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Volume 10, numéro 1-2, août-décembre 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1099952ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1099952ar>

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Éditeur(s)

International Centre for Innovation in Education/Lost Prizes International

ISSN

2291-7179 (imprimé)

2563-6871 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Delgado, J. (2022). Film's Transformative Potential with Gifted Adolescent Girls. *International Journal for Talent Development and Creativity*, 10(1-2), 193-203. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1099952ar>

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# 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.

Teachers and counselors may wish to use pre- and post-test measures and less formal interviews with students to better understand if guided viewing is helping their students. The Child and Adolescent Perfectionism Scale (Flett et al., 2016) is one self-assessment measure students may complete if teachers or counselors are concerned about perfectionism, for example. Students may take the Healthy Kids Survey (Hanson & Kim, 2007), a self-assessment used for understanding student health risks and their school environment. The elementary school module monitors both environmental and internal resilience assets and serves as a potential tool for teachers and counselors concerned with their students' resiliency. The Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (Olweus, 2007) is another self-assessment available for teachers and counselors to use with students who have or are experiencing bullying. The Revised BVQ (Olweus, 1996) uses 38 questions to measure involvement and attitudes toward bullying, and school climate. A definition of bullying is included to start the questionnaire, two global measures within the questionnaire deal with occurrence of being bullied and taking part in bullying within a certain time frame, and follow up questions about verbal, physical, and social forms of bullying, including exclusion, spreading rumors, indirect, sexual, and racist forms to help estimate the prevalence (Lee & Dewey, 2009; Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

## General suggestions for using guided viewing with gifted and talented students

In this article, a general list of approaches for educators who want to use guided viewing is suggested. Teachers and counselors are also encouraged to continue to provide additional options based upon the film(s) of choice and the group of students with whom they are working. The next section includes specific examples of films to use with gifted and talented girls. A few examples of possible novels to incorporate into discussions are also included after the suggested films. In general, when using films to help young gifted and talented students better understand themselves and their environments and potential challenges, the following suggestions can be helpful. Marsh (2016) suggests that critical reflection is evidenced in which mode or media the students choose to create.

- Choose a character from the film that you relate to or understand. Write a poem, short story, blog, limerick, or song expressing one of the obstacles the character faced and how they coped with the situation. If you do not agree with the way they chose to handle the situation, you may add how you would suggest they overcome the situation in an alternate way.
- Create a role-playing activity such as short play, dramatic scene, interview for radio, television, or podcast, or even an interpretive dance that portrays an important event or turning point in a character of your choice from the film. Be sure to include what the turning point is, how the character dealt with it, and how it affected the rest of the film.
- Create a piece of artwork depicting the character(s) and/or event(s) that was pivotal to your understanding of the film. This can be in the media form of your choice, suggestions include photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, collage, found objects, picture book, or diorama.
- Create a journal or diary of a character of your choice, whether it is a main character or one that observes the events, that follows them throughout the film. Be sure to include important events, their perspective on the event, and how they feel or cope with it.
- Create an alternate prequel or ending for the story. Add or remove a character, change their actions in a way that makes this story more meaningful and hopeful for you and your own beliefs and situation. Explore their feelings and intentions as you describe the new scenes.

## Guided viewing for gifted girls

Four guided viewing examples are suggested for elementary and middle school gifted girls, including: *Encanto* (Bush & Howard, 2021), *Inside Out* (Doctor & Del Carmen, 2015), *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Columbus, 2001) adapted from the book with the same title written by J. K. Rowling. Each can be used within the school curriculum to reinforce numerous curricular objectives while addressing the unique challenges faced by gifted girls (Reis, 2018). More film ideas are included in the Resources section. Teachers may choose to align grade level English Language Arts standards (for writing, speaking and listening, and language standards), as well as Arts and Technology standards throughout their guided discussions and follow-up activities for accountability purposes.

Teachers and counselors can focus on several issues presented throughout the movie that gifted girls face in elementary and middle schools. Understanding the group of students who are involved in the guided discussion will help determine which issues to focus on. Instructors can choose issues to be presented as themes throughout the entire film or use specific segments to highlight one issue at a time. Once this decision has been made, teachers can

create a list of discussion questions or scenes that will facilitate each session. Teachers or counselors can begin discussions with safe or non-threatening questions that enable students to ease into the conversation, then follow up with more sensitive questions targeting the challenging issues faced by the film characters and the students themselves. Students and teachers can work together to problem solve events in films which can translate and empower gifted adolescents to consider different decisions in real-life situations.

