

English 12
Gilmour Academy

Books and Movies:
The Uneasy Relationship between Film and Text
Gilmour course # 107G; KAP course #ENGL 104

Syllabus
Spring 2007

KAP

The KAP English course is designed to help students to develop skills in perceptive reading, critical thinking, and effective writing, through the study of significant literary texts representing a range of genres and chronological periods, and drawn from a variety of gender and cultural perspectives.

Course overview

People assume that “The book is always better than the movie.” Is that true? What is the relationship between film and text? Are there film versions of books that are *better* than the original text? What can you do in a movie that you cannot do in a book? What can you do on the page that you cannot do in a film? We look at critical reviews of books and movies and we read and watch for ourselves classics such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*, and contemporary works including *The Hours* and *Seabiscuit*. The course concludes with student presentations of their own comparison/analysis of a text-to-film work.

Essential questions to guide course:

- Is the book generally better than the movie?
- What can you do in a book that you cannot do on film?
- What can you do with film that you cannot do in a book?

Instructors’ goals

This class, even more than most, requires your presence to work. We will be reviewing and discussing film clips that have been carefully culled and edited for discussion purposes and working our way through excerpts from novels and short stories that have been chosen to correspond with those clips. It is not possible to hand all of this to you to read and view on your own. Nor is it possible to recreate the classroom discussion/discovery process. It is imperative that you make attendance a priority in this class.

My goals include the following:

- Students will develop a familiarity, and a level of comfort in using the language of cinema and cinematic terms;
- Students will approach film and text with the same analytic eye;

- Students exercise and develop the critical acumen necessary to be a thoughtful and informed consumer of both text and film, see the connection between the two art forms, and in comparing the two, develop their use of the language of criticism.

Course materials

a. Books:

Course packet will be distributed in class

Reference will be made to the following texts:

Golden, John. *Reading in the Dark*

Golden, John *Reading in the Reel World*

Stam & Raengo, eds. *Literature and Film*

Grading/assessment

Assessment

Evaluation is based primarily upon student achievement in the composition of 4-6 essays, most addressing the texts studied, and additional in-class writing and informal assignments. Student essays typically range from 3-5 typed pages. Essays should be evaluated for the relative freshness and sophistication of their insights into the texts in question; their success in developing a focused and well-substantiated argument; their ability to analyze textual evidence, utilizing (as appropriate) close-reading skills; their stylistic control and clarity; their grammatical and mechanical accuracy. As they prepare some of their essays, students will be asked to complete research using reference texts and scholarly sources. There is a final project in this course (see section b. below) in which the student is expected to demonstrate understanding of the major concepts of the course (see instructor's goals, above).

A major component of KAP English classes is the informed and specific discussion of the assigned literature. Discussion should engage as many students as possible each day, and should encourage independent thought, clear articulation of ideas, and close analysis of specific textual detail.

a. Daily preparation

Daily homework must be completed in a timely fashion, as it will be impossible to engage in the in-class activities without adequate preparation. There will be several traditional tests or quizzes in this class as we master cinematic terms and work our way through several novels. There are frequently in-class writings and/or discussions, in response to critical questions. All students are to demonstrate that they have read and prepared for class. Failure to do so will result in a zero for daily work and may also result in exclusion from full participation in class activities.

If you know that you are going to miss a class, see the instructor beforehand to get the assignment. If you miss class due to illness or another unanticipated reason, contact another student in the class to get the missed assignments, and see the instructor immediately upon your return to school regarding work to be made up. It is YOUR responsibility, NOT the instructor's, to inquire about making up the missed work. Be

vigilant. I will adhere to the policy as stated in the Student Handbook: If you are absent (excused) on the day an assignment is due, it is due upon your return to class.

b. Major project

A major portion of your grade will come from your performance on a final project. There are two options:

1. You choose a film/text pairing, find a central theme or issue that connects them (examples will be presented early in the course), choose appropriate excerpts from each and present your insight and analysis to the class. The final project will include a 5-7 page paper explaining and exploring your analysis, citing both the book and the film, and any relevant criticism.

