Part II – Applications

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Early Childhood (Ages 4-7)

The Lion King

Directors: Roger Allers, Rob Minkoff
Producer: Don Hahn
Screenwriters: Irene Mecchi, Jonathan Roberts, Linda Woolverton
Voices of: Rowan Atkinson, Matthew Broderick, Niketa Calame, Jim Cummings, Whoopi Goldberg, Robert Guillaume, Jeremy Irons, James Earl Jones, Moira Kelly, Nathan Lane, Zoe Leader, Cheech Marin, Ernie Sabella, Madge Sinclair, Jonathan Taylor Thomas
MPAA Rating: G
Year of Release: 1994

Review

This animated feature film contains several elements of classical mythology as it tells the tale of the birth, childhood and eventual manhood of a lion. Simba’s life begins in a rocky outcropping of the African plains. His birth is announced in the opening sequence of the movie, which shows all of the animals of the African veld gathering to hail their future king while the cute cub is held aloft from a dramatic spur of rock. The young lion lives with his father Mufasa, the king of the Pride Rock, his mother Sarabi, and members of their extended family.

Simba learns from his father that he has a distinct place in the circle of life as the future king. He has a close bond with his dad and assumes that Mufasa will always be available to guide him towards his future adult responsibilities.

The cub also believes that everyone loves him. But he is wrong. His enemy is his evil, jealous, and conniving uncle Scar, the king's brother, who wants to rule the kingdom himself. This uncle is a mannered but manipulative schemer. He encourages Simba and his best friend Nala, a female lion cub, to explore the alluring but dangerous and forbidden elephant graveyard. Then Scar calls Mufasa to Simba's and his playmate’s rescue from the hungry hyenas. When the king is trying to save the cub’s lives, Scar kills Mufasa and makes it appear like an accident. Subsequently the
uncle plays into his nephew's sense of guilt, shame, and fear, convincing the cub that he is responsible in bringing about the death of his father.

Because Simba believes that his family will blame him for causing the king's death and reject him for it, he flees the plains and hides in the jungle. As luck would have it, running away ensures the cub's survival. While the Pride Rock kingdom suffers under the tyranny of Scar and his hyena minions, Simba is adopted by jungle jokers, who raise him to be a strong and fun-loving lion. He is befriended by Pumba, a warthog, and Timon, a meerkat, who allow him to keep his past a secret while helping him to create a new way of living. The lion cub grows up in a worry-free life. His friends teach him in the ways of "Hakuna Matata" or "No Worries," a philosophy that encourages him to avoid dealing with his problems, leave his past behind, and live only for the moment.

Simba grows into early adulthood in his self-imposed exile. While he appears to be happy outwardly maintaining an irrelevant stance, he is internally grieving his father. As the lion struggles with this incongruence, Nala, his childhood friend, and Rafiki, a wise mandril shaman, find Simba and tell him how all the animals are starving under Scar's rule.

Initially Simba refuses to return home. He is ashamed to face his family and determined to maintain the stance that his past is irrelevant. Rafiki shows him how his own reflection resembles Mufasa, speaking directly to Simba's yearning for a father's unconditional love as well as to his fear around his expectations that he is supposed to become his dad. As the lion continues to insist that his past is not important to his current circumstances, Rafiki thumps Simba on the head with a walking stick. When the young lion demands to know why, Rafiki replies, "It doesn't matter. It happened in the past." After this "intervention", Simba's perception of his past is transformed into an immediate and congruent experience of pain, which is operating in his current life.

Once his perception shifts, Simba feels ready to return to Pride Rock and carry out his familial obligation. Although he finds the kingdom in complete chaos, he learns now that the perceptions which have
ruled his behavior, that he was responsible for his father's death and that his family would reject him, were inaccurate. This enables Simba to overcome his guilt and shame and reunite with his family. In allowing himself to return to the context he had avoided, he discovers how much he has been missed. His emerging sense of self enables him to heal himself and his family.

With courage and spirit, Simba confronts Scar and his henchmen. Then he overthrows his uncle’s evil rule. After he takes his rightful place as the Lion King, the Pride Rock prospers once again in the hands of a fair and just ruler.

Cinema Therapy

Leslie, a young mother, brought her four-year old son Luke to therapy because he had nightmares and threw temper tantrums for about two months. She had already tried behavioral modification techniques for the temper tantrums unsuccessfully. I learned that they relocated from another state because Leslie wanted to make a fresh start after her recent conflictual divorce. The boy had not seen his father since their move although Luke was very attached to his dad. They rarely talked on the phone.

I alternated between seeing Luke for play therapy and sand tray work, seeing Leslie for grief and parenting issues, and meeting with both of them together. During a joint session, I asked the boy whether he has a favorite movie. He spontaneously told me about The Lion King. Leslie added that he lately has been watching this film over and over.

During our next individual session, I asked Luke to choose figures from my sand tray figure collection and “play” the story of the movie. He picked lions and other jungle animals. When he could not find hyenas, the boy did not hesitate using dog figures in their place. I noticed that Luke primarily focussed on the sequence of the film in which Simba and Nala went to the elephant graveyard, Mufasa was killed and the cub ran away into the jungle. In spite of his young age, Luke was able to tell me in detail what the young lion cub had to go through.
Luke’s response made me wonder whether he might feel responsible for his parents’ separation. Therefore I asked the boy whether he thinks that it was Simba’s fault that his dad died. He responded with, “not really”. I told him that he was exactly right and that it’s not his fault either, that his parents got divorced and that they moved. Luke looked at me as if he didn’t believe what I said. When I asked him whether he missed his dad, he nodded with a sad look on his face.

During the subsequent session with Leslie, I told her about Luke’s responses and encouraged her to keep telling him that he is not responsible for her divorce. She agreed to work on her resistance to allow her ex-husband to communicate with Luke more frequently.

After a while, she was able to arrange for phone calls between Luke and his father on a regular basis. When I asked her son to “play” *The Lion King* in again, he focused on the last part, of the story, the “happy end”. Not much later, his nightmares and temper tantrums disappeared.

**Theoretical Contemplation**

Movies are best used as an adjunct to traditional therapeutic methods when working with children. Because young children are usually not able to talk about conflicts or other problems directly, using film characters gives them an opportunity to work through unresolved psychological material. Sometimes they even initiate a client-directed play therapy style of Cinema Therapy.

Many children want to repeatedly watch the same movie. They become focused on a character because they are playing out significant concerns or developmental tasks, such as figuring out how to overcome fear of an anxious situation.

**Guidelines for Work with Children**

- First determine the child’s abilities. Choose movie according to the child’s developmental capacities and the treatment plan.
- Young children’s developmental limitations reduce the effectiveness of assigning movies between session because of the
time lapse between their viewing of the film at home and the discussion in session. This is different when a discussion follows immediately after a movie clip is shown in session or when families watch movies together at home in the context of family therapy. The desire for repetition and recurrent focus on a particular film can prompt children to come to therapy ready to play out or to describe the movie they have been watching.

- When children don’t talk about their responses to a movie, puppets, figures, and drawings can be used to recreate scenes that are relevant for the child. The characters in these scenes can represent family members, care takers, teachers or friends.

The Bridge to Terabithia

**Director:** Gabor Csupo  
**Producers:** Lauren Levine, Hal Liberman, David Paterson  
**Screenwriters:** Jeff Stockwell, David Paterson  
**Cast:** Josh Hutcherson, AnnaSophia Robb, Zooey Deschanel, Robert Patrick, Bailee Madison  
**MPAA Rating:** PG  
**Year of Release:** 2007

**Review**

The big-screen adaptation of Katherine Paterson’s award-winning 1977 children’s book captures its powerful and bittersweet spirit. In 1976, Katherine Paterson's son, David, who co-wrote the script for this movie, was eight years old when his friend, Lisa Hill, was struck by lightning and killed. His mother drew upon his personal tragedy to create the story of a boy, Jesse Aarons, and a girl, Leslie Burke, fifth graders in rural Virginia, who become the best of friends.

