendy students from afar while paying less and less attention to the students who have always considered him a friend. Upon befriending Maggie, a pretty cheerleader who is new to the town, Lucas decides that he needs to do something bold. Fed up with being pushed around, he decides to stand up to those who have always bullied him by trying out for the school football team. With Maggie and big man on campus Cappie at his side, Lucas embarks on a journey of friendship, self-discovery, and football that earns him the respect and admiration of all the students at his high school.

Audience: Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Importance of friendship for gifted males; examination of stereotypes; value of intellectual and athletic pursuits

✪ *The Mighty* (Fields, Startz, & Chelsom, 1998)

The Mighty is a story of two young men who come together as outcasts.

Kevin Dillon, a highly gifted, physically challenged youngster develops a close friendship with his next-door neighbor Max Kane when he becomes his reading tutor. In return, Max protects him from teenage adversaries in their middle school. Though they both have problems that label them as pariahs, Kevin and Max realize that by combining their strengths and remaining united, they can overcome their individual limitations. Together the two boys take on adventurous challenges. In the spirit of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, they set out on an inspirational quest for greatness and preserving the common good. In doing so, they discover the greatest treasure—their lifelong friendship.

Audience: Middle School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Importance of friendship for gifted males; development of resilience to overcome adversity; creative problem solving in gifted young men

Films Suggested for Use With Middle or High School Students

✪ *October Sky* (Franco, Gordon, & Johnston, 1999)

In this biographical film, Homer Hickam has no reason to think that he will be any different from other boys growing up in Coalwood, WV, where all young men are expected to become coal miners like their fathers. Too small to earn a football scholarship to college, Homer has no way out of his predetermined life, until 1957 when Sputnik flies over his community and changes Homer's life. Homer begins a mission to build and launch his own homemade rockets with a group of his loyal friends. Although their frequent mishaps get the "Rocket Boys" in trouble, the small mining community becomes more intrigued with their scientific endeavors, offering resources and

support. Their science teacher supports the efforts of the four aspiring scientists and she encourages the young men to enter the state science fair competition with hopes of securing college scholarships. Homer's fascination with space is not appreciated by his father, the superintendent of Coalwood's mine, who dreams of his son taking the realm of the company when he retires. Throughout the movie, the values of the father and son continue to clash as they struggle to understand each other. When the Rocket Boys win the national science competition, earning themselves college scholarships, Homer's father begins to appreciate his son's determination and passion for science.

Audience: Middle–High School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Peer group influence; parental expectations for gifted males; athletic pursuits versus intellectual pursuits; influence of a significant mentor

★ *Rudy* (Fried, Woods, & Anspaugh, 1993)

For as long as Rudy Ruettiger has dreamed about playing football at the University of Notre Dame, there has been a friend, family member, teacher, or classmate at his side to tell him that it will never happen. With only his best friend Pete to support him, Rudy keeps the dream alive while working in a factory in suburban Chicago. After Pete's tragic death, Rudy decides that the time to fulfill his dream has come and heads to Notre Dame to take his shot. With the help of an unlikely mentor, Rudy attempts to succeed in that which no one would have ever thought possible.

Audience: Middle–High School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Familial expectations; importance of friendship; setting high aspirations; importance of a significant mentor

★ *The Sandy Bottom Orchestra* (Maurer & Wigor, 2000)

Norman and Ingrid Green and their 14-year-old daughter Rachel are considered an eccentric family in Sandy Bottom, WI. Ingrid is a sophisticated woman who has abandoned her promising career as a classical pianist to follow her dairy farmer husband to the rural community. As the head of the local church choir, she spends her days trying to introduce new selections of music to the congregation and challenges the community's rural mentality. Norman dreams of being an orchestra conductor. Rachel, a gifted high school freshman, struggles to find friends who appreciate her. As she excels academically, she also outgrows her private violin lessons, and her parents struggle with whether to have their daughter audition for a place in a private arts academy. When her father decides to produce a classical concert for the community, both Rachel and Ingrid become members of the orchestra. With the overwhelming success of the concert, the Greens celebrate their community's acceptance and realize that Sandy Bottom is the town where they belong.

Audience: Middle–High School

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Key Issues for Discussion: Being true to self; finding a place where you are appreciated; influence of a significant mentor; women's choices between career and family

★ *Spellbound* (Welch, Blitz, & Blitz, 2002)

This powerful documentary follows eight highly intelligent young people as they compete in the national spelling bee sponsored every spring by Scripps-Howard newspapers. Through vignettes of their daily preparation, family life, and local and regional competitions, we gain an insider's view of the culture surrounding such a competition. We enjoy the diversity of the eight unique personalities. We also listen to their views on studying, competition, victory, and defeat. Once at the national bee in Washington, DC, we observe the competition, spend time with their parents between each round, celebrate with the final champion, and

empathize with those who came so close to winning.

