



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

*to strengthen teaching in public schools®*

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2018 Volume III: Adaptation: Literature, Film and Society

---

## **Filmic Adaptations of Mid-Century Bildungsromans Using *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar***

Curriculum Unit 18.03.11, published September 2018  
by Tara Waugh

“I felt dull and flat and full of shattered visions.” -- Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

“If there’s one thing I hate, it’s the movies. Don’t even mention them to me.” -- J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

### **Introduction**

---

My students are selfish. Or self-involved. Probably both. I can write this because I understand it. This is the time of their life where they are figuring out their identities, their beliefs, their goals, and struggling with the constant contradictions and societal expectations.

My students are also bursting with creativity, eager to make things their own, and have their voices heard. In a world where images can be controlled, filtered, and uniform and where they feel they are constantly told what to do and how to do it, they are ready to figure things out on their own, tell their own stories, and make their individual mark on the world.

Knowing this about my students, I want to marry their exploration of self with their incredible vision and interpretation of the world. I will use the art of adaptation to help my students to translate their vision of a coming-of-age text to a modern film that not only is faithful to the original text, but transports the relatable themes for modern teenage audiences, giving the modern teenage voice a chance to scream their truth.

## Teaching Situation and Content Objectives

---

I teach at a magnet school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It has a diverse student body, ranging from those students who help support themselves and their families to those who are extremely wealthy. Specifically speaking, at Booker T. Washington High School, our current student body is comprised of 35% African American, 36% Caucasian, 3% Asian, 13% Hispanic, 9% Multi-Race, and 4% American Indian with 38% free and reduced lunch. My classroom reflects this diversity. Also, the two classes I teach, Pre-AP English II IB-MYP (focus on World Literature) and AP Language and Composition (focus on American Literature), have students with ranging abilities, so it is important that I differentiate and scaffold my instruction, as well as build in some flexibility for those students who need it. This unit will be written for my AP Language and Composition class, but I feel like the information and texts will be useful for other grade levels as well and is not only appropriate for an English classroom, but for a Film classroom too.

Although AP Language and Composition courses are typically focused on nonfiction, I like to bring at least three to four novels into the classroom to help aid in analysis skills. My students secretly get excited when I say we are going to read a novel, as they sit up straighter in their desks and start asking me all kinds of questions: What is it about? Pause. Who is it by? Pause. How long is it? Groan. This secret excitement is seen in the way they devour the book at the beginning; however, despite the initial interest, the excitement wanes if they aren't being constantly entertained. So the question I always ask myself is how can I keep that initial interest sustained? What activities can I have students do that will motivate them and continue their in-depth analysis? The answer lies within finding a text that they can relate to, giving them a distinct challenge, developing strategies and activities that allow students' ideas and creativity to shine, and using film and technology. This is how I will keep their interest. This is how I will further their critical thinking skills.

Wanting to find a text they can relate to, I chose a bildungsroman for this unit. According to The Oxford Companion to English Literature, a bildungsroman is defined as "an 'education-novel'... [and] relates the experiences of a youthful protagonist in meeting the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood."<sup>1</sup> This definition also explains that these "'coming-of-age' novels, typically develop themes of innocence, self-knowledge, sexual awakening, and vocation."<sup>2</sup> Teenagers love reading about people going through issues similar to those that they are going through, so *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar* seemed perfect choices.

I also know depression is ubiquitous among teenagers; they either have suffered from it, are suffering from it, or know people who are depressed. It's real, it's palpable, and it's everywhere. In Jean M. Twenge's 2017 book *iGen* there is scientific data showing that the rates of depression for teenagers and young adults is on the rise. She writes that "overall, more and more college students are struggling with mental health issues"<sup>3</sup> and notes that in a 2016 study, students indicated major increases in "feeling overwhelmed (increasing 51%)... and (perhaps most troubling) feeling depressed (increasing 95%, or nearly doubling)."<sup>4</sup> So for this unit, it was imperative for me to choose bildungsromans that dealt with not only with a coming-of-age story, but ones that deal directly with depression and unhappiness to help students confront these issues and know that they are not alone. *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar* both fit these criteria, and with the *13 Reasons Why* culture that my students are living in, these books might generate true interest. Though both these literary works are dated and might not completely resonate with modern teens today for they both predate the internet and the use of smartphones, their themes of depression, identity, and fitting into society are timeless.

After considering the content of the novels, I think about creating interest that can be sustained for the iPhone and SnapChat generation that I am teaching. If my students aren't on their phones, then they are talking about movies or *Netflix* shows. Considering this, I want to combine the chosen bildungsromans with their passion for movies, media, and technology by having them create a modern adaptation of the novel they read by filming a movie scene or trailer for their final project. Robyn Seglem, author of "YA Lit, Music and Movies: Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom," writes, "Embedding media within the language arts curriculum will not only teach students the critical thinking skills needed to interpret the onslaught of media messages, but will also allow teachers to use the media to teach and motivate students in the areas of reading and writing."<sup>5</sup> This solidifies why it is important to include media in the classroom. As an extra added bonus Seglem points out "that understanding the more popular media texts that engage student interest can help educators ...[better] understand their students."<sup>6</sup> So by using popular media outlets and technology, students will hopefully be more invested in the unit and as a teacher, I will better understand and see my students' world and reality because they will be showing me their modern interpretation of their old-school bildungsroman, using literary themes to make sense of their own lives -- the English teacher's dream. In the end, using film in the classroom will be a motivational tool and encourage analytical skills.

## Unit Content

---

### Guiding Questions

Do these works from the 1950s-1960s share commonalities with today's students' anxieties and experiences as they navigate their coming of age and can these "dated" pieces relate to their own truth and to the modern world?