Jesse is the ignored middle child and only son of a reticent father, who struggles to earn a living. Of his four children, dad favors his youngest daughter, May Belle. He works all the time, and reprimands his son frequently. Jesse is an artist, although none of his family members and schoolmates see much value in his aptitude with pencil and paint. Leslie is the new kid in the Jesse’s class. She is the only child of two wealthy, successful, self-involved writers who
barely notice when she is not there. They have moved to the country, next door to the Aarons. Despite being lively and energetic, Leslie is scorned as readily as Jesse because her parents don’t want her to watch TV, and because she is an artist too. Her particular discipline is writing.

Jesse and Leslie are picked on by bullies and need to cope with a tyrannical teacher named Mrs. Meyers. The connection between the two kids is hesitant at first, particularly after Leslie usurps Jesse's title as the fastest runner in their class at Lark Creek Elementary. Jesse is nearly as hostile toward the girl as his classmates. But eventually they are drawn together because they both feel "different", share a love of imagination, and come to respect and support each other's unique talents. As viewers we sense that Jesse and Leslie are special, eager, bright-eyed, and a bit beyond their years in the way smart kids can be.

Soon, the two friends are doing everything together. As a means of escape they spend their days after school out back in a deep patch of woods near their houses, reachable only by a rope swing over a creek. To combat boredom and rise above their depressing surroundings, Leslie creates an imaginary kingdom called Terabithia where they rule as queen and king. This land is filled with magical creatures, a Dark Lord, ferocious monsters, goblins, and mythical beings. There are occasional battles with the forces of evil. The girl shakes up Jesse’s little world by showing him that dreaming is OK. In magical Terabithia tree houses become fortresses, trees become giant trolls, and squirrels are vicious man-eaters. From the top of a tree they can see a beautiful waterfall and endless snow-capped fantasy mountains. In this marvelous fantasy kingdom Leslie tells her stories and Jesse is free to draw as much as he likes. When they're in their mythical land, the world behind them fades away, they can relish each other's company, and enjoy the adventures they script along the way.

The complexion of their real world brightens. They take revenge on the mean kids who taunt them at school, and eventually find a way to befriend one of them. Leslie's parents finish writing their book and pay more attention to her. A music teacher, Ms. Edmonds, discovers Jesse's artistic ability and helps him to nurture it. "Don't
"let those other kids stand in your way," she says to the boy. For the first time, Jesse dares to feel good about himself.

On one day, an ugly reality intrudes upon their idyllic world. Suddenly, Jesse plunges into the most difficult experience of his young life as he is forced to deal with Leslie’s tragic death. He isolates and displays hostility because he feels guilty after he learns that his friend drowned in the turbulent creek trying to swing over it while he visited an art museum with Ms. Edmonds. The ten-year-old goes through a painful process of deep grief, loss of innocence, and eventually renewal. His relationships with his dad, with May Belle, and even with Mrs. Meyers are profoundly transformed in this process. After a touching good-bye ritual, Jesse’s grieving soul heals, he builds a wooden bridge over the creek, and guides his little sister as a princess into his magical kingdom.

Theoretical Contemplation

*The Bridge to Terabithia* shows Jesse going through the stages of grief. Watching the movie can support grief therapy with a child or adolescent because it helps normalizing the grief process. By sending a drawing of Leslie on a small wooden raft down the creek where she drowned, he says a final good-bye to his friend. Jesse also symbolically builds a “bridge” to a new phase of his life by building a bridge over the creek to Terabithia. In the last scene of the movie, his renewal is shown, when the boy crosses over this bridge with his sister and is able to see an even more spectacular magical kingdom than ever before.

Cinema Therapy

Amber’s parents brought their six-year-old daughter to therapy. Two months ago, her friend Jasmine had died from an injury as a result of a tragic car accident that happened when her babysitter picked her up from school. Their families were neighbors and the girls had become best friends for a year. After Jasmine’s death, Amber lost her ability to focus in school and got into several fights with her schoolmates. She refused to talk to anybody about her friend.
Amber’s parents appeared supportive and concerned. They let me know that her daughter told them that she hates school. Amber is a bright girl and had been excited about going to school before her friend died. In order to protect their daughter’s feelings, they avoided talking about her loss. In a session with Amber’s parents, I provided grief education for them. I explained that grief is a natural response to loss. Although everybody’s journey toward acceptance and healing is different, some of the basic elements usually are shock, emotional upheaval, guilt, hostility, depression, and finally hope and the reaffirmation of life. It is important that each individual’s pattern is respected, allowing the grieving person to move to each phase at their own pace. I also recommended that they watch *The Bridge to Terabithia* with Amber at home and make themselves available to her if she wants to talk about the movie afterwards.

During a subsequent individual play therapy session with Amber, she began to mention Jasmine. First she told me how much fun they had together. When I asked her whether she felt a bit like Jesse, in the movie, Amber started crying and said that she knows exactly how Jesse feels. She also told me that she hates school now because she always feels like crying there. Jesse’s story helped Amber normalize her feelings: she was grieving her friend, just like Jesse. The movie also gave her hope that her feelings will change with time.

In a subsequent family session, we discussed how Amber’s parents can support their daughter’s healing process. Inspired by Jesse’s good-bye ritual, they created a little altar for Jasmine at home. Whenever Amber got or found something that she would have shown to her friend, she put it on the altar for a while. Soon she started feeling better, began to get along with her schoolmates again, and became increasingly more able to focus on her schoolwork.

Questions for Children who Experience Grief

• Is there any similarity between what Jesse feels after Leslie’s death and how you are feeling right now?
• Was Jesse really responsible for Leslie’s death? Do you feel guilty for something you are not really responsible for?
• What do you think about the people who helped him after his loss? Do you have people in your life who are there for you?
• What can you do that might help you cope with your loss similarly to what Jesse did when he sent his little raft down the creek?

Bend it like Beckham

Director: Gurinder Chadha
Producers: Gurinder Chadha, Deepak Nayar
Screenwriters: Paul Mayeda Berges, Guljit Bindra, Gurinder Chadha
MPAA Rating: PG
Year of Release: 2003

Review

This movie tells the story of high-school senior Jesminder (Jess). Her Indian parents emigrated from Africa to England, where her dad works at Heathrow airport. They live in the middle-class suburb of Hounslow, under the flight path of arriving jets.

The British-born Jess is about to enter college and is encouraged by her strict parents to emulate her soon-to-be-married older sister Pinky. Jess is a fairly typical teenager. Her source of rebellion is to play soccer. In her family's living room is a large portrait of a Sikh spiritual leader, but above Jess' bed is her own inspiration--the British soccer superstar David Beckham. To Beckham's portrait she confides her innermost dream, which is to play for England.

However, although her parents tolerated her sports passion when she was younger, they now believe she should become serious about her life and prepare for the future. That means giving up "children's games" for cooking lessons, marriage, and university studies. They forbid her from playing any more. An Indian girl should not play
soccer, since the game consists of "displaying your bare legs to complete strangers." The preparations for her sister’s wedding only underscore the liabilities of Jess’s unladylike behavior. Her mother says: "Who'd want a girl who plays football all day but can't make chapattis?" "Anyone can cook aloo gobi," Jess responds, "but who can bend a ball like Beckham?"