Audience: Middle–High School

MPAA Rating: G

Key Issues for Discussion: Value of persistence; keeping competition in perspective; parental expectations; celebrating diversity in gifted youth

Films Suggested for Use With High School Students

★ *The Competition* (Sackheim & Oliansky, 1980)

Heidi, a protégée of an internationally renowned pianist, earns the opportunity to compete in one of the music world's most challenging competitions. Winning the competition will earn Heidi a lucrative prize and the opportunity to tour for a year as the featured pianist in musical centers throughout the world. At the competition, Heidi meets and falls in love with Paul, a pianist who hopes to use the competition to help his financially strained family and alleviate stress for his father who has been diagnosed with cancer. As the competition progresses and Heidi's relationship with Paul intensifies, her mentor objects to the romantic relationship, wanting her to maintain her competitive edge. When Heidi learns of Paul's family situation, she is torn with whether or not to remove herself from the competition, knowing how important winning is to Paul. Heidi delivers a magnificent performance and wins the title, with Paul earning second place. Despite his earlier pledge of unconditional love and support, Paul struggles with knowing that Heidi is more gifted than he. The two gifted musicians must examine their feelings and decide just where their relationship will take them.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Gender issues for gifted females; influence of a significant mentor; gifted females balancing careers and relationships; competition

✪ *Dead Poets Society* (Witt, Thomas, Seale & Weir, 1989)

John Keating is a new teacher whose unusual methods run contrary to the conservative nature of the New England prep academy in which he teaches. His passion for all things literary, however, inspires his students to discover their own love of poetry and to form a secret society with that as the focus. The story primarily follows two students, Neil Perry and Todd Anderson, each of whom goes through a journey of self-discovery with the help of Keating. Todd learns to deal with his substantial shyness and living up to the legacy of his highly successful older brother, while Neil's true nature emerges despite the best efforts of his extremely controlling father.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Identity development in gifted males; influence of a significant mentor; parental expectations for gifted males; setting high aspirations

✪ *The Emperor's Club* (Abraham, Karsch, & Hoffman, 2002)

William Hundert is a revered teacher of Western Civilization at St. Benedict's Academy, an all-boys private school. St. Benedict's maintains an important tradition by holding a contest in which the top three students answer questions about Roman history in a public tournament. The winner is crowned Mr. Julius Caesar. In his work with the group of highly intelligent young men, Mr. Hundert meets his challenge, Sedgewick Bell, the son of an influential state senator. Sedgewick is determined to play the role of the nonconforming, rebellious underachiever. Mr. Hundert succeeds in motivating Sedgewick to study for the Mr. Julius Caesar contest. When the contest takes place, Mr. Hundert realizes that Sedgewick is cheating. Bell loses the contest, and returns to his rebellious ways until his graduation from the academy. Twenty-five years later, Bell, a wealthy business tycoon, wants to reclaim his intellectual honor by sponsoring a rematch of the Julius Caesar contest. During that reunion, Mr. Hundert learns a difficult

lesson regarding character development in men.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Identity development in gifted males; influence of competition in academic settings; moral development in gifted individuals

✪ *The Ernest Green Story* (Higgins & Laneville, 1993)

This biographical film depicts the true story of one young man's battle to overcome racial intolerance in the segregated South of the 1950s. Ernest Green, along with eight other gifted African American high school students, comprised a group of the first students to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, AR. Ernest and his peers face racial epithets, abusive mobs, biased teachers, and an uncooperative state government. With the help of mentoring from his grandfather, Ernest, the only senior in the group, emerges as the leader and offers inspiration and encouragement to his friends. The courage and resilience of these nine teenagers allow them to cope with the adversity and overcome the inhumane treatment that they have experienced.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Key Issues for Discussion: Developing resilience to overcome adversity; developing a racial identity; influence of a significant mentor; setting high aspirations

✪ *Finding Forrester* (Connery, Mark, Tollefson, & Van Sant, 2000)

Jamal Wallace, an African American teenager living in the Bronx is given a unique opportunity to attend one of New York's finest prep schools when he performs extremely well on a statewide standardized exam. Upon arriving at the new school, however, he discovers that his skills on the basketball court were just as important to the administration as his test scores. Distraught by this situation, Jamal has a chance encounter with a William Forrester, Pulitzer Prize-winning author,

who helps Jamal to pursue writing, his off-the-court passion. With Forrester's help, Jamal is able to overcome a number of challenges in his new environment, while having a powerful effect on his new mentor in the process.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Influence of a significant mentor; parental expectations for gifted, culturally diverse males; influence of peer group; pursuing one's passion

✪ *Gross Anatomy* (Rosenman, Hill, & Eberhardt, 1989)

Joe Slovak is a brilliant first-year medical school student whose casual, nonconforming approach to life becomes tested when he enrolls in anatomy, his most challenging course. Joe's free-spirited, independent style puts him at odds with Dr. Rachel Woodruff, his most demanding professor who questions whether or not this gifted underachiever has what it takes to be a doctor.