### The Language of Film

Before we get involved in reading our novels, it is important to introduce students to film terminology and teach them to look at movie trailers or movie clips with a critical eye. In John Golden's book *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*, it is suggested that teachers go about using movies in the wrong order. Golden writes, "We tend to read a written text and then watch its counterpart on film, but what this book is suggesting is that we reverse the order; use a film clip to practice the reading and analytical skills that we want our students to have and then turn to the written text."<sup>7</sup> This is exactly what I want to do; start with film and then turn to the text. Students are much more enthusiastic about analyzing a movie, but the skills of analyzing text are one and the same. Linda Costanzo Cahir, in *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, compare literature and film when she writes, "Literature and film composition, unlike a painting, for example, both comprise a series of constantly changing images."<sup>8</sup> She then mentions how analyzing a film is much like analyzing a text where she compares the film frame to a word and film sequences to syntactical structure.<sup>9</sup> The lightbulb goes off and this makes sense to me. For example, I might use the sentence from Plath's *The Bell Jar*, "[The rain] flew straight down from the sky in drops the size of coffee saucers and hit the hot sidewalks with a hiss that sent clouds of steam writhing up from the gleaming, dark concrete."<sup>10</sup> When doing a close reading, we might focus on the words "hiss," "writhing," and the image of the "gleaming, dark concrete." I would ask students to connect this to the tone or theme of the novel. Likewise, when viewing *The Girl Interrupted* movie trailer, I might pause on a frame where the six patients

from Claymore mental asylum are breaking into the office that contains their personal files and have students analyze the arrangement of characters, the lighting, and camera angle and then connect these components to the tone and theme of the film. Since “film and literature have aesthetic equivalents in methods and style”<sup>11</sup> and as a teacher, I understand the importance of teaching terminology when analyzing a written text, I now realize that it is just as important to give my students the same analytical tools when discussing or considering film. So using either a rolled up piece of paper, as Golden suggests in his book, or even their own phones, the unit begins with defining and demonstrating the different type of shots, angles, lighting, camera movement. This is described in great detail below in classroom activities.

After familiarizing them with the movie analysis lingo, I will show a few movie trailers or clips and demonstrate how to break these examples down using our newly acquired terminology. I will show the movie trailers for *Igby Goes Down*, *Rushmore*, *Girl Interrupted*, and *Revolutionary Road*. I chose these trailers because they seem to be inspired by these two books and carry similar themes. It could also be useful to also have students study clips from the films of different iconic filmmakers (such as Hitchcock, Wes Anderson, etc.) to help aid in discussion of mise-en-scène. For example, I might show frames from Wes Anderson’s *The Royal Tenenbaums*, specifically when Richie, Margot, and Chas are introduced as children. Each frame, Richie with his tennis balls, Margot with her plays, and Chas with his business suit, without any dialogue beautifully begin to show who these kids are.<sup>12</sup> I would walk students through each frame and discuss how Anderson uses mise-en-scène to develop characterization. While viewing these various film examples, Seglem also suggests having students “tak[e] notes over the events of the plot, making observations about characters and their motivations, noting the effect music has on each scene, and writing down various other observations. At the conclusion of the movie, students... reflect on how the theme is developed in the movie.”<sup>13</sup> Students will do this same type of analysis on the chosen movie trailers or clips, focusing on music, lighting, camera angles, editing, mise-en-scène, etc. Again, this process should be familiar to them, as film analysis is akin to literary analysis and students will have already been introduced with the concept of annotation. This movie trailer and clip analysis allows students to recognize the importance of film techniques and how to use these to best represent their concept and adaptation of the novel when it comes to their final project of creating their own movie clip or trailer of the coming-of-age novel they chose. This is where their adaptation brainstorming will begin, noticing how other filmmakers affect their audience-- what works and what doesn’t.

### **Reading and Analyzing Their Chosen Bildungsroman**

This unit focuses on two mid-century bildungsromans, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar*, and students will get to choose which novel to read. Choice is important in the high school classroom because it gives students ownership of the material. I want to present the final project of creating a modern adaptation and filming a scene or creating a movie trailer before students read their chosen book so that when they begin reading, they can annotate it as a filmmaker would, focusing on possible scenes and images to use in their final project. In *Literature into Film*, Cahir reminds readers, “The literary text is strip-mined for the riches the filmmakers can use to produce their own vision of the work.”<sup>14</sup> Even though their modern adaptation will be its own thing, it should be “fertilely tethered to its literary parent.”<sup>15</sup> This should be highlighted as teachers go over ways to help students annotate their chosen novels, using the filmmaker annotations strategy showcased below. It should also be mentioned to students that as they are reading, they should be brainstorming all the possibilities for their modern adaptation, creating adaptation mind maps described later. Having them do this will instinctively make them take the text they are reading and instantly make connections to their own world, my ultimate goal for this unit.

As they read, students should also consider critically examining the point of view and development of these two characters, Holden and Esther -- looking at race, gender, and socioeconomic status and what these novels offer in terms of criticism of the period in which they were written.

### **The Catcher in the Rye: Historical Context and Analysis**

Published in 1951, J.D. Salinger uses the narrative frame of being in a mental institution as Holden Caulfield recounts his story of his deteriorating mental state two days before Christmas in 1949. Readers hear about how he gets kicked out of Pencey Prep boarding school and his judgements of his classmates and teachers in his school and follow him to New York City as he drinks, smokes, and cusses his way through the city streets. He checks into a hotel, goes to a nightclub, has a violent encounter with prostitute and her pimp all the while giving his unique, pessimistic, funny, blatantly honest views on girls, sex, phoniness, death, and a variety of other things teenagers deal with. As he increasingly becomes more depressed, we gain more insight into his thoughts of death and suicide. The next day, Holden reaches out to an old girlfriend Sally who disappoints him, and then he sneaks into his own house to see his little sister Phoebe who seems to be more adult than Holden is. Finally, he visits an old English teacher whom Holden trusts. Mr. Antolini offers him a place to stay for the night, but he wakes up in the middle of the night to find his teacher patting his head. Fleeing that unusual situation, he is confused as what to do next and plans to "go west," but not before he says good-bye to his sister Phoebe. As the book continues, we realize how mentally and physically sick Holden is, but in the end, we see him in a recovery state, telling us this story from an asylum, reflecting on his experience and giving us a glimmer of hope.