### ***Encanto***

The first example of guided viewing is *Encanto*. Adolescent girls may relate to the emotional rollercoaster Mirabel experiences throughout the animated film and compare themselves, peers, or family with members within the Madrigal family. *Encanto* can be used as a guided viewing to discuss intergenerational trauma, displacement, healing, emotional regulation, self-doubt, depression, perfectionism, identity challenges, perceptions of others, “cracks” in relationships with family and community, expectations or roles placed by others or self, and service to others.

A summary of the film can guide the process of working with gifted adolescent girls. The magical realism of *Encanto*, set in Columbia, is about a magical Latin American family infused with real history and culture. In the family Madrigal, everyone was gifted magical powers which help their home and community, except Mirabel. The matriarch, Abuela Alma, holds the family together and received the original miracle, represented by the candle that helps to keep the family and community safe. Tia (aunt) Pepa controls the weather with her often uncontrolled mood and emotions, Tio (uncle) Bruno can see the future and leaves as he believes he is hurting those around him. Cousin Dolores can hear a pin drop but doesn’t always share what she hears, while cousin Camilo can shift his appearance but doesn’t quite know who he is yet, and cousin Antonio speaks to animals. Mama Julieta can heal with her cooking, oldest sister Isabela is the perfect first-born sister who makes flowers bloom anywhere, and older sister Luisa has super strength to carry the family’s burdens, but never complains.

Mirabel is both a disappointment and concern for the family when she did not receive her gift at her ceremony. She is treated differently because of this lack of a gift, even being left out of family photos. Mirabel remains optimistic, creating her own magic through her tenacity, endless love, desire to please and care and empathy for her family and community. She sees each family member for who they are and helps them discover their true gifts as the story unfolds.

As the foundation in the Casita crumbles and cracks, Mirabel takes action to save the family miracle, despite being at odds with Abuela and the fact that no one else sees or believes there is a problem. Mirabel learns that the last vision Bruno experienced before leaving features Mirabel and cracks in the Casita. Soon after, Mirabel discovers Luisa is feeling weak and that Bruno didn’t really leave but is protecting his beloved family from within the Casita walls, patching cracks as they appear. Reluctantly Bruno has another vision for Mirabel, showing the destruction of the Casita, as Mirabel hugs Isabela, provoking her into apologizing to her older sister to save the family. Unfortunately, this does not prevent the inevitable loss of the Casita, the candle’s flame burning out, and an unforgettable confrontation between Mirabel and Abuela. Through reconciliation and acknowledgement of responsibility a new foundation for a stronger family structure and Casita is created and brought back to life with the community’s support and Mirabel’s special doorknob. The animated film ends when Mirabel and Bruno are included in a new family portrait.

Teachers and counselors may guide a discussion group with the following questions:

- Describe each of the characters’ gifts. Why were each of them given their specific gift? What personality traits warrant such a gift? Do the characters have to work at their gifts to keep them special? If you were to receive a gift, what would your gift be? Why? What traits do you have that would make this the right gift for you? Do you think others would choose the same gift for you or see you with that gift? Why or why not? What gifts would you bestow upon each of your family members or friends? What made you choose each of the gifts? Do you think they would agree with your choice?
- Mirabel does not receive a gift. She says, “Gift or no gift, I am just as special as the rest of my family.” In what way is she still special? How do you believe she maintains her belief in self? How do each of the Madrigal family members see and treat Mirabel? How does she react to each of them? How do you think that impacts her self-esteem? Self-worth? How does she see herself fitting into the family? Into the community? How does

she support her family without having a magical power? If you were to give Maribel a gift, what would you choose for her? Why?