The edict to stop playing soccer comes just as Jess has taken up an invitation from a white classmate, Juliette (Jules), to try out for an all-girls' soccer team. The coach, a young Irishman named Joe, thinks she's brilliant and offers Jess the opportunity to play for a semi-pro team. Her parents are appalled. The promise of an upcoming visit from an American soccer scout, and the potential to play professionally, keeps Jess sneaking back to the field for more soccer.

In the locker room, Jess finds herself schooling the white girls on what it means to be her: "Indian girls aren't supposed to play football," she explains. "That's a bit backwards," observes one of her teammates. Jess knows exactly what it is: "It's just culture, that's all."

Jess and Jules develop a friendship, through which the film explores the differences in their respective backgrounds and the ways they navigate their parents' rather typical fears of other cultures and changing times.

Jess’s father regrets that he gave in to social demands when the British in Africa laughed at his regular use of a turban and refused to allow him to enter into their cricket competitions. Rather than use his resentment to fight for his daughter, he tries to pass on his disillusionment. But "things are different now," Jess tells him, and eventually he sneaks into the crowd at a match to see for himself.

Several crises emerge when Jess and Jules both fall for their soccer coach. When Pinky’s future in-laws spot Jess and Jules on a street corner, displaying more affection publicly than is seemly, the wedding is called off. Jules' mom fears that Jules is a lesbian, and Jess’ parents (believing short-haired Jules is male), think Jess is intimate with a white boy. After these issues get cleared up, new complications develop when the date chosen for Pinky’s wedding is
the very day that Jess is scheduled to play in the most important match of the season.

All of these conflicts come to a head in a colorful finale that crosscuts between a final football match and the traditional wedding. Jess and Jules take their team to victory against all odds. The cultures continue to clash, but in ways that are increasingly responsive to one another.

Cinema Therapy

Rashmi and Talan came to therapy asking for help with their son Nikhil as well as their disagreements about parenting. They had immigrated into the US from India right before their now seven-year-old son was born. While Talan had lived in the US with his parents as a child for several years and was happy when he was able to return, Rashmi felt homesick and did not assimilate to the American culture as well. She emphasized that she feels very loyal to her traditional family in India.

Rashmi only spoke in their Indian dialect to Nikhil. Recently, the boy started talking back to her in English. He also began to get defiant and to withdraw into in his room for hours when Rashmi did not allow him to watch American TV or to play with his American friends. She was afraid that he would disconnect from his roots with too much exposure to the American culture.

Talan did not agree with Rasmi’s parenting, but he usually kept quiet. He believed that “she wouldn’t know what he was talking about because she grew up in a completely different world”. Talan also said that he would love to find a way to be understood by his wife and to help his son to become the happy little boy again that he once was.

I decided to primarily work with the parents in order to help them and their child. First I suggested an “experiment” to Rashmi and Talan: to watch Bend it like Beckham together as a couple at home and see whether this might help start the dialog that Talan was yearning for. They came to their next session pleasantly surprised how relatively easy it was to talk with each other after watching the
The film served as a catalyst for Rashmi to find the courage to talk about things she had never shared with anyone before.

The couple let me know that Rashmi told Talan after watching the movie that she had never openly rebelled as a teenager. After seeing the character Jess in *Bend it like Beckham*, Rashmi thought that she had missed the opportunity to stand up to her parents and to communicate her dreams to them. She appreciated that her husband listened to her new discoveries supportively. They both thought that their open communication brought them closer together and they gained hope that things might improve in their family.

Because Rashmi and Talan’s relationship improved, and because Rashmi became aware of the limitations that she had faced in her own childhood, her approach to raising Nikhil started to change. She decided that she did not want to put her son through the same experience that she had gone through in her family of origin.

When I heard this, I suggested that the parents watch *Bend it like Beckham* together with Nikhil. After viewing the movie, mother and son felt closer too. The boy was very excited when she allowed him to participate in a soccer training that he had talked about for a while and his defiance disappeared. Talan felt relieved about this new development.

**Theoretical Contemplation**

Like in the movie, *Bend it like Beckham*, this family was caught in a typical dynamic of immigrant families, when the traditional parents try to push their conventional expectations onto their children who have been born into a different cultural world.

As in the described case, communication between family members is often strained because they try to communicate a concept that is unfamiliar to other members of their family. A film can introduce understanding through readily grasped images. It serves as a metaphor and therefore represents more accurately feelings and ideas that a client had trouble putting into words.
This can also be applied to work with couples and families. In combination with systems oriented therapy, watching films that show family or other relationship dynamics, and comparing with them, helps clients

- understand their problem as a function of being part of a larger system
- identify how they had or had not satisfactorily adjusted in their system
- retrieve or learn necessary attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, etc. to meaningfully connect or reconnect with others (e.g. improve communication)

Guidelines for Working with Families

- Ask clients to choose a film with a message they want to convey to their partner or family.
- If they cannot think of a movie, help them with their choice using film indices (e.g. from www.cinematherapy.com)
- Encourage clients to watch the film together with their partner or family and explain to their loved ones why they picked that particular film. This helps clients to enter into a more productive conversation about issues they were not able to communicate before.

Categorized Movie Suggestions for Early Childhood

Each film speaks to a number of different subjects, issues and themes and usually has more than one message. Therefore most of the movies that are mentioned here could be categorized in several different ways.

Abuse and Molestation:

_Do You Know the Muffin Man_ (1989) - A police officer, and his wife Kendra have two children, Teddy and Sandy. What they know and how they live as a family is irreparably changed one day when it is discovered that a classmate of Teddy’s is the apparent victim of sexual abuse and molestation at the respected neighborhood daycare center.
**Rapunzel** (1983) - A young princess is spirited away by an evil witch and locked in a tall tower. As she grows into a beautiful woman, her hair is left uncut and becomes so long that it serves as a golden stairway to her room.

**Coping with Fears and Overcoming Obstacles:**

*Alice in Wonderland* (1951, animated) - Alice becomes bored and her mind starts to wander. She sees a white rabbit who appears to be in a hurry. She chases it into its burrow and then a most bizarre series of adventures begins. First Alice is first not afraid about this adventure, but later she has to cope with her fears.

*An American Tail* (1986, animated) - While immigrating to the United States, a young Russian mouse gets separated from his family and must find them while trying to survive in a new country.

*Bambi* (1942, animated) - A young deer, Bambi, grows up and learns to cope with his fear in the wild after hunters shot his mother.

*The Brave Little Toaster* (1987, animated) - This movie tells the story of a gang of household appliances who set off for the big city to find their young master after he thoughtlessly leaves them in his summer cabin. Along the way they must face many dangers and obstacles, including figuring out how to get juice in a wilderness containing no electrical outlets.

*Escape to Witch Mountain* (1975) - When Tia and Tony arrive at an orphanage, they do not remember who their families were or where they came from but know they have special telekinetic powers, which make getting along with the rest of the kids difficult. They learn to cope with their fear when they get chased by a scheming millionaire.

*The Hobbit* (1977, TV, animated) - Bilbo Baggins the Hobbit who lives in Middle Earth gets talked into joining a scary quest with a group of dwarves to recover their treasure from a dragon.

*The Jungle Book* (1967, animated) - Mowgli is a boy who has been raised by wolves in the Indian jungle. When the wolves hear that the fierce tiger, Shere Kahn, is nearby, they decide to send Mowgli to a local "man tribe". On his way to the village, Mowgli meets many animal characters. When Shere Kahn learns of Mowgli's presence, Mowgli learns to cope with his fear while Kahn tries to track him down.
**Lassie (2005)** - A family in financial crisis is forced to sell Lassie, their beloved dog. Hundreds of miles away from her true family, Lassie escapes and sets out on a journey home.