2. The other option is to select a meaningful passage from a novel or short story and create a screenplay based on it. The screenplay will be as long as it needs to be, but must be accompanied by a 3-5 page paper discussing the choices you have made and your vision for the potential film. If you have the ability and desire to film your screenplay, see the instructor to create a set of agreed-upon parameters from your project.

c. Late/missing work

Work submitted late due to an excused absence will be accepted without penalty according to the guidelines set forth in the *2005-2006 Student-Parent Handbook*. It is due upon your return to class. Late papers will lose 10 points **per school day** for every day after the due date up to a maximum of 50 points. If a paper or assessment is not submitted within two weeks of the due date no credit will be given for that assignment. All assignments are due immediately upon return to school following an absence. If a student has missed part but not all of one school day, assignments are due **THAT DAY**.

You may submit ONE paper late each semester, with a grace period of up to one week. In order to use your extension, you must submit your request **IN WRITING** when the rest of the class submits the paper. If I don't receive notification at that point, the paper will be classified as late, and the late policy (see first paragraph) will be in effect. This only applies to major papers. There are no extensions for homework and daily work.

Computer malfunction will **not** be accepted as an excuse for late assignments. If your printer fails, come in early and print it in the library or find an alternative printing source.

The important thing to remember is this: If there are extenuating circumstances, discuss the situation with the teacher, and submit the late work within a reasonable amount of time, usually by the next class period. Communication is the key when you find yourself in a tough spot.

c. Extra credit

On the rare occasion that there are activities outside of the work of the course (a play, reading, or movie to attend, an extra book to read, etc.) that might enrich class discussion, the opportunity to engage in those activities for credit will be made available only to those students who have completed all assigned work to date.

Instructor availability:

I am available each school day at 7:45 a.m., and after school until 4:15 p.m. I check my Gilmour account on a regular basis, and find that it is an efficient and effective way to reach me.

Plagiarism:

"Plagiarism is the dishonest act of presenting the words or thoughts of another writer as if they were your own. You commit plagiarism whenever you use a source in any way without indicating that you have used it." (James A.W. Heffernan and John E. Lincoln, *Writing: A College Handbook*, 2nd ed., New York: Norton, 1986, 522.). Flagrant, unacknowledged use of another's material is a grave matter. All acts of plagiarism will be referred directly to the Honor Council.

Classroom discourse:

Classroom behavior should, of course, be courteous and orderly. I will, if necessary, enforce the policies contained in the *2005-2006 Student-Parent Handbook*. Repeated disruptions (including talking while others have the floor) will result first in a disciplinary referral, then in a phone call home. You can assume that your comportment in class will be reflected in your participation grade.

I will not, under any circumstances, tolerate behavior that is hurtful toward other students. Showing lack of respect toward another student is a direct violation of the Honor Code and will be directly referred to the Honor Council.

Tentative course overview**Questions for analysis:**

In each of the paired works we look at in this first unit, the book was written first, and is the inspiration (or at least the starting point) for the film. Assuming precedence for the book, ask yourself the following:

- What is the author's message? How is it achieved?
- What is the filmmaker's message? How is it achieved?
- How are the two works similar? Different?
- Does the film extend, develop, truncate or summarize the book?
- Is the message different? Changed? Do think that was the intention? Who achieves their apparent purpose more effectively? How?

Unit 1: An artful move from book to film: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

E.Q.: How do the criteria for "greatness" differ from one medium to another?

Unit 2: Character and setting: *Matilda*, *The Shipping News*

E.Q.: How do you convey tone, setting, character in a book and in a movie?

Unit 3: Staging a book: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

E.Q.: Can a movie be *too* faithful to a book?

Unit 4: An author's perspective: Michael Cunningham and *The Hours*

E.Q.: What can you do on the written page that you cannot do with film? What can you convey with an image on film that you cannot do with the written word? What are the strengths/weaknesses/differences of the two media?

Unit 5: Non-fiction book to film: Are the issues different? *Seabiscuit* as a case study

E.Q.: Are the rules different when you're dealing with "real life?"

Unit 6: Art across genres: *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

E.Q.: What happens when we consider yet another medium?

Unit 7: student presentations