- The Madrigal's gifts come with expectations. What expectations are presented when a gift is given? Who is placing the expectations? What happens when the expectations are not met? What expectations are placed on you by your family? Friends? Teachers? Community? Culture? Yourself? What happens to you when you don't "live up" to expectations? Is it similar or different to what happens in the film? What is the worst thing that could happen if you broke expectations? What do you think would be the best thing that could happen?
- As Luisa suggests, the weight of expectations is like a scale, trying to keep it balanced. Do you see the characters in balance? Is there space on their scales for joy? Who is placing the most weight on each character? What do they do when their scales are not balanced? If you were to create a scale for yourself, what would go on each side? Who creates the weight of each object on your scale? What brings you joy? How can you create or maintain balance?
- How do each of the characters react to the pressures of their gifts? Did you learn anything based on the reactions of the characters? How do you react to the different pressures in your life?
- What role do each of the gifts have in the family? Community? How do they work together to create harmony? What happens when harmony is disrupted?
- How do the townspeople treat the family Madrigal? Do they treat those with gifts differently than those without? How does that impact the way Mirabel sees herself? How do they react when the family Madrigal lose their gifts?
- What is "The Violence"? How does it affect the family dynamics? Why would the writers and directors choose to not put a face or give specific details to "The Violence"? By leaving it faceless, who does it shift the focus to? How does that impact the story line? In the end of the film, Abuela learns she cannot pretend threats do not exist, how does she learn to face them?
- The yellow butterfly is a predominant symbol found throughout the movie. What does it mean to the Madrigal family? To the Latinx culture? What symbol would you choose for your family? Is there a symbol that means something to your culture?

Specific follow-up activities to this guided viewing may focus on a specific character, theme, trait they connected with or wish to explore further. Students may choose to explore cultural or family expectations or values and how those influence the decisions we make, or they may find value in researching their own family history. Students may also venture into the history of a country, investigating "The Violence" in Columbia. Mirabel blames Abuela for the miracle dying and Abuela blames Mirabel, students may choose to write an alternative to this confrontation, whether it is no longer a confrontation but a heart-to-heart discussion or an alternative outcome. This film also lends itself to many creative musical and visual arts projects. Students may choose a specific character to write a song about, or they may choose to create a diorama, multimedia presentation, or graphic illustration to show what is behind their magical door. A student may create their own door or room for their own gift they chose for themselves. They may want to create a dual portrait of how they see themselves and what they perceive others to see of them or perhaps a scale with representations of what they perceive as expectations they have on their plates and how they try to balance them.

### ***Inside out***

The next example of guided viewing is *Inside Out*. Adolescent girls may relate to the emotional upheaval Riley experiences while feeling similar emotions watching the animated film. *Inside Out* can, for example, be used to discuss feelings and emotional regulation, self-doubt, identity challenges, strains in relationships with family and friends, depression, and stressors this specific group may face.

Eleven-year-old Riley is torn from her midwestern life, filled with happy "core" memories that power her personality, to San Francisco where everything is new and different. It's not at all a fantastic new beginning. Riley is guided by her feeling characters (Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger and Disgust) that live inside her mind, also known as Headquarters. Riley must navigate through disheartening events and upheaval as she learns to regulate her emotions, self-advocate, and accept her new life. Riley puts on a brave face at the beginning, staying the positive and happy girl her parents know and love. As the obstacles keep coming, including a disappointing house without their belongings, her dad being pulled away from the family (working longer hours), a broccoli covered pizza, and then crying in front of her classmates on her first day, Riley's struggles increase. The well-balanced adolescent

Riley is losing control of her emotions. In Headquarters, Joy tries to keep Sadness from affecting Riley's memories anymore but is unfortunately sucked into Riley's long-term memory, leaving Fear, Anger and Disgust in charge of her personality. Riley then starts crumbling as she becomes apathetic with the chaos in Headquarters and follows Anger's bright idea of running away. Joy and Sadness get back to Headquarters just in time for Sadness to reinstall the core memories, prompting Riley to return home and admit her struggles to her family. Joy learns the importance of Sadness and, working together, they build new memories that hold both joy and sadness, helping Riley accept her life in San Francisco. The movie ends with the feeling characters beginning to understand how the events that have troubled Riley do not result in singular feelings but rather, that they all work together. As this process emerges, Riley continues to grow and build her personality.