**The Lion King** (1994, animated) - See above.

**Peter Pan (2003)** - The Darling family children receive a visit from Peter Pan, who takes them to Never Never Land where a scary, ongoing war with the evil pirate Captain Hook is taking place.

**The Wizard of Oz** (1939) - Dorothy Gale is swept away to a magical land in a tornado and embarks on a quest to see the Wizard who can help her return home. On this journey, the girl learns to cope with his fear and makes the slow and painful transition from dependence to independence.

**Death and Grief:**

**Bambi** (1942, animated, loss of mother) - See above.

Finding Nemo (2003, animated) - After Nemo’s mom dies, the boy clown fish is stolen from the coral reef. His timid father must then travel to Sydney to find Nemo.

**Charlotte’s Web** (1973 and 1996) - Wilbur the pig is scared of the end of the season, because he knows that at that time, he will end up on the dinner table. He hatches a plan with Charlotte, a spider that lives in his pen, to ensure that this will never happen. Charlotte dies towards the end of the movie.

**Lassie** (TV-Series 1954-1974) - After the loss of his mother, Matt has a hard time accepting his new stepmother and the family’s move to the country. But with the help of his new dog, Lassie, he starts feeling better.

**The Lion King** (1994, animated) - See above.

**Friendships, Peer and Sibling Relationships:**

**Aladdin** (1992, animated) - Aladdin, a street urchin, accidentally meets Princess Jasmine, who is in the city undercover. They love each other, but she can only marry a prince.

**Arthur’s Baby** (1997, animated TV) - Arthur experiences big changes when his new baby sister arrives. He feels like baby Kate gets all the attention. This movie entertains while gentle, appealing characters teach simple lessons about new siblings to young children.

**Charlotte’s Web** (1973 and 1996) - See above.

**The Lion King** (1994, animated) - See above.
Mary Poppins (1964) - Mary Poppins is a kind of Super-nanny. With the aid of her rather extraordinary magical powers, she flies in with her umbrella in response to the request of the Banks children and proceeds to put things right between the siblings and in the family as a whole before flying off again.

Toy Story (1995 and 1999, animated) - This movie is about the “secret life of toys” when people are not around. A cowboy toy is profoundly threatened and jealous when a fancy spaceman toy supplants him as top toy in a boy's room.

The White Balloon (Iran, 1995) - A seven-year-old girl yearns to own a goldfish. Despite mishaps, she perseveres in her desire, while shaping new perceptions of the world and of her sibling.

Illness and Disability:
Finding Nemo (2003, animated) - See above.

Lying and Stealing:
101 Dalmatians (1996) - A woman kidnaps puppies to kill them for their fur, but various animals gang up against her and get their revenge in slapstick fashion.
Aladdin (1992, animated) - See above.
An American Tail (1986, animated) - See above.
Beauty and the Beast (1991, animated) - Belle, whose father Maurice is imprisoned by the Beast, is dishonest as she offers herself instead. She finds the prince inside the Beast.
The Lion King (1994, animated) - See above.
Pocahontas (1995, animated) - The daughter of a Native American tribe chief and an English soldier are dishonest as they share a romance when English colonists invade 16th century Virginia.
Robin Hood (1973, animated) - Robin Hood is an outlaw who starts to form a gang in Sherwood Forest to fight the injustices of the Sheriff of Nottingham, who levies unpayable taxes upon the people. Robin Hood steals from the rich to give to the poor.

Moving:
An American Tail (1986) - See above.
Lassie (TV-Series 1954-1974) - See above.
Prejudice, Being Different than Others:
*Cinderella* (1950, animated) - When Cinderella's cruel stepmother prevents her from attending the Royal Ball, she gets some unexpected help from the lovable mice Gus and Jaq, and from her Fairy Godmother.
*Dumbo* (1941, animated) - Mrs. Jumbo wishes for a baby, but when the stork finally delivers, the baby has a distinctive enhancement: gigantic ears.
*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996, animated) - A deformed bell ringer must assert his independence from a vicious government minister in order to help his friend, a gypsy-dancing girl.
*The Lion King* (1994, animated) - See above.

Self-esteem:
*The Black Stallion* (1979 and TV: 1990-1993) - After being shipwrecked on a remote desert island, young Alec Ramsay and a wild Arabian stallion named "Black" form an irrevocable bond that continues after their rescue. No one else can ride the stunning stallion but Alec. Black's spirit is untamed, his speed is unmatched, and he is swiftly becoming the fastest racehorse in the world.
*Cinderella* (1950, animated) - See above.
*The Little Engine That Could* (1991, animated) - On her way to deliver a cargo of magical toys to eagerly waiting children, the engine Georgia suddenly breaks down. Pete and Farnsworth, two big engines with important jobs, refuse to pull the train in her place. Plus, rusty old Jebediah is too worn out. The little switch engine named Tillie is the only engine left. She is courageous and thinks she can do it.
*The Little Mermaid* (1989, animated) - A little mermaid named Ariel dreams of going on land. When her father, King Triton, forbids her to do that, Ariel courageously visits Ursula who her father had banished.
*Pinocchio* (2002) - Despite guidance from the Blue Fairy, and the love of his father, Gepetto, a wooden puppet's curious spirit leads him into one wild adventure after another.

Single Parent:
Finding Nemo *(2003, animated)* - See above.
Middle Childhood (Ages 8-12)

**Lorenzo’s Oil**

**Director:** George Miller  
**Producer:** George Miller  
**Screenwriters:** George Miller, Nick Enright  
**Cast:** Susan Sarandon, Nick Nolte, Peter Ustinov, Kathleen Wilhoite, Zack O'Malley Greenburg, Laura Linney  
**MPAA Rating:** PG 13  
**Year of Release:** 1992

**Review**

Lorenzo's Oil chronicles a couple's search for a cure for their son's progressive, degenerative, and presumably terminal disease. Michaela and Augusto Odones' five-year-old son, Lorenzo, is diagnosed with the most devastating form of Adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD) — the childhood cerebral form. They are told that Myelin, the "insulation" around Lorenzo's nerves in the brain, breaks down over time and prevents these nerves from functioning. Only boys have the most severe form of this disease, because ALD is an inherited genetic disorder linked to the X sex chromosome. Victims die after losing all sensory functions. All known treatments are experimental, and none is rated as successful. No boy with this disease has ever survived. Though the parents enlist their son in the most promising of the experimental treatment programs immediately following his diagnosis, the disease progresses rapidly and things look hopeless.

Despite the pessimistic prognosis from all the experts, the Odones refuse to give up. While Augusto begins researching ALD himself, Michaela stays at their son's side. She devotes herself to keeping her child alive with a single-minded focus that alienates everyone around her, including, at times, her husband. The emotional strain takes its toll on their relationship, but neither loses hope nor faith.

In his quest for a treatment, Augusto Odone clashes with doctors, scientists, and support groups, who are skeptical that anything could be done about ALD, much less by laypeople. He persists, setting up camp in medical libraries, combing the medical literature
looking for clues, reviewing animal experiments, badgering researchers, and questioning top doctors all over the world. It becomes clear to him that one problem he faces is the lack of a system for integrating knowledge about the disease.

Eventually, Michaela and Augusto take it upon themselves to organize an international symposium of experts and parents of afflicted boys. They begin to connect various unrelated and overlooked theories. Despite resistance from a disbelieving medical world, they finally connect the right ideas, discovering that a possible treatment of ALD lies in adding a certain kind of olive oil to their son's diet.

They contact over 100 firms around the world until they find an elderly British chemist who is willing to take on the challenge of distilling the proper formula. It proves successful in stopping the accumulation of the long chain fatty acids in the brain that have been causing their son's steady decline, thereby halting the progression of Lorenzo’s disease.