After our quick study of the language of film, students will do a little individual research into the historical context of the novel, information on Salinger himself, and on the novel's history of being banned to help orient students and to help them understand the characters, language, and significant themes in the book. In "Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*," Sarah Graham writes, "It is important to acknowledge that he is sensitive and kind as well as rebellious, with a keen sense of right and wrong. In many ways Holden is a product of his time and place... and he faces the uncertainties of being young in post-war America with insight and anxiety."<sup>16</sup> Students will find that this time in the 1950s was fraught with the Cold War, McCarthyism, the rise of the suburban status quo and conventional family values, the birth of teenage culture, and the importance of conformity.<sup>17</sup> I might even direct students to the "Shy Guy" video that was shown in schools during the 1950s so that they can get a sense of the culture. Students should understand that "Holden's willingness to confront taboo subjects"<sup>18</sup> is what makes this text so controversial. Holden's rejection of the typical masculine stereotypes, openly sneering at the idea of working a job that he would hate and doing mundane things like going to the movies (hopefully, the irony will not be lost on the students), should be reinforced as well. This will be echoed and be a point of comparison for those students reading *The Bell Jar*.

### **The Bell Jar Background: Historical Context and Analysis**

A representation of mental instability and published under a pseudonym in 1963, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*'s offers another teenage point of view. Protagonist Esther Greenwood experiences a mental breakdown while she questions societal expectations and contradictions of the 1950s. The novel seems to be divided into two parts. The first being about her spiral into depression and uncertainty during a New York City month-long internship at a fashion magazine. She is an intelligent, overachieving, curious, funny girl whose family is of lower socioeconomic status trying to navigate her world, while fixating on the paradoxical disparities between men and women. During this New York City internship, she meets new friends like Doreen, a southern belle with a promiscuous side, has a mentor named Jay Cee whom she just cannot impress, tells us about her

hypocritical, on-again-off-again boyfriend Buddy, the quintessential 1950s, chauvinistic man, and ends this first part by describing her experience of an attempted rape. This seems to be the tipping point for her spiraling depression. The second part of the book focuses on her decline into depression especially after not getting accepted to a much-desired summer writing program, her suicide attempts - the last being almost successful, her experience in a mental asylum, the death of her friend Joan, and her eventual recovery.

After our quick study of the language of film, students will be required to do a little of individual research about Sylvia Plath, finding out that this novel is semi-autobiographical and that Plath did eventually commit suicide in 1963, and about the world of the 1950s, focusing on the role of women and societal expectations during that time period. In "Individual Mobility and the Sense of 'Deadlock': A Cultural Materialist Analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*," Azhar Noori Fejer and Rosli Talif describe the world of the 1950s as a time when "political and social ideologies ... were encouraging young women to seek a husband, take care of children, and maintain biological roles."<sup>19</sup> The authors continue to depict a woman's role in this time period by using Betty Friedan's description of how the media created this image of the "'happy housewife heroine.'"<sup>20</sup> The perfect woman was seen as "healthy, beautiful, educated, and as having no concerns except for her husband, children, and home. She has supposedly found true feminine fulfillment."<sup>21</sup> This powerful image did not paint a truthful picture for most women. A majority of women were unhappy with the monotony of being a housewife and doormat for their husbands, leaving them crestfallen and fed-up.<sup>22</sup> During this time period, "scientific literature" concluded that feminism was "'a deep illness' and education for women could only bring trouble: 'the more educated a woman is, the greater chance there is of sexual disorder.'"<sup>23</sup> This is essential for students to recognize because it explains so much of Esther's "struggle for self-determination and power in the face of antagonistic social forces"<sup>24</sup> and leads them into a greater understanding of her character.

### **Adaptation--To Adapt or Not to Adapt: That is the Question**

When teaching students about adaptation, it's important to let them know that "The adaptation is a new original. The adaptor looks for the balance between preserving the spirit of the original and creating a new form,"<sup>25</sup> and that "by its very nature, adaptation is a transition, a conversation, from one medium to another."<sup>26</sup> I want students to understand that their final project is their modern interpretation of a book that is a product of the generation it was written in. How can students stay true to the story line, but make it more relatable to teens today? This is their challenge.

### **Theory of Adaptation**

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as "A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging. An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work. Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative --a work that is second without being secondary."<sup>27</sup> This is at the core of this unit and so important to convey to my students. I envision having discussions centering on what an adaptation really is and how it differs from plagiarism, song covers or music sampling, and prequels or sequels as Hutcheon brings up in her book.<sup>28</sup> As we go through this discussion of adaptation, I want students to understand that "An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise."<sup>29</sup> This is what I am asking them to do during this unit -- to breathe contemporary life into these works that may have already become difficult to relate to and, through their modern translation, bring comfort to teens today that they are not alone in feeling dissatisfied and depressed in this hypocritical world. I want students to see that literature, no matter how

obsolete and old-fashioned it may seem, can be made relevant with the help of adaptation. Hutcheon writes, "Adaptation is how stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places."<sup>30</sup>