As Joe the nonconformist approaches the challenges of medical school in his own way, Dr. Woodruff appreciates his brilliant mind and challenges him with a complex medical case study. In discovering the upsetting truth behind the case study, Joe begins to question existential issues associated with becoming a doctor. As he works through his questioning and learns why Dr. Woodruff maintains such high standards for him, he decides that he does have what it takes to succeed in life without having to compromise his values.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Identity and moral development in gifted males; selective achievement in gifted individuals; alignment of one's value system with life goals

✪ *Mona Lisa Smile* (Goldsmith-Thomas, Schiff, Schindler, & Newell, 2004)

Katherine Watson, a first-year art history professor, arrives at the prestigious and conservative Wellesley College

in the 1950s. Professor Watson comes to Wellesley not to fit in but to make a difference for her students. She soon discovers that the young women in her classes may be exceptional in their memorization of art history but have much to learn about becoming critical consumers of art. She works diligently to challenge her students and to convince the college's administrators that her unconventional teaching practices require her students to think critically. As she struggles with her own romantic relationships, she mentors the young women as several of them question the traditional societal expectations for females. When the school's administrators hesitate to renew her contract, she decides to leave for Europe. As she departs, she realizes that her young protégés have learned to appreciate her as a teacher, friend, and role model—a woman who lived by her own definition and would not compromise her values.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Gender issues for gifted females; cultural, community, and familial expectations for gifted females; influence of a significant mentor

✪ *Mr. Holland's Opus* (Cort, Field, Nolin, & Herek, 1995)

Glenn Holland possesses one lifelong dream—to compose a piece of music that will leave a lasting impression on the world. While struggling to come up with that one perfect piece, Mr. Holland decides to take a job teaching music at a local school. In dealing with a number of issues, including his wife's pregnancy and a deaf son who will be unable to hear the music on which he works so hard, he discovers that success is not necessarily about that one perfect piece of music. Instead, he finds that sharing something that gives him so much joy can be just as rewarding.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Influence of a significant mentor; setting high aspirations; pursuit of one's passion

✪ *Smoke Signals* (Estes, Rosenfelt, & Eyre, 1998)

Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire are two Native American teenagers living on a reservation. Victor is tall, athletic, handsome, and angry, while Thomas is gifted, awkward, wears thick glasses, and constantly shares colorful stories. Though they are very different from each other, the budding relationship between Thomas and Victor provides both young men with the support they need to cope with the adversity in their lives. Victor's father, an abusive man, abandoned his family when Victor was a child. When Victor learns of his father's death, he and Thomas travel to Arizona to recover his father's ashes. The journey and the subsequent adventure allow Victor to begin to come to terms with his father's life and death. During his quest to retrieve his father's remains, he is able to express his rage and transform it into forgiveness, allowing him to move forward with his life.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Developing resilience to overcome adversity; father-son relationships; friendships between gifted males; coping with anger toward missing parents

✪ *Stand and Deliver* (Musca & Menéndez, 1988)

This film features the biographical story of Jaime Escalante, a serious math teacher in a tough East Los Angeles high school. Assigned classes of unmotivated students, Escalante is determined to turn his students' lives around. He draws upon his own cultural heritage and forms a bond with his largely Hispanic student body. Escalante's students gradually realize that the only way they will escape their economically depressed barrio is to improve themselves intellectually. Mr. Escalante dedicates countless hours preparing his students for the Advanced Placement (AP) examination. With Escalante as their teacher, the students' academic achievements greatly improve and they excel on the exam. Regardless

of their outstanding performance, the AP test administrators do not believe that a group of culturally diverse students from an urban high school are capable of such success. Accusations of cheating take place, and Escalante and his students must prove the authorities are wrong.

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG

Key Issues for Discussion: Developing resilience to overcome adversity; pursuing one's passion; social injustice and discrimination

✪ *With Honors* (Robinson, Weinstein, & Keshishian, 1994)

Montgomery Kessler, a Harvard University senior, is determined to graduate summa cum laude. His computer crashes as he is completing his senior thesis. On the way to the library to photocopy a backup version of his printed work, his only copy of the thesis falls into the hands of Simon Wilder, a homeless man living in the basement of Harvard's library. The homeless gentleman, who survives by his applied intelligence, drives a hard bargain with Monty as he agrees to return the thesis for food, shelter, and favors for each individual page. Simon moves in with Monty and his Ivy League housemates. As Monty and Simon develop a life-changing friendship, Monty views life through Simon's perspective, leading him to question his values and restructure his world view. Simon teaches him that he must "graduate life with honor and without regret."

Audience: High School

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Key Issues for Discussion: Being true to self; sensitivity and empathy in gifted males; gifted students developing a personal code of ethics **GCT**

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