The film ends with Lorenzo at the age of 14 showing definite improvement. Several healthy children are shown who, having followed a course of treatment with Lorenzo's oil, have remained symptom-free.

Theoretical Contemplation

Because Lorenzo's Oil is based on a true story, this movie had a powerful effect as it brought the attention of the world to ALD in general.

Clients are often more impacted by a film that portrays real events than by fantasy stories. Therefore this movie had a strong effect on several of my clients, especially when I instructed them to watch it with conscious awareness. When clients learn to view a movie with conscious awareness, they are given a tool to develop increased awareness in real life and to strengthen their capacity to access their inner wisdom. Inner wisdom is more than knowledge. Whereas knowledge is simply acquired information, wisdom requires understanding on a deep level.
Since our rational mind is only a small part of the portal to our inner wisdom, watching with conscious awareness is a process in which we watch and listen with our whole body. Body awareness helps us to access inner wisdom through a felt sense rather than through mental perceptions. The awareness of our physical reactions is an important vehicle to increasing awareness.

The guidelines for watching a movie with conscious awareness instruct clients to view a film by paying attention to the story and to themselves. They learn to bring non-judging attention, curiosity, and acceptance to whatever is arising in their experience of the present moment. They observe how the movie’s images, ideas, conversations, and characters affect their physical sensations and notice any tension or holding as they watch a movie. In all likelihood, a film’s stimulants are similar to whatever unbalances these clients in daily life. To release tension they may experiment with "breathing into" any part of their body that feels strained. Another entryway into conscious awareness is to observe how the movie scenes affect their breathing.

As clients practice becoming aware of physical sensations that are triggered by emotions during a movie experience, they increase their capacity to tolerate unwanted emotions in everyday life without needing to suppress them, numb out, act out, or release them in other unhealthy ways. They do not need to resist these feelings any more because they become more familiar with them and eventually experience these emotions as just another energy in their body. Without resistance, emotions can run their course and do not get unnecessarily stronger. Consequently clients will be less likely to avoid a feared challenge and can develop the courage to face it because their anxiety no longer overwhelms or paralyzes them.

Eventually the fear or other previously rejected emotion will dissipate, and clients feel strong enough to take on the challenges that had prevented them from moving forward in their lives.
Cinema Therapy

In the following case I did not work with the child directly because his problem could best be treated by working with his mother.

Nancy was referred to me by her son’s pediatrician who was concerned about her negative impact on eight-year-old Ryan. She was extremely worried because her son suffered from multiple allergies. The physician believed that her agitation in response to Ryan’s physical problem contributed to his lack of progress and produced anxiety for him.

Nancy told me that she had taken Ryan to several doctors, including a naturalist. Nothing helped. She felt deflated and ready to give up. Sometimes she felt so bad that she didn’t want to think about this problem any more. I encouraged her to watch Lorenzo’s Oil at home and explained the process of watching a movie with conscious awareness.

In our next session, Nancy told me that she was surprised about her responses to employing this technique. First she felt worse when she sensed the pain of the family Odones. She noticed a sinking feeling in her stomach. As I had advised her, she stayed aware of these physical sensations and even remembered to “breathe into” them. As the movie progressed, it became increasingly easier for Nancy to stay with her emotional experience in a conscious way. Her “inner container” for previously rejected emotions grew larger and stronger. After a while the difficult feelings related to her anxiety dissipated, and she noticed how she became more and more hopeful and excited. She even got in touch with a deep inner knowing, like a hunch or an intuition that she should not give up yet but keep looking for ways that can help heal Ryan. When her anxiety lifted, Ryan appeared less anxious too.

As a scientifically minded person, Nancy was receptive to this movie because Lorenzo’s medical circumstances were well described in the film. She even did some research on the Internet about Lorenzo’s case. Nancy was impressed and encouraged when she read that Lorenzo Odone had turned 27 years old in 2005 and that Augusto
Odone received an honorary Ph.D. for his pioneering work in researching and discovering a significant treatment for ALD.

After a couple of weeks, Nancy gained new energy to make phone calls in order to find another specialist who would be able to help Ryan. It took her a while, but with growing determination, she found the right treatment. Ryan feels much better now.

Guidelines and Questions for Parents facing Physical Challenges of a Child

While watching the movie:

• Watch Lorenzo’s Oil at home with conscious awareness.
• Notice how Lorenzo’s parents don’t give up in spite of the extreme emotional strain they experience. They become very creative in their efforts to save their son.
• What touches you most about them?

After watching the movie:

• How have you coped with difficult challenges in your life before?
• Check in with yourself whether you might have an inner knowing, like a hunch or an intuition, about starting to look for new ways of healing.
• Can you imagine how things could turn for the better, if you approached new creative solutions to your problem (possibly finding another doctor, a chiropractor, or an acupuncturist) with the determination, courage and creativity that Augusto and Michaela display in the movie?
• Can you imagine how much stronger you would feel if you faced healing your child’s physical challenge in the same way as they did?

In America

Director: Jim Sheridan
Producers: Arthur Lappin, Jim Sheridan
Screenwriters: Jim Sheridan, Naomi Sheridan, Kirsten Sheridan
Cast: Samantha Morton, Paddy Considine, Djimon Hounsou, Emma Bolger, Sarah Bolger
MPAA Rating: PG-13
Year of Release: 2003

Review

In America offers a unique and moving look at a family’s devastating grief over the accidental death of a son and brother, who also had a brain tumor.

The movie also tells Jim Sheridan’s semi-autobiographical story about the so-called “immigrant experience” that is as much about family dynamics as about the struggle to survive in unfamiliar surroundings. The story starts with the Irish family sneaking across the Canadian border into the US as illegal immigrants.

Johnny, the young father, wants to be an actor. Since the death of his son, he has suppressed his emotions, which threatens his career. The mother, Sarah, is an exhausted and deeply grief-struck woman who swings back and forth between depression and moments of elation while she tries to fulfill her obligations as a mother, wife, and breadwinner. In spite of their best efforts, the marriage is in danger of disintegration. Their eleven-year-old daughter, Christy, shoots videos of everything with her low-cost camcorder and serves as a voiceover narrator of the story, writing letters to her diseased brother, Frankie. Christy’s gregarious younger sister, Ariel, who almost always has a smile in her face, demonstrates the soulfulness of children whose wonder and imagination can carry them through an ocean of difficulties.

It’s presumed that the family’s move to America was meant as an escape from the tragedy back in Ireland; yet, even with the change in scenery, both parents struggle with overwhelming feelings of guilt. Sarah urges her husband to use his talents as an actor for the kids’ sake: “Make believe you’re happy!” But Christy breaks through the denial as a sounding board and unforgiving judge: “I’ve been carrying this family on my back for over a year.” Eventually, looking for a means to end the pain, Sarah gets pregnant. But their
challenges continue when the doctor tells them that there could be life-threatening complications with the birth.

The family lives in a New York City tenement building, where they are confronted with racism and drug addiction. There is one door, which has the words KEEP AWAY painted on in big orange letters. Here lives, as called by the girls, “a man who screams” because his anguish sometimes echoes up the stairs. The girls’ innocence and implicit faith in others allows them to approach this gentle giant, Mateo, without fear, rather than to cower away from him like other tenants. Later, when he joins them for dinner, Ariel says “You’re magic.” And she is right with her intuitive response.

Everything shifts when Mateo and Johnny face each other in anger and unexpected insights are triggered. Mateo continues to be the catalyst for emotional changes in the family and for different ways of seeing. Especially in the final episode the movie boosts the human spirit and suggests that small miracles do exist.