Another quality I find intriguing about the idea of adapting these mid-century coming-of-age novels is that "adaptation implies change. It implies a process that demands rethinking, reconceptualizing, and understanding how the nature of drama is intrinsically different from the nature of all other literature."<sup>31</sup> This is where students are going to problem-solve, think critically, and put their own modern stamp on this project. For example, think about the Baz Luhrmann's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* where, although he keeps the Shakespearean language, he sets the film in modern day Verona Beach, an obvious nod to California's Venice Beach, where the characters drive cars and have guns instead of swords. One important aspect of adaptation to remind students of is that "the nature of condensing involves losing material. Condensing often includes losing subplots, combining or cutting characters, leaving out several of the many themes that might be contained in a long novel."<sup>32</sup> This is where students need to be aware of a filmmaker's intentionality. What is omitted or added? What is the atmosphere and tone conveyed? What in the story is being sped up or slowed down and why? Who is the filmmaker's intended audience? A filmmaker is very mindful of the changes and decisions that she makes. More importantly, change or translation of an original text is inevitable and scary. Again, I plan on bringing up another recent adaptation using Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* which we will have viewed earlier in the school year and point out some of the changes and decisions he made as he took *Gatsby* out of the 1920s to a more modern, stylized world that still captures the excesses of the roaring twenties. As Seger writes, "Making changes takes a certain amount of courage from the writer, but if writers are unwilling to make some changes in the source material, the transition from literature to drama won't happen."<sup>33</sup> So in order for their final projects to be successful adaptations, students need to be aware of and intentional about the changes they make.

### **Adaptation Challenges with *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar***

In this part of the unit, I will break down the adaptation issues for each novel. For *The Catcher in the Rye*, it would also be important to examine why Salinger never wanted his novel adapted to a movie, specifically looking at the letter he wrote declining the movie rights. I would show this letter to students where he describes Holden as "unactable" and that he "can't legitimately be separated from his own first-person technique."<sup>34</sup> Because there have been no movies made of *The Catcher in the Rye*, I will have students re-examine and look at loosely-based Holden characters like in the movies *Rushmore*, *Donnie Darko*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *Igby Goes Down*. Showing the trailers of these movies, students can critically look at other adaptations to see what worked and what didn't in relation to the adaptation ideas they are toying with. For example, after looking at clips from *Rushmore*, students will see that both Holden and Max Fischer attend a prep school, although Max fiercely loves his school, both try to act older and feign confidence despite their obvious immaturity, and both are authentically and unapologetically themselves. Now Max is not an exact replica of Holden, but students should see how he is derivative of Holden.

For *The Bell Jar*, I will have students analyze clips from the 1979 made-for-TV version and ask themselves if it does the novel justice. There has been some controversy surrounding this film directed by Larry Peerce. According to an article in *The Australian*, Jane Anderson, who claims to be the inspiration for the character of Joan, sued the filmmaker for his suggestive interpretation, showing Joan "making sexual advances to Esther and proposing a suicide pact."<sup>35</sup> Anderson eventually won the case. Another important fact to mention is that Julia Stiles, a famous actor, attempted to adapt the book, but after many years, said, "The difficulty in adapting a novel like this is that so much is established by Esther's interior narrative. On the other hand,

Esther’s visual metaphors and hallucinatory imagination are perfectly cinematic.”<sup>36</sup>

Since both novels’ characters are very much in their own head, another issue I would want my kids to tackle, and this was also Salinger’s and Stile’s argument as well, is how do you capture that on film -- what is the best way to adapt the internal monologues that both these novels develop through their protagonists? Seger writes that “there are many novels, plays, and true-life stories that are simply not commercially viable. They are too difficult to adapt and will resist any changes to make them adaptable.”<sup>37</sup> This is what Salinger believed about his own novel. However, Seger believes that most stories are adaptable -- even unusual stories can be successful.<sup>38</sup> This should give students hope that it can be done. More importantly, I find that high school students really like to try to do something when there is the claim that it can’t be done. The advice that Seger gives is that “the material will often fight the writer... By knowing where and why the material resists the transition, writers and producers are better able to know what material is not worth the effort, and what problems need to be addressed in order to make the adaptation work.”<sup>39</sup> This is definitely something that teachers would need pass on to students when they begin brainstorming for their adaptation.

## Teaching Strategies

---

### Filmmaker notes

The filmmaker is “an interpreter before becoming a creator.”<sup>40</sup> This is essential for students to understand when using this strategy, which allows students to start with the text and begin their analysis and interpretation. In “A Director Prepares: A Visual Script Breakdown,” it is claimed that the first read through should not only concentrate on those “initial powerful ideas that instantly came to mind when reading the written words; the most powerful images..., but also on what the atmosphere is like; the colors, the lighting, the sound.”<sup>41</sup> Considering this and using sticky notes and specific guided questions and topics to focus on to guide their close reading, students should make short, cogent, and organized comments on mood or initial feelings, any songs or music that come to mind, film techniques (shots, angles, lighting, etc.), places, actors. Students could even do quick sketches on their post-it to illustrate a particular shot they see in their heads. The filmmaker notes which will be on sticky notes can be kept in the book or in a notebook, but students should note the page number in both cases. In classroom activities, I will suggest specific scenes for students for the filmmaker annotations. It is important to note that these annotations will be the catalyst for their adaptation mind maps and the building blocks for their final project.

### Adaptation Mind Maps

Seger writes that “setting the style, eliciting a mood, setting the right tone, and shading a scene or action are some of the most difficult aspects of adapting any material to film. These are the areas where adaptations often reach their highest level of art.”<sup>42</sup> Because of this, students really should start brainstorming and figuring out their adaptation style as soon as they begin their filmmaker notes. To develop the concept for their modern translation of their chosen bildungsroman, I will have students use an adaptation mind map. This type of mind map is used for translating a writing style into a filmic style. For example, a student could take the description of Holden’s red hunting hat, draw a picture or print a picture off the internet. From this image, a line would be drawn to a more modern hat style. What would a modern red hunting hat look like -- a red



baseball hat or a red adidas bucket hat? Students could also include characteristics of Holden when he is wearing this hat. This would be conveyed as another branch from the original red hunting cap and include words or images that describe his attitude when the iconic image is described. This is just one avenue a student could take, but keep in mind that there is not a prescriptive process for this and every students' map will be different. However, this method is rooted in images and helps connect ideas together. Using this strategy, students will literally create a map of their adaptation ideas.