Below are examples of discussion questions for the movie *Inside Out* that teachers and counselors may use to explore with a group of gifted girls:

- How does Riley feel about her move to San Francisco? Why?
- Riley puts on a brave face for her family in the beginning and tries to relieve some stress they feel by playing trash hockey. What are some other activities she could pursue to relieve stress?
- Riley feels she must keep smiling through her struggles, until it becomes too much, when Joy and Sadness are absent from Headquarters. What does this tell you about her character? Would you describe this characteristic as positive, negative, both, or neither? Explain your thinking.
- Riley's first day of school is a struggle. What could she have done to prepare herself for this event? What personal strategies might have helped her to overcome this situation in a more positive way? What do you do to cope with stress or when something does not go the way you hope or expect it to go?
- Take a close look at each of the feeling characters. How do they embody the feelings they are portraying? Are there any stereotypes showcased with the characters? Is there anything you would change about the feelings, the way they look or act?
- Joy is the main emotion running Riley's life. How does she feel about each of the other feeling characters? How does Joy solve problems in the beginning of the film? In the end? How did Joy change throughout the film? Why did the creators make Joy the main feeling character? How would the film have changed if one of the other feelings were in charge?
- Sadness is the other main feeling showcased throughout the film. How does she affect the other characters, the memories? How do the other feelings treat Sadness? How does this change throughout the film? How has Sadness grown as a character as the film progressed? What is the significance of Sadness to the plot? How would the story be different if Sadness were not a main character?
- Bing Bong is a unique imaginary friend from Riley's past who helps Joy and Sadness through Long Term Memory Storage. Why does Bing Bong choose to help Joy and Sadness? What character traits does Bing Bong have that make him an integral part of Joy's growth and understanding of Sadness? In the end, Bing Bong is willing to sacrifice himself for Joy. Why would he do that? How would the story have turned out if Bing Bong chose to stay in the wagon with Joy? How would the film be different if there were no Bing Bong?

Follow-up activities to the viewing of this film may include helping gifted girls to select a focus for their writing, artwork, or role-play on one of the feeling characters, doing an in-depth character study on how one character impacts the story line, or considering what the story would be like without one of the main characters. For example, what if there were no Joy? Do some individuals lose joy over time? They may want to create their own artistic interpretation of one or each of the feeling characters. Another alternative would be to focus on Mom or Dad or other family members to consider any issues they may be facing during this same time frame. They could also be asked to write a summary of a prequel or sequel to the film. What happens a year from the time the film ends, or even a decade later? What becomes of Riley? Students may also create a song list or compilation of films that create a certain mood or feeling. They can then use these ideas in a multimedia presentation to showcase their understanding of each of the characters or focus on one character and how they change over time.

### ***Brave***

Educators and counselors may alternatively, or in conjunction with *Encanto* and *Inside Out*, use the movie *Brave* to support gifted girls in a guided discussion about identity, lack of family support, self-doubt, gender stereotyping, independence, and cultural expectations. Smart girls may connect with Merida, a headstrong and skilled princess who is determined to carve her own destiny. The 16-year-old despises the lessons her mother,

Queen Elinor, is bestowing upon her while pressuring her to embody her princess duties and is unwilling to succumb to her clan's age-old betrothal traditions. Merida competes for her own hand in the Highland games, besting her suitors and embarrassing the clans, including her own, but especially her mother. Queen Elinor and Merida fight over Merida's future, tearing their bond and the tapestry. Merida rides away angry and upset and follows the whisps into the woods. There Merida finds a wood carving witch willing to conjure up a spell that will change her mother and therefore her fate.

Merida turns her mother into the monstrous bear she often feels she is and now must deal with the consequences. Merida has a big task of teaching Queen Elinor survival skills and in doing so they both end up understanding each other in ways they never had before. To break the spell, Merida and Queen Elinor must "mend the bond torn by pride" before a permanent change occurs. This journey changes them both in unexpected ways, as Merida learns some of her most renowned strengths come from her mother's love and teachings; accepting responsibility for her actions. She also begins to understand the importance of reconciliation to preserve relationships. Queen Elinor learns the importance of following our hearts, writing our own stories, and begins to understand that the story will unfold in its own time. Both characters learn compassion, the value of different perspectives, and how to work together toward a common goal.

Listed below are discussion questions teachers and counselors may use to engage gifted adolescent girls in group conversations after viewing the film or selected segments of the film.