Theoretical Contemplation

Stephanie Ericsson wrote: ”Grief ... is the ashes from which the phoenix rises. ... Grief will make a new person out of you, if it doesn’t kill you in the making.” In America demonstrates how intense, chaotic, contradictory, and heart-wrenching emotions can be in the grieving process.

Movies like In America, used as an adjunct to grief therapy, can serve as a catalyst for suppressed emotions. Sometimes tears flow over a sentimental film but not in real life. Emotional release can lift clients’ spirits for a while. Energy that was drained by depression can reemerge, at least temporarily. With therapeutic guidance this “break” frequently allows clients to open up to the grieving process or explore the issues that have inhibited healthy mourning. They may also feel less alone in their pain. Film characters often serve as either negative or positive models for the grieving process. Their story can also help clients of any age experience the transformational potential in grief.
**Cinema Therapy**

10-year-old Connor lost his younger sister, Katie, to heart failure. Because he feared that peers would make fun of him, he never cried about this loss. Although his parents told him that Katie’s death was not his fault - she suffered from a congenial incurable heart condition - Connor felt responsible for her death. He believed he should not have asked her to play with him the day before she died. Connor is sensitive and mature for his age. His parents brought the boy to therapy because he seemed depressed lately and started having nightmares. They told me that they try to not show him their sadness about Katie’s death to not depress him even more.

Initially I used play therapy and sand tray work with Connor. However, a breakthrough eventually happened, when I asked the boy’s parents to watch *In America* with him at home. They told me during a subsequent family therapy session that all of them cried when they watched the family’s pain in the movie. Connor’s parents agreed that these were tears about the loss of little Katie. Watching the film served as a catalyst for their emotions.

More grief surfaced during subsequent family therapy sessions. The fact that the whole family responded with tears to the film helped Connor understand that nothing was wrong with him when he felt sad and cried. With the help of my guiding questions (see below) the family started to accept mourning as a healing process. They experienced the movie characters like a support group.

I subsequently worked with Connor’s guilt by referring to the movie characters (see question below) during individual sessions. Pretty soon his nightmares and depression symptoms disappeared.

**Guidelines and Questions for Work with a Grieving Family**

Before the movie:

Crying is ok when you feel sad. Let yourself cry when you feel like it during this movie.
After the movie:

- Do you think that it’s anybody’s fault that the little boy in the movie died?
- The death that’s so painful for you and your family is not your fault.

Guidelines for Work with Grieving Parent(s)

Before the movie:

Ask clients to notice ...
- how Johnny’s and Sarah’s negative, self-defeating beliefs and their resistance to grief slowly change,
- how they develop a new sense of compassion and purpose when they finally give themselves permission to grieve,
- how the characters take small acts of courage in spite of fear, and
- how their determination and endurance helps them become stronger.

After the movie:

- How do you feel about the character’s experience of grief and guilt in relation to your own?
- What did you see in the film that reminds you of your own inner and outer resources?
- Have you discovered transformational gifts of grief after experiencing a loss before, similar to the family in the movie?

The Lord of the Rings Trilogy

Director: Peter Jackson
Producers: Peter Jackson, Barrie Osborne, Tim Sanders
Screenwriters: Frances Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson
Cast: Elijah Wood, Ian McKellen, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Liv Tyler, Cate Blanchett, John Rhys-Davies, Billy Boyd, Dominic Monaghan, Orlando Bloom, Hugo Weaving, Sean Bean, Ian Holm
MPAA Rating: PG 13

Review

The Lord of the Rings Trilogy is based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s well-known novel.

A little person (hobbit) with hairy feet, named Frodo, is entrusted with a mysterious ring. It is the One Ring, forged by the Dark Lord, Sauron, and capable of corrupting the wearer. Sauron's servants, the Ring Wraiths, are scouring Middle Earth for it, since, when it is returned to their master, nothing would be able to stop him. All of the world would plunged into war. The only way to stop the evil will be to destroy the ring by casting it into the fire where it was forged - in Mordor, on the Dark Lord's doorstep.

Frodo starts his journey in the company of three other hobbits. Later, as the dangers mount, others join his company: the humans Aragorn and Boromir, the wizard Gandalf, the elf Legolas, and the dwarf Gimli. Together, these nine individuals must face ring wraiths, orcs, and worse; travel through the treacherous landscape of Middle-earth and the dreaded mines of Moria; and face mistrust within their fellowship.

The trilogy chronicles extraordinary adventures and reveals how the power of friendship, love and courage can hold the forces of darkness at bay.

Theoretical Contemplation

The patterns of many movie plots are born out of the aspect of the collective unconscious that is reflected in our mythology, especially the Hero’s Journey. The stages of the Hero’s Journey can be traced in all kinds of films, not just those that feature heroic physical action and adventure, but also in romance, comedy, and thrillers. The viewer is hooked into the same pool of consciousness as the screenwriter. Both tap into the following wisdom: The antidote for the ache lies in ceasing the resistance to our calling, finding the courage to face our worst fears, and consequently expanding our possibilities. Especially when we go through life changes, the movies
with these kinds of typical screenplays can help us access our
courage to release the hurt that is stuck in the past and the fear and
angst projected into the future. We follow the characters’ process of
letting go and learn to move into the present moment where we can
take action with clarity.

*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy seems especially full of mythological
motifs; and almost every character embarks on a Hero’s Journey.
Maybe this explains the movie’s special attraction for so many
viewers.

**Cinema Therapy**

12-year-old Jade came to therapy with his grandmother because she
was concerned about his lack of contact with other kids at school.
His mother and Jade had moved in with his grandparents after the
boy’s dad had left the family. Grandma was concerned about her
grandson because it was hard for him to make friends in his new
school.

In his individual sessions, Jade appeared shy and initially spoke
very little. But he expressed a desire to improve his self-esteem and
to be able to make new friends. When I asked the boy about his
most favorite movie, he mentioned The Lord of the Rings. I knew
that the third part of the trilogy of The Lord of the Rings was
currently playing in the theaters and encouraged my client to ask
one of his relatives to take him out to see it.

During our next session, Jade was more talkative. He reported that
he had seen the movie with his grandfather. I was surprised because
the boy’s grandma had told me that the two were not close. Prior to
their outing, grandpa had not paid much attention to his grandson.
Now they seemed to feel more connected. From Jade’s answers to
my questions I concluded that they both felt as if they had
“undertaken a real Hero’s Journey” as opposed to one on the screen.
As they identified with the heroes in the movie, they “stuck together
fighting enemies” for an important goal. My sense was that their
relationship was transformed as a new and unfamiliar bond
developed between them. From that day on they became movie
buddies. No one else in their family shared their special interest in adventure films.

In our subsequent sessions, Jade and I talk about all three segments of The Lord of the Rings trilogy. The reflection on these movies opened his eyes to an important value: standing up and fighting for a goal and for one’s true beliefs. I assume that, in some ways, he had been aware of this value before, but it was not very clear in his mind, and he certainly did not have the words to articulate it. The movie characters demonstrated through the actions as heroes how to follow this principle.

Jade also told me that the film heroes were strong and courageous when they faced their enemies. He liked to imagine himself as one of them. It appeared to me as if this fantasy helped him to feel strong and capable of taking on his own problems. I asked him to imagine how he would talk to his classmates in school, as “a hero”. At our next visit he told me that this was not very hard. Making contact seemed surprisingly effortless for Jade now. At first he almost could not believe that his classmates started responding to him. Over time his shyness diminished significantly and he developed new friendships.

When I saw Jade months later, he told me that he had watched more movies that told stories of heroes who struggled with big challenges and eventually triumphed over them. I believe that these movie experiences created an important imprint on the boy’s young psyche. They helped him develop an adventurous spirit and the courage to take risks that supported him in his development.

