

# Film's Transformative Potential with Gifted Adolescent Girls

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## Introduction

Films touch our emotions, ignite our imagination and curiosity, and establish lifelong memories. They transport us to new worlds, help us recognize differing perspectives, and suggest positive change. Films engage students in social and emotional awareness and can open a portal into ways that smart young people can better understand themselves. Some academically talented students face challenges above and beyond typical developmental issues faced by peers due to their exceptionalities (Dole & McMahan 2005; Hébert & Hammond, 2006; Milne & Reis, 2000; Wilson, 2004). Some of these challenges include perfectionism, motivation, emotional sensitivity, empathy, resilience, advanced moral maturity, asynchronous development, twice exceptionality, and underachievement (Hébert & Hammond, 2006; Hébert & Speirs Neumeister, 2002; Milne & Reis, 2000; Reis, 2018).

Additional and unique challenges also arise with gifted girls and women, such as a search for identity, lack of family support, stereotyping, self-doubt, self-criticism, absence of role models, and lowered cultural expectations (Hébert, Long, & Neumeister 2001; Reis, 2001; Reis, 2018). To address these challenges in a school or home setting, educators and counselors may suggest guided viewing of high-quality films. This article provides a practical approach to implementing guided viewing of contemporary films for gifted elementary and middle school girls.

Matching a movie or film excerpt to the student may result in positive outcomes that extend beyond any lecture or class. Newton (1995) suggests this strategy results in direct appeal to the senses, the ability to engage reluctant readers and attract visual learners while creating a safe atmosphere to explore the multiple facets of their giftedness. Hébert and colleagues (2002; 2006) describe four consecutive stages students may experience while viewing films that relate to their experiences including identification, catharsis, insight, and finally, application. Identification occurs once students see a resemblance between themselves and movie characters, they may also begin to experience or probe their own emotions through those characters, known as the catharsis stage. During the insight stage, adolescents may connect their emotions to those of the film characters. Students can reflect upon their own unique situations, then consider how and when to apply this understanding to their own lives and the lives of their peers in the final application stage. With forethought from either a teacher or counselor and the opportunity to view or consider specific films in a safe environment, a rich and healthy discussion may enable students to contemplate and work through sensitive or difficult issues. Educators and counselors should enable choice in follow-up activities, such as creative expressions of poetry, art, writing and role-playing, that subsequently enable students to process their emotions and new understandings (Hébert et al., 2006).

Additionally, viewing films with a critical literacy lens may help students learn the power of self-expression, agency, emotional intelligence skills, and problem-solving strategies. Critical literacy practices include understanding the complex relationships between literary works, the environment, power, and inequity (Vasquez et al., 2019). Multimodal texts enable students to become researchers of images, language, gestures, practices, objects, and spaces, and how they can create, reconstruct, or redesign them to be socially just and equitable with real-life implications (Vasquez et al.). Hoult (2016) argues that as one analyzes both literary and non-literary works, these stories we see and hear become interwoven into our experiences and we create meaning and accept things in real life. "These stories do more than represent a pre-existing reality; they enter and shape culture and they provide another way of looking at life" (Hoult, 2016, p. 53). Mack (2012) suggests literature educates our emotions and helps us question ethicality, decisions, and actions of characters, helping us to assess and interpret what is "fair, good, or desirable" (p. 21). These literary ideas and critical thought practices are useful in creating and understanding the links between literacy and culture and how adolescent students may formulate their understanding of the world and inform emotional choices.