- Compare and contrast Queen Elinor, King Fergus, and Merida's viewpoints on: Merida shooting a bow and arrow, princess duties, betrothal, fate/destiny/traditions, and family. How do these differing viewpoints affect the other characters in the story?
- What role do the three princes play in the movie? What is their relationship like as triplets? How does Merida compare herself to them? Describe their sibling relationship. How would the story be different without the triplets?
- How might outsiders view the actions of Merida? Queen Elinor? Why does the audience perceive them in these ways? Why would the creators choose to portray these characters in this way? What would the story be like if they were different?
- How do Merida and Queen Elinor perceive each other's actions? Do they understand each other and why they take the actions they do? What could they do to try to understand where the other person is coming from?
- How does Merida's "peace offering" (enchanted cake) to her mother make you feel? How would you describe Merida's intentions? Reflect upon Merida's intentions, have you ever done something with similar intentions? Would you suggest Merida try a different approach? If Merida used your suggested approach, how would her story have changed?
- Merida wants her mother to "get right" in her decisions about a potential marriage. What does she mean by "get right?" Do you agree with what Merida is doing here? Why or why not?
- What is the significance of the whisps? Why is Merida willing to follow the whisps but not her mother? Is there anyone that you hold in high regard which you would put their opinions and guidance above others? Why or why not?
- What role does Angus play for Merida? Do you have anyone or anything in your life that plays a similar role? What makes Angus for Merida or the person/thing in your life so important? What would your life be like without them?
- Merida has a certain idea about what her destiny holds for her while her mother has a very different expectation. Merida is willing to try many things to change her fate. Is fate/destiny fixed? Can you do anything to change or influence this?

Specific follow-up activities for *Brave* include writing a short story or poem about or from the perspective of Mor'du or one of the clans' firstborn sons. Students may also choose to create a piece of artwork showing their traditions or role-play an interview with the wood carving witch. Students may wish to research their own cultural traditions and create an informational writing piece to share their understanding of what they have learned. They may choose to agree or disagree with a cultural tradition and write a persuasive speech sharing this viewpoint. Students may wish to write a letter to their future self, explaining their current situation, what their hopes or goals are, and how they may work to achieve these goals and decide their own fate.

## ***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone***

A final option presented here is *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Completing a character study of Hermione Granger in this film will enable gifted adolescent girls to focus on things they may have originally missed while watching the film for enjoyment. Hermione undergoes a transformation in how she sees herself, but also how the other characters really see her as the film progresses. This character study gives teachers and counselors the opportunity to focus on topics of perfectionism, independence, bullying, book smarts and social smarts, and friendship.

Hermione Granger is a knowledgeable mudblood who is perceived by many of her classmates as a know-it-all and “mental” according to Ron Weasley. She showcases her intelligence, knowledge, and skill of witchcraft in different classes and situations. She fixes Harry’s glasses on the train after Ron’s failed attempt at turning his rat yellow. Hermione knows all the right answers to Professor Snape’s questions directed at Harry, and she knows how to pronounce “leviosa” to get her feather to float, much to the irritation of Ron. She might also be described as bossy, judgmental, and a rule follower. She doesn’t think Ron’s spell on the train is a good spell, she tells Harry to stay off his broom when Malfoy takes off with Neville’s Remembrall, and she is upset when the trio ends up on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor which is forbidden and could get them expelled, which she states, “get us killed, or worse, expelled!”

Once Harry and Ron save her from the troll in the girls bathroom and become friends with her, the perceptions of some of the other characters and audience change. Instead of being considered a know-it-all, Hermione emerges as a problem-solver who is willing to bend the rules, and a leader who has wisdom the other characters need for guidance. She also becomes a true and loyal friend. Hermione comes to Harry’s aid during the quidditch game, setting Professor Snape’s robe on fire. She helps figure out what is hidden under Fluffy and gets Ron out of the Devil’s Snare when he is too panicked to listen to her. Harry and Hermione quibble over who is a better wizard after the chess match that renders Ron unconscious and Hermione expresses self-understanding about how she is book smart and clever. Hermione explains that she has learned there are more important things than being smart, like friendship and bravery, and urges Harry on to his battle of wits with Voldemort.