Guidelines and Questions for Work with Children

Keep the following questions and suggestions in mind while you watch:

- What parts of the movie touches you most?
- What character would you most like to be?
- Notice how the hero(es) go(es) through phases of hesitation, fear, facing obstacles and crises, confronting fear, and eventually gaining a new perspective.
Questions after the movie:

• How does this hero’s story compare with yours?
• Did this hero learn something that you would like to learn as well?

Categorized Movie Suggestions for Middle Childhood

Each film speaks to a number of different subjects, issues and themes and usually has more than one message. Therefore most of the movies that are mentioned here could be categorized in several different ways.

Abuse and Molestation:

*Do You Know the Muffin Man* (1989) - A police officer, and his wife Kendra have two children, Teddy and Sandy. What they know and how they live as a family is irreparably changed one day when it is discovered that a classmate of Teddy’s is the apparent victim of sexual abuse and molestation at the respected neighborhood daycare centre.

*Matilda* (1996) - This movie is a whimsical but at times dark portrayal of a little girl who is neglected by her family, but who goes on to develop remarkable talents and relationships.

*Radio Flyer* (1992) - Mike, now a father, reminisces about his childhood when he and his younger brother moved to a new town with their mother, her new husband and their dog, Shane. When the younger brother is subjected to physical abuse at the hands of their brutal stepfather, Mike decides to convert their toy trolley, the "Radio Flyer", into a plane to fly him to safety.

*Shattered Spirits* (1986, TV) - Martin is an alcoholic with a bad temper, who takes his frustration out on his family when he loses his job.

Adoption:

*Harry Potter Series* (2001 - 2007) - Young Harry Potter’s parents have died in a car crash when he was still a baby, and he is being brought up by his mean Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. On his 11th birthday, he discovers the life of a wizard at Hogwarts School.
of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Throughout his subsequent school years he has to face Dark Arts teachers and other dark forces bent on destroying him. 

*Losing Isaiah* (1995) - An African-American baby, abandoned by his crack-addicted mother, is adopted by a white social worker and her husband. Several years later, the baby's mother finds out her son is not dead as she thought before, and goes to court to get him back.

**Bullies:**

*Ever After* (1998) – This movie tells the "real" story of Cinderella, Danielle. She is made a servant by her new stepmother after her beloved father died. One stepsister is quite kind but the other one bullies Danielle, who grows up to be a happy and strong-willed young young woman. One day she falls in love with handsome Prince Henry, who has troubles of his own at home.

*The NeverEnding Story* (1984) - Bastian is a young boy who lives a dreary life being tormented by school bullies and grieves his mother’s death. He escapes into a bookstore where the owner reveals an ancient storybook to him, which he is warned can be dangerous. Shortly after, he "borrows" the book and begins to read it in the school attic where he is drawn into the mythical land of Fantasia, which desperately needs a hero to save it from destruction. He begins to understand that he is a part of the story and that the survival of the world about which he has been reading is in part up to him.

**Conflict with Parents:**

*Drop Dead Fred* (1991) - A young woman, Lizzie, battles with her controlling mother and finds comfort and confusion with the appearance of her imaginary childhood friend.

*Pieces of April* (2003) - In a very poor zone of New York, April Burns and her boyfriend, the Afro-American Bobby, are preparing to receive April's family for a thanksgiving dinner. While driving in the road, the relationship between the dysfunctional suburban family Burns and the black-sheep April is disclosed through the conversations between her father Jim, her resented mother Joy, her brother, her sister, and her grandmother.

*Shattered Spirits* (1986, TV) - See above.

*Something About Amelia* (1984, TV) - Amelia’s father is sexually abusing her. Eventually the problem is discovered and Amelia is
removed from the home. In family counseling, Amelia has a chance to listen to her father apologize. She struggles with her own guilt.

**Coping with Fear and Overcoming Obstacles:**

*An American Tail* (1986, animated) - While immigrating to the United States, a young Russian mouse gets separated from his family and must find them while trying to survive in a new country.

*Antz* (1998, animated) - Z-4195 is a worker ant that doesn't fit in. He longs for a life that strays from his monotonous routine. One night in a bar he dances with a female that turns out to be the Princess Bala. In order to see her again, he switches places with one of his friends that is a soldier. Little does Z know that he will be sent into battle and start the adventure of his life. Z struggles to get the princess, defeat the evil general, and find his own identity.

*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945) - In Brooklyn circa 1900, young Francie struggles to keep her idealism alive in the face of grinding poverty and the comedies and tragedies of ordinary life.

*August Rush* (2007) - In this movie with fairy tale elements, an orphaned musical prodigy courageously uses his gift as a clue to finding his birth parents.

*Bambi* (1942, animated) - A young deer, Bambi, has to cope with fear as it grows up in the wild after hunters shoot his mother.

*Casper* (1995) - Furious that her late father only willed her his gloomy-looking mansion rather than his millions, Carrigan Crittenden is ready to burn the place to the ground when she discovers a map to a treasure hidden in the house. But when she enters the rickety mansion to seek her claim, she is frightened away by a wicked wave of ghosts. Determined to get her hands on this hidden fortune, she hires afterlife therapist Dr. James Harvey to exorcise the ghosts from the mansion. Harvey and his daughter Kat move in, and soon Kat meets Casper, the ghost of a young boy who's "the friendliest ghost you know." But not so friendly are Casper's uncles, Stretch, Fatso, and Stinkie, who are determined to drive all "fleshies" away. Ultimately, Harvey and Kat cope with their fear as they help the ghosts cross over to the other side.

*The Golden Compass* (2007) - In a parallel universe, young Lyra Belacqua overcomes her fear as she journeys to the far North to save her best friend and other kidnapped children from terrible experiments by a mysterious organization.
Miracle on 34th Street (1947) - When a nice old man who claims to be Santa Claus is institutionalized as insane, a child copes with fear to help him until a young lawyer decides to defend him by arguing in court that he is the real thing.

My Life as a Dog (Sweden, 1985) - A boy is sent off to a rural village while his ill mother recuperates. He copes with his fear as he finds acceptance and adventures with the town’s eccentric.


Star Wars (1977-2005) - This adventure movie follows the patterns of the Hero’s Journey in ancient mythical stories.

Rapunzel (1983) - A young princess copes with her fear when she is spirited away by an evil witch and locked in a tall tower. As she grows into a beautiful woman, her hair is left uncut and becomes so long that it serves as a golden stairway to her room.

The Wizard of Oz (1939) - Dorothy Gale is swept away to a magical land in a tornado and embarks on a quest to see the Wizard who can help her return home. On this journey, the girl makes a slow and courageous transition from dependence to independence.

Whale Rider (2002) - On the east coast of New Zealand, the Whangara people believe that their ancestor, Paikea, escaped death when his canoe capsized by riding to shore on the back of a whale. From then on, Whangara chiefs, always the first-born, always male, have been considered Paikea's direct descendants. Pai, an eleven-year-old girl in a patriarchal New Zealand tribe, believes she is destined to be the new chief. But her grandfather Koro is bound by tradition to pick a male leader. Pai loves Koro more than anyone in the world, but she must fight him and a thousand years of tradition to fulfill her destiny.

Yentl (1983) - A Jewish girl disguises herself as a boy and copes with her fear as she follows her desire to enter religious training.

Ethical Decisions:

Beauty and the Beast (1991) - Belle, whose father Maurice is imprisoned by the Beast, offers herself instead and finds the prince inside the Beast.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005) - The poor and sweet boy Charlie Bucket finds golden tickets hidden in the bars of chocolate for the pride and joy of his very supportive family, and he spends the day in a mysterious competition for an initially unknown award with other four nasty boys and girls. As he gets the award, he
doesn’t forget the needs of his family.