### **Persuasive Letter Writing**

Due to the lost art of letter writing, this strategy is important. I have students who don't even know how to address an envelope, let alone write a formal letter, so going over letter writing conventions is a must for my students because writing a formal letter or email will be something they will encounter as an adult. This strategy focuses on teaching the structure of the letter and having students use text-based evidence and the elements of argumentation to ask for the movie rights for their novel and to develop a proposal. Teachers may want to review ethos, pathos, and logos. Students also must consider their audience and must be aware of the author's (their own) purpose: two rhetorical strategies stressed in an AP Language and Composition classroom.

### **Text to Film Translation Multimedia Project**

This strategy takes a text and translates it to a film medium, making use of music, text graphics, and lighting. After developing a plan for their movie clip or trailer, students should use or find technology they are comfortable with. Most will use their smartphones and make use of iMovie, Magisto Video Editor and Maker, Video Mixer Pro, Video Editor AndroMedia or Adobe Premiere clip. Then, students will film and edit a scene from or trailer of their adaptation and share it with other students.

### **Rationale and Reflective Writing**

In connection with their final project, students will be required to write a rationale that explains the choices that were made and to write a reflection that details whether or not they felt those choices were successful in the long run. This strategy provides teachers with insight into the final decisions that were made and allows students to reflect on their process and final product.

## **Classroom Activities**

---

### **Teaching Film Terminology Activity**

First, it is important to have students understand what a shot is. A shot is "the amount of visual information contained within a frame" and "a sustained point of view recorded by the camera."<sup>43</sup> Once they understand this concept, I want to define and demonstrate the different types of shots, such as the long shot, the close-up, and the medium shot. The long shot is where the camera is far away. You can see the whole body in the shot, and typically, these shots are used to show a sweeping setting in a film; think when we are first introduced to The Shire in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The opposite of a long shot is a close-up usually of a face or object that is being focused on. These types of shots help to convey emotion or intensity. Next, there is the medium shot. This shot is between the long shot and close-up and usually show someone from the waist

up and is considered a more neutral shot. I plan on using Golden's paper camera technique to have students experience these shots as we go over the definitions. For example, Golden has student roll up their paper camera tightly so it focuses on another student's face, giving the close-up effect.

After our short discussion of shots, we will move on to camera angles. Camera angles are "where the camera is in relation to the subject."<sup>44</sup> A low angle shot is one where the camera is down below and it looks up on a person or object. The effect of this angle is to make something or someone look "huge, powerful, dominating, and in control."<sup>45</sup> In making something or someone appear "small, weak, powerless, trapped,"<sup>46</sup> you would use a high angle where the camera looks down on its subject. Eye level is exactly as it sounds and is another type of neutral approach. Again, using the paper cameras, I will have students stand on desks or lie on the ground to see what these particular angles look like.

Camera movement is another component to make students aware of. Golden explains, "When the camera pivots along the horizontal axis..., the movement is called a pan."<sup>47</sup> Without leaving their seats, I will have students follow me as I walk across the front of the room and this should demonstrate what this movement is. Next, I would have them use their paper cameras to look me or another student up and down and let them know that this movement is called a tilt and is "an extremely effective way to communicate distance, size, and strength."<sup>48</sup> Then, you have the zoom. Most students should be aware of this type of shot because it's a shot that is frequently done on their phones while using Snapchat. Helping to focus on a particular object, the zoom is when "the focal length of lens changes, thus making the object appear to move closer or further away."<sup>49</sup> Again, using their makeshift cameras, students will be in a long shot position looking at me at the front of the room and slowly tighten their paper camera so that I become in a medium shot position. The last movement to review with students is the tracking shot. A tracking camera movement is where "the camera is attached to a mount that moves on a horizontal axis, along tracks, attached to a motorized cart, or on the back of a moving vehicle."<sup>50</sup> Golden argues that this is the most unique of the movements because "it can enter and actually move us through the imaginary space of the film... We can now go with the action, become a part of it, or even go behind it, instead of merely watching as it passes us by."<sup>51</sup> To demonstrate this movement, Golden has students take their paper camera, or again, students could use their phone camera, and sit on a chair with wheels. While I walk around the room, students will push the chair with wheels as the camera follows me.

Different types of lighting can affect a shot as well. You have high-key, low-key, bottom or side, and front lighting. I would demonstrate high-key lighting, as Golden suggests, by opening up all my blinds, turn on all the lights which students should notice the brightness and lack of shadows.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, low-key lighting, I would turn off all the lights in the room and have only a singular source of light such as a phone light or flashlight, which should create dramatic shadows, have high contrast between light and dark, and give off a certain ominous or mysterious feeling. Keeping the lights off, I would then shine my flashlight underneath my chin to demonstrate bottom lighting and then have someone shine the light from the side of my face for an example of side lighting. Both examples create distortion of the subject, high contrast shadows, and has "the effect of creating characters that may be evil, are hiding something, are morally ambiguous, or are conflicted in some way."<sup>53</sup> For front lighting, take your flashlight and shine it on a student's face which should produce a halo effect and is used to convey innocence and honesty.

Next, I want to introduce two categories to discuss sound. Diegetic sound is the sound that is heard by the characters in the film which includes background noise and dialogue. Nondiegetic sound is the sound that is not meant to be heard by the characters in the film. An example would be a soundtrack song playing in the

opening scene, helping to establish the mood of the film.

Finally, I will introduce the term *mise-en-scène* which includes the artistic aspect and aesthetic of the setting, the arrangement of actors, the lighting, color, and costume.