Teachers and counselors can guide small group discussions with elementary and middle school aged, gifted girls using the following questions:

- Hermione is perceived by some of the characters in the film and by the audience in certain ways, which change as the story progresses. How would you describe Hermione at the beginning of the film? Why do you think the author and producers wanted to portray these feelings about Hermione in the beginning? What purpose does it serve to the plot? If they portrayed her differently, how would it have affected the story line?
- How does Hermione perceive herself throughout the film? Does she see herself in the same ways other characters do? What can cause her perceptions to change? How does one reconcile the difference in her self-perceptions?
- Hermione is book smart. She references things she has read throughout the movie and she prides herself on being knowledgeable. She also struggles at times with friends, being the victim of bullying, and knowing how to ride a broom. How do these conflicts affect Hermione as someone who likes to be good at everything and is she, perhaps, a perfectionist? How does Hermione cope with her struggles? How would you support Hermione if you saw her in one of these situations? Do you have friends like her? Do you ever have the same feelings that she does?
- Why does Harry and Ron’s view of Hermione change? How does their attitude toward Hermione change the perceptions of the other characters and the audience? Why is this a turning point in Hermione’s character? Have you ever had a turning point in your own perceptions of being a smart girl?
- Did Hermione change her actions and character traits as she became friends with Harry and Ron or did the perception of her just change? What parts of Hermione stayed the same? What parts changed? Did any of her values change as a result of their friendship? Have you ever changed your actions and characteristics to fit in with friends? Is it a strength, a weakness, both, or neither to change your actions and traits to fit in with different crowds?

Students may close the guided viewing with choice activities such as writing a song about friendship or a lesson Hermione learned along the way. They may want to collaborate with another student to create a picture book about perceptions and how they affect the way characters act in the presence of different individuals or groups.



They may want to write about one of the challenges Hermione faced and how she overcame it and compare this change to a change in their own lives. They may choose to create a prequel focusing on what made Hermione who she is with the specific character traits she exhibits. Students may choose to create a piece of artwork that displays their understanding or feelings about friendship or bullying.

These three animated films and one fantasy film have many themes in common including relationships, expectations, perceptions of others, uncertainty, and emotional rollercoasters. These movies may be used in any combination, alone, or in conjunction with one or more novels featuring similar topics. Here are a few suggested follow up book titles that have similar themes that may help continue conversations with students. *When You Trap a Tiger* (Keller, 2020) brings Korean folklore to life with magical realism. Lily's family moves to a new state to take care of her sick grandmother and family secrets are revealed. Through this journey, Lily's courage and self-awareness help her find her voice. *Black Girl, White School: Thriving, Surviving and No, You Can't Touch My Hair. an Anthology* (Clarke, 2020) is a collection of poems, anecdotes, and entries on things from friendship, motivation, racism, to self-esteem and hair. This non-fiction book was created to support Black girls in primarily white schools, but it also provides a real-life perspective that adolescent girls can learn about diversity, inclusion, and empathy. Kelly's *Hello, Universe* (2020) weaves together four characters' perspectives from the same neighborhood, they barely know each other, that is until a prank pulls them together. This story uses humor and an inventive plot to help the characters who face their own struggles, confront bullying, relationships, and self-acceptance. *Kat and Meg Conquer the World* (Priemaza, 2017) showcases a unique friendship built between Kat and Meg through a year-long science project. Kat has anxiety which makes it difficult for her to talk to new people while Meg wishes she had more friends, but her ADHD tends to push people away. *Ungifted* (Korman, 2014) is a story about Donovan Curtis, an impulsive character, who ends up in the "wrong" place, a school for the gifted and talented. He feels like an imposter, he's not like everyone else there, and he has to learn to use his unique gifts before he is "discovered". This novel allows students to take a closer look at finding out who they are, how they fit into their environments, and what they can contribute.

A final literary suggestion for books to use with some or all of these films is the trio of graphic novels by Shannon Hale about her real-life struggles in her elementary years with *Real Friends* (2017), in 6<sup>th</sup> grade with *Best Friends* (2019), and again in 8<sup>th</sup> grade with *Friends Forever* (2021). Friends, frenemies, family relationships, mental health, bullying, misfits, insecurities, underdogs, and finding oneself are explored within these stories. All of these topics can be explored along with similar films and discussion questions that accompany some of the films discussed earlier.