### **Filmmaker Notes and Mind Map Activity**

Now, when I present this “annotation” of the novel, I plan on calling this filmmaker notes. Because annotating a whole novel can be intimidating for students, I would give my students guidelines to help them through this process. Using sticky notes, I would expect that students have at least three to five important scenes heavily annotated for theme, characterization, imagery, important dialogue, and dynamic, imagistic figurative language, although there might be smaller annotations throughout the novel. I would periodically check these annotations in the two weeks that students are reading their books; this will give students accountability while reading. Their heavily annotated scenes should not only include pointing out these authorial techniques, but should include their initial emotional reaction and commentary and any ideas or images, actors, sounds, songs that come to mind. This will ultimately help them with their final project and again by cleverly disguising literary analysis as filmmaker notes, students should be less resistant to this type of close reading.

Students should do three adaptation mind maps during the course of reading their novel. These mind maps should represent the beginning, middle, and the end and focus on how they are translating this dated novel to the modern teenage audience. I will give topics they can think about as they work through their ideas like setting, actors, music, costumes, tone, film techniques to help create their adaptation mind maps. Ultimately, this mind map technique will be used to figure out their thoughts on their modern adaptation and style of their final project.

It is important to give students questions to guide their filmmaker notes and adaptation mind maps. Linda Seger points out that when adapting a novel to film that “choices need to be made. Among all the themes, which is the one I want to explore? Among all the characters, whom do I consider the most important? Among the myriad plots and subplots, which ones are dramatically worth pursuing?”<sup>54</sup> I will tell students to focus on questions like these as they begin their exploration and analysis of their book. Seglem advises having students consider the following questions: “When you think of your book, what first comes to mind? If you were going to recommend your book to a friend, what specific parts would you describe to convince your friend to read it? What is the underlying theme or message of your book?”<sup>55</sup> I would type these questions out and give these to students as a bookmark so that students have these questions at the forefront as they are making their filmmaker notes and adaptation mind maps.

For students’ filmmaker annotations and mind maps, I will give direction to which scenes in the book could make a dynamic scene to analyze for their modern adaptation movie clip or trailer. Now, obviously, this will be students who need a little direction; students can ultimately choose other scenes that peak their interest or speak to them.

*The Catcher in the Rye* has a wealth of images and scenes that would lend themselves to well to film. Have students pay close attention to the description of Allie’s death in chapter 5, chapter 6 has his fight with Stradlater, when he leaves Pencey and yells “Sleep tight, ya morons!” in chapter 7, chapter 12 has Ernie’s Nightclub, in chapter 13, there is the prostitute scene, the scene in chapter 14 where he gets beat up by Maurice and pretends he is dying, the date with Sally scene in chapter 17, Mr. Antolini scene in chapter 24, the “f--k you” and the carousel scenes in chapter 25. I would also have students pay close attention to the imagery of the red hunting hat, the ducks and Central Park, Allie’s baseball glove, and the juxtaposition of

innocence and impurity.

For *The Bell Jar*, I will direct students to chapter 2 where there is the Lenny and Doreen scene and the bathtub scene, chapters 3 and 4 which contain the overindulgence of caviar at the *Ladies' Day* luncheon and subsequent food poisoning scene, and chapter 9 where Marco attempts to rape Esther, she mindlessly walks through the streets of New York City, and she throws her entire wardrobe out the window. chapter 13 is a rich chapter and is one of the most dramatic because her suicide attempts are described. You have images of her swimming out to sea, her first suicide attempt, her trying to hang herself, going to her father's grave site, and the final almost successful suicide attempt. Chapters 14 and 15 could yield some interesting mental asylum scenes. Chapter 19 is when she finds out her friend Joan has killed herself, chapter 20 when she is talking to Irwin on the phone in the asylum and rejects his chauvinistic advances by exclaiming "Never!"(Go Esther!). Again, this novel is rich with images including the bell jar, the fig tree, mirror reflections, etc., so I will have students pay close attention to these descriptions as they could be useful when creating their final project.

### **Persuasive Letters to Salinger and Plath Activity**

After reading the novel, those students who read *The Catcher in the Rye* should read Salinger's letter to Mr. Herbert explaining why he will never sell the movie rights. During this activity, I would go over the conventions of formal letter writing and addressing an envelope. I will review the concept of ethos, pathos, and logos and identify the rhetorical strategies used in his letter. After analyzing some loosely-based Holden characters mentioned earlier in the unit and solidifying their own adaptations, I would have students write a persuasive letter to Salinger's family asking for the rights of the movie and proposing their film adaptation.

For the students who chose *The Bell Jar*, I will have them review clips from the 1979 adaptation, specifically the opening scene where Esther seems to be thriving, the scene where she parties with Lenny and Doreen, the scene when she throws her wardrobe out of the window and we see her become unhinged, the scene of her almost successful suicide, and finally, the scene where Joan professes her love of Esther and Joan's suicide. After critically analyzing these few scenes, telling them about the trouble Julia Stiles's attempted adaptation, and going over the conventions of letter writing, I will ask them to write a persuasive letter to Plath's family, asking for the rights of the movie and proposing their film adaptation, just like *The Catcher in the Rye* kids.

### **Culminating Activity: Modern interpretations using Movie Trailers, Scenes, and Soundtracks**

Ultimately, I want to challenge my students to create a modern concept and adaptation of their mid-century coming-of-age novel. To showcase their translation, students will have the choice of filming a scene from their movie or a movie trailer and must have an accompanying soundtrack. In groups of three to four, students will take their filmmaker notes and adaptation mind maps and come together to create a final concept for their group adaptation, which may be an amalgamation of their adaptations or they may find that one student's idea really shines. Students will create a plan for their adaptation through informal storyboarding or outline, and then, in class they will film and edit their scene or trailer using the classroom iPads or their own phones. I will suggest that some outside class time should be used to create a stellar product.

Along with their modern adaptation movie clip or trailer, each person in the group will be asked to each pick one song for their chosen novel to design a contemporary soundtrack for their movie adaptation. For each song, students will write one paragraph indicating the artist and title of the song, the chapter and page number where the song would be played, how the song would be used as background music while characters are speaking, as the main sound of a scene, while a character/s is not speaking, as an introduction to a scene,

or transition to another scene. The paragraph will also explain how the song and scene are connected and why that particular song captures the essence of the scene. For this part of the project students can create a Spotify playlist and share with me -- a playlist we could listen to for the rest of the year.

As part of the project or as an enrichment, I do plan to have each student write a rationale and reflection paragraph explaining why they made some of the adaptation choices that they made, who their intended audiences is, and finally, what they felt was successful about their project and what needed improvement.

Each group will make a presentation, showing their trailer or scene and playing snippets of their soundtrack. With the presentation, "An added benefit is that the audience grows interested in the books they did not read."<sup>56</sup> I would hope that this would create interest in the novel they didn't choose to read and that maybe, just maybe they will read that one too.

## Appendix

---

Standards -- Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts -- 11th grade. These standards can be easily cross-referenced to other standards.

11.1.W.2 Students will work effectively and respectfully within diverse groups, demonstrate willingness to make necessary compromises to accomplish a goal, share responsibility for collaborative work, and value individual contributions made by each group member.

The culminating activity requires students to work in diverse groups, collaborating, and combining adaptation ideas to create their movie clip or trailer and to develop a modern-day soundtrack.

11.3.R.1 Students will evaluate the extent to which historical, cultural, and/or global perspectives affect authors' stylistic and organizational choices in grade-level literary and informational genres.

To understand the two novels and their characters, students must do some research and reading about the historical and cultural context to truly grasp the societal pressures in the 1950s and '60s. This will also aid in their adaptation because they will have to compare and contrast modern day context with the past in order to create their translation.

11.3.R.4 Students will evaluate literary devices to support interpretations of texts, including comparisons across text: imagery, tone, symbolism, irony.

Using their filmmaker notes, students will begin to closely read, annotate, and analyze these literary devices to first understand the major themes of these bildungsromans, but this will ultimately help them figure out ways to create their contemporary interpretation.

11.3.W.5 Students will use words, phrases, clauses, and varied syntax to connect all parts of the argument and create cohesion and include a conclusion that follows logically from the information presented and supports the argument.

When students write their persuasive letter to the authors' families asking for the movie rights of the novels,

students will be required to create a logical and convincing argument, along with examples and a solid proposal, to sway their audience.

11.7.R.2 Students will analyze the impact of selected media and formats on meaning.

By watching film clips and trailers and learning the language of film, students will learn to analyze and recognize film techniques and their effects on viewers.

11.7.W.2 Students will construct engaging visual and/or multimedia presentations using a variety of media forms to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence for diverse audiences.

For the final project, students will create their modern adaptation of either *The Catcher in the Rye* or *The Bell Jar* and film a movie scene or trailer using their smartphones, film editing apps, music, and text graphics. Targeting a modern teen audience, students will then present their scene or trailer to the class.

## Resources

---

### Bibliography for Teachers

"Bildungsroman." *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Birch, Dinah. Oxford University Press, 2009. Accessed June 10, 2018. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192806871.001.0001/acref-9780192806871-e-798>.

Cahir, Linda Costanzo. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*. McFarland &, 2006. This book is a great introduction into film as it provides not only terminology and describes film theory, but has a lot of examples for teachers to use in their own classroom.

Conger, Clay. "How Wes Anderson Uses Mise En Scène." *StudioBinder*. June 25, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2018. <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/mise-en-scene/>. This article goes over the variety of ways Anderson uses mise-en-scene and really helps you to understand the concept.

"A Director Prepares: Visual Script Breakdown." *W(A/O)NDERING Filmmaking*. January 03, 2016. Accessed July 10, 2018. <https://waondering.com/2014/08/09/a-director-prepares-visual-script-breakdown/>. This article breaks down various ways a director may approach a text or script and annotate it and begin to translate it to film.

Fejer, Azhar Noori and Rosli Talif. "Individual Mobility and the Sense of "Deadlock": A Cultural Materialist Analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *SAGE Open*, 2014, 4 (3): 1-10. Accessed July 1, 2018. DOI: 10.1177/2158244014547180. A resource that has a wealth of information about the historical and social context of Sylvia Plath's world, as well as some biographical information. This also has detailed analysis of the novel and characters.

Goldberg, Matt. "1957 Letter from J.D. Salinger Explains Why *Catcher in the Rye* Wouldn't Work as a Movie." *Collider*. February 27, 2012. Accessed July 10, 2018. <http://collider.com/catcher-in-the-rye-movie-rejection-jd-salinger/>. This site has a jpeg of the actually typed letter from Salinger to Mr. Herbert explaining why he doesn't want anyone to make a movie of his book. This would be great to project on the board to show students.

Golden, John. *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2001. This is a great resource to teach students the language and film and where I got the ideas to teach about shots, angles,

lighting, etc.

Graham, Sarah. *Salinger's the Catcher in the Rye*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2007. Accessed July 11, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central. This resource not only gives historical and social context, but gives great information about Holden and chapter summaries and analysis.

Hawker, Phillipa. "Kirsten Dunst Film Adaptation of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* Underway." *The Australian*. July 30, 2016. Accessed July 15, 2018.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/kirsten-dunst-film-adaptation-of-sylvia-plaths-the-bell-jar-underway/news-story/a0954b12e51d1fce2a90fac60caa31e9>.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006. This book is helpful in understanding what adaptation really as it moves from one medium to the next.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1991.