## Conclusion

Utilizing films to engage gifted adolescent girls in guided discussions has been in practice and researched for over three decades (Hébert, Long, & Neumeister 2001; Kangas et al., 2018; Milne & Reis, 2000; Newton, 1995). Teachers and counselors can approach sensitive topics and issues faced with this special population of students in a safe and reflective atmosphere through the use and viewing of contemporary and relevant films. A positive response may evolve as the students process through the four stages of identification, catharsis, insight, and application providing counselors and teachers an educational opportunity to support the social and emotional growth of their students. Elementary and middle school adolescents may find alternative perspectives and solutions to personal issues showcased within a film. Guided viewing of films not only influences our emotional lives and offers safe, educational and even therapeutic potential but also presents the opportunity for gifted girls to explore sensitive topics in a safe environment. These opportunities may also encourage these young women to pursue additional reading to further examine their experiences. Adding this technique to teachers' and counselors' toolboxes may be beneficial for their students' well-being and emotional support.

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## Resources

Teachers and counselors may also utilize these films, understanding the importance of knowing their students and being sensitive to their age, situation, the community and school values.

### *Akeelah and the Bee* (Atchison, 2006)

Akeelah struggles with her attendance, grades and dealing with her father's death. The spelling bee is not her first choice of activities, but with the threat of detention, Akeelah reluctantly joins where she finds friendship, a mentor, and her self-worth. A non-stereotypical portrayal of African Americans creates the backdrop for 11-year-old Akeelah to inspire young girls who deal with self-esteem, stigmas, and overcoming obstacles.

### *A Little Princess* (Cuarón, 1995)

Perseverance, creativity, individuality, and self-worth are at the forefront of this film. Sara goes to boarding school, with a strict headmistress and must learn to overcome her unexpected change in status. From her father sparing no expense for her happiness to becoming a servant, Sara remains positive, kind, and creative. *A little Princess* provides the backdrop for conversations about staying true to yourself, perseverance in times of struggle and grief.

### *Black* (Bhansali, 2005)

A childhood illness creates a black world where Michelle cannot hear, see, or speak and as her parents try to protect her from the real world, she becomes unsettled and violent. Debraj Sahay is hired to teach Michelle, bringing light and a bond between two strong-willed individuals. Overcoming fear, obstacles and stigma, Michelle and *Black* may be the discussion basis for students struggling with their own fears and obstacles to learning and self-regulation.

### *Fly Away Home* (Ballard, 1996)

Dealing with the loss of her mother, Amy moves across the world to live with her father at 13. She is miserable and living with her father she barely knows. Things start to look up for her when she finds an abandoned nest of goose eggs. Amy must take care of her goslings and find a way to get them to a winter home. Love, loss, family, and ingenuity become the talking points for this film.

### *Hercules* (Clements & Musker, 1997)

While Hercules has superhuman strength, he is not immune to bullying in school. Hercules goes on a quest to find where he came from and become a "true" hero. He learns about himself, sacrifice, friendship, and love. This cartoon is more appropriate for younger students who may be experiencing bullying. Teachers and counselors can open lines of communication about what bullying looks like, feels like, and how Hercules deals with this, and in turn how the students can use similar strategies in their own lives.

### *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016)

One strong-willed Polynesian chief's daughter, Moana is prepared to save her village and return a stone to the goddess of creation. In her quest, she runs into the demigod, Maui, who reluctantly helps Moana. They both learn a lot about themselves, friendship, hope, and heart. *Moana* is a popular animated film that allows young girls to see the power in understanding themselves, working against the odds, lack of family support, and setting out to achieve goals. Teachers and counselors may use this film to engage students in self-esteem and friendship conversations, and goal setting sessions.

### *Mona Lisa Smile* (Newell, 2003)

Traditional women's roles are questioned when Watson begins teaching at Wellesley College. She encourages her students to think beyond the right man and marriage while exposing them to modern

ideas and art, while fostering friendships and becoming a mentor to many girls. These ideas are too modern for Wellesley and Watson decides to leave the school and explore Europe. Gifted adolescent girls who are questioning their own roles and creativity may learn just as much from Watson as her own college students. Teachers and counselors may explore the idea of gender roles, artistic expression, and learning to be true to yourself.

*The Princess Diaries* (Marshall, 2001)

Mia is just an average teen who experiences many challenges in school. Her world turns upside down when she learns of her heritage, being a princess, and an heir to the throne of Genovia. She was not only being bullied at school, but now her grandmother doubts her. Mia overcomes these struggles with a makeover and hard work, only to realize it doesn't matter what people think of her, but rather she should be who she is regardless of other's opinions. While this is a fantastical story, students may relate to feeling inadequate in the eyes of others, experience bullying, and need support in finding the message that you should not change yourself to please others.

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