Seglem, Robyn. "YA lit, Music and Movies: Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom." *ALAN Review*, 2006, 33 (3): 76-80. Accessed June 5, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v33i3.a.11>. This article has convincing rationale as to why teachers should use film in the classroom and details a great project that she uses -- this inspired the culminating activity for this unit.

Seeger, Linda. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1992. This book really focuses on how to take novels, short stories, plays, and nonfiction stories and turn them into adaptations. It has practical advice for filmmakers (and subsequently our students) making an adaptation.

Shields, David, and Shane Salerno. *Salinger*. Simon & Schuster, 2013. This is documentary that can give teachers more insight into the life of J.D. Salinger.

Twenge, Jean M. *IGEN: Why Today's Super-connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy... -and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What*. Atria Books, 2018. This gives important information and data about teenage depression rising because of cell phones and the use of technology.

Walds, Matthew L. "Psychiatrist Files a Libel Suit over Film of Plath's 'Bell Jar'." *New York Times*, Jan. 14 1987. Accessed June 10, 2018. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/110615026?accountid=15172>. This article will give teachers insight into the controversy surrounding the 1979 movie adaptation of *The Bell Jar*.

## Reading and Viewing Lists for Students

*The Bell Jar*, directed by Larry Peerce. AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1979. Scenes from this made-for TV film will be used as a point of comparison for the novel and as an example of adaptation.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1991.

Shields, David, and Shane Salerno. *Salinger*. Simon & Schuster, 2013. This is documentary that can give students more insight in to the life of J.D. Salinger.

## Notes

---

1. "Bildungsroman." *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Birch, Dinah. Oxford University Press, 2009. Accessed June 10, 2018.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192806871.001.0001/acref-9780192806871-e-798>.
2. Ibid.
3. Jean M. Twenge, *IGEN: Why Today's Super-connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy... -and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What*, 104.
4. Ibid, 103-104.
5. Robyn Seglem, "YA lit, Music and Movies: Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom." *ALAN Review*, 2006, 33 (3): 76-80. Accessed June 5, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v33i3.a.11>, 77.
6. Ibid., 77.
7. John Golden, *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*, xiv.
8. Linda Costanzo Cahir. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, 45.
9. Ibid, 46.
10. Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, 41.
11. Linda Costanzo Cahir. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, 45.
12. Clay Conger, "How Wes Anderson Uses Mise En Scène." *StudioBinder*. June 25, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2018.  
<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/mise-en-scene/>.
13. Robyn Seglem, "YA lit, Music and Movies: Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom." *ALAN Review*, 2006, 33 (3): 76-80. Accessed June 5, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v33i3.a.11>, 78.
14. Linda Costanzo Cahir. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, 97.
15. Ibid., 97.
16. Sarah Graham, *Salinger's the Catcher in the Rye*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2007. Accessed July 11, 2018.  
ProQuest Ebook Central, 8.
17. Ibid., 12-18.
18. Ibid., 18.
19. Azhar Noori Fejer and Rosli Talif. "Individual Mobility and the Sense of "Deadlock": A Cultural Materialist Analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *SAGE Open*, 2014, 4 (3): 1-10. Accessed July 1, 2018. DOI: 10.1177/2158244014547180, 2.
20. Ibid., 2.
21. Ibid., 2.
22. Ibid., 2.
23. Sarah Graham, *Salinger's the Catcher in the Rye*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2007. Accessed July 11, 2018.  
ProQuest Ebook Central, 13.
24. Azhar Noori Fejer and Rosli Talif. "Individual Mobility and the Sense of "Deadlock": A Cultural Materialist Analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *SAGE Open*, 2014, 4 (3): 1-10. Accessed July 1, 2018. DOI: 10.1177/2158244014547180, 4.
25. Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, 9.
26. Ibid., 2.
27. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 8-9.
28. Ibid., 9.
29. Ibid., 176.
30. Ibid., 176.
31. Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, 2.
32. Ibid., 2.
33. Ibid., 10.



34. Matt Goldberg, "1957 Letter from J.D. Salinger Explains Why *Catcher in the Rye* Wouldn't Work as a Movie." *Collider*. February 27, 2012. Accessed July 10, 2018. <http://collider.com/catcher-in-the-rye-movie-rejection-jd-salinger/>.
35. Phillipa Hawker. "Kirsten Dunst Film Adaptation of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* Underway." *The Australian*. July 30, 2016. Accessed July 15, 2018. <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/kirsten-dunst-film-adaptation-of-sylvia-plaths-the-bell-jar-underway/news-story/a0954b12e51d1fce2a90fac60caa31e9>.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, 4.
38. *Ibid.*, 5.
39. *Ibid.*, 10.
40. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 84.
41. "A Director Prepares: Visual Script Breakdown." *W(A/O)NDERING Filmmaking*. January 03, 2016. Accessed July 10, 2018. <https://waondering.com/2014/08/09/a-director-prepares-visual-script-breakdown/>.
42. Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, 172.
43. Linda Costanzo Cahir. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, 293.
44. John Golden, *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*, 8.
45. *Ibid.*, 9.
46. *Ibid.*, 9.
47. *Ibid.*, 12.
48. *Ibid.*, 13.
49. *Ibid.*, 13.
50. Linda Costanzo Cahir. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, 63.
51. John Golden, *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*, 15.
52. *Ibid.*, 16.
53. *Ibid.*, 16.
54. Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, 9.
55. Robyn Seglem, "YA lit, Music and Movies: Creating REEL Interest in the Language Arts Classroom." *ALAN Review*, 2006, 33 (3): 76-80. Accessed June 5, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v33i3.a.11>, 78.
56. *Ibid.*, 79.

---

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit [https://teachers.yale.edu/terms\\_of\\_use](https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use)