**Friendships, Peer and Sibling Relationships:**

*Alaska* (1996) - Jake Barnes and his two kids, Sean and Jessie, have moved to Alaska after his wife died. After Jake’s plane goes down somewhere in the mountains, Jessie and Sean set out on an adventure to find their father.

*The Cure* (1995) - Dexter, who has AIDS, and Eric become best friends. When they read that a doctor in distant New Orleans claims to have found a cure for AIDS, the boys leave home and find him.

*Dead Poet’s Society* (1989) - Several students and friends meet Professor Keating, their new English teacher, who tells them of the Dead Poets Society, and encourages them to go against the status quo. Each, in their own way, does this. The boys and their relationships to each other are changed for life.


*Harriet the Spy* (1996) - Harriet M. Welsch is a spy. But when Harriet’s friends find her secret notebook the tables are turned on her. Eventually she wins her friends back and still keeps on going with the spy business.

*The Little Rascals* (1994) - The sanctity of the He-Man Woman Haters Club is threatened when one of its most respected members, Alfalfa Switzer, falls in love with a girl, Darla Hood. It's up to Alfalfa’s pal Spanky McFarland to set his pal straight before Alfalfa’s indiscretions jeopardize the club's chances of winning the big go-cart race in a few weeks.

*My Girl* (1991) - Vada Sultenfuss is obsessed with death. Her mother is dead, and her father runs a funeral parlor. She is also in love with her English teacher, and joins a poetry class over the summer just to impress him. Thomas, her best friend, is "allergic to everything". He sticks with Vada despite her hang-ups.

*Stand By Me* (1986) - Four boys on a long walk discover a body in the woods and share other secrets. This movie portrays peer-group development and peer pressure in latency-age kids.

*The White Balloon* (Iran, 1995) - A seven-year-old girl yearns to own a goldfish. Despite mishaps, she perseveres in her desire, while shaping new perceptions of the world and of her sibling bond.

*Mr. Mom* (1983) - Jack and Caroline are parents when Jack suddenly loses his job. They agree that he should stay at home and look after
the house while Caroline works although he really doesn't have a clue.

*Stuart Little* (1999, and 2002, animated) - Stuart is a mouse who is adopted into a human family. His new parents are sure thrilled with him, but everyone is not. Through a series of adventures he eventually gains the love of his big brother, acceptance by the extended Little family and even the grudging tolerance of the family cat.

*Tom and Huck* (1995) - Tom Sawyer and his best friend, Huckleberry Finn, go on many adventures including finding lost treasure, witnessing a murder, getting lost in a cave, and almost getting killed.

**Grief and Death:**

*Finding Nemo* (2003, animated) - After Nemo’s mom dies, the boy clown fish is stolen from the coral reef. His timid father must then travel to Sydney to find Nemo.

*Alaska* (1996) - See above.

*The Boy with the Green Hair* (1948) - Peter Frye, a typical American boy, is orphaned when his parents are caught in the London Blitz. The morning after Peter learns he's an orphan, his hair spontaneously turns green.

*Charlotte's Web* (1973 and 1996) - Wilbur the pig is scared of the end of the season, because he knows that come that time, he will end up on the dinner table. He hatches a plan with Charlotte, a spider that lives in his pen, to ensure that this will never happen. Charlotte dies towards the end of the movie.

*Corrina, Corrina* (1994) - When Molly’s mom dies, she becomes mute and withdrawn. The sassy housekeeper Corrina Washington coaxes Molly out of her shell and shows father and daughter a whole new way of life.

*Fly Away Home* (1996) - Amy’s mother is killed in an auto wreck. Amy is miserable in her new life with her father until she discovers a nest of goose eggs that were abandoned when developers began tearing up a local forest.

*Heidi* (1993, TV) When Heidi is orphaned she first lives with her grandfather, before she is taken away to be the companion of a rich man's invalid daughter.

*House of Cards* (1992) - A six-year-old girl witnesses the accidental death of her father and retreats into a world of fantasy. Her mother
responds ambivalently to a psychiatrist's input.  
*Ponette* (1996) - Ponette withdraws from all the people around her, waiting for her dead mother to come back. She tries waiting, and when her mother still doesn't appear, tries magic chants, praying to God, and then becoming a child of God, to have some power over Him. First she does not succeed, but when she is in despair, her mother does come back.  
*The Secret Garden* (1993) - Young Mary Lennox is orphaned by an earthquake in India and sent to England to live with her uncle in a cold ancestral manor in Yorkshire. He is still mourning for the wife who died ten years ago. After Mary briefly meets him, she is mostly left on her own again. She soon makes two exciting discoveries in an overgrown secret garden and meets new friends.  

**Illness and Disability:**  
*David and Lisa* (1962) - This movie portrays the relationship of an obsessive-compulsive adolescent boy with an autistic girl in a residential setting.  
*The Horse Whisperer* (1998) - Both a young girl and her horse are physically and psychologically traumatized. The healing of both slowly ensues.  
*Lorenzo’s Oil* (1992) - This movie portrays an inspirational true story of extraordinary parental efforts to find a remedy for their ill son (see above).  
*The Miracle Worker* (1962) - Young Helen Keller, blind, deaf, and mute since infancy, is in danger of being sent to an institution. Her inability to communicate has left her frustrated and violent. Through persistence and love, and sheer stubbornness half-blind Annie Sullivan breaks through Helen's walls of silence and darkness and teaches her to communicate.  
*My Life as a Dog* (1985) - A boy grows up after he is sent off to a rural village while his ill mother recuperates. He finds acceptance and adventures with the town’s eccentrics.  
*The Ryan White Story* (1989,TV) - This movie tells the true story of Ryan White, a thirteen-year-old hemophiliac, who contracted AIDS from factor VIII, which was used to control this disorder.  
*Simon Birch* (1998) - Simon Birch was born with a condition that makes him much smaller than all the other kids in town. Now, due to his condition, Simon thinks God made him this way for a reason.
Simon and his best friend Joe Wenteworth are both outcasts in their tiny New England town: Joe is the illegitimate son of the town beauty. Together, they try to find out, who Joe's father is. Just as they succeed, a situation arises that demands a very small hero.

**Learning about Romance and Sexuality:**

*Antz* (1998, animated) - See above.

*Big* (1988) - Josh Baskin makes a wish at a fairground machine to be big. He wakes up the following morning to find that his wish has been granted and his body has grown older over night. He gets a job in a toy company, and develops a relationship.

*The Little Rascals* (1994) - See above.

*Milk Money* (1994) - Three prepubescent boys are fascinated with sex. One boy attempts to facilitate his single-parent father’s attachment to an unlikely woman.

**Lying:**

*An American Tail* (1986) - See above.

*Hook* (1991) - In this remake of the “Peter Pan” movie, Peter Pan has the role of the initially dishonest and “too-busy-for-his-children father.” Issues of development, and growing up are explained.

**Moving:**

*Alaska* (1996) - See above.

*An American Tail* (1986) - See above.

*A Home of Our Own* (1993) - A single mother packs up her six children and leaves Los Angeles in search of a place they can call their own. The oldest son misses his life in the city.

*The Sandlot* (1993) - Scotty Smalls moves to a new neighborhood with his mom and stepfather, where he doesn’t know anybody. The neighborhood baseball guru Rodriguez takes Scotty under his wing, and soon he is part of the local baseball club.

**Prejudice, Being Different than Others:**

*Babe* (1995, animated) - Babe is a little pig who realizes that he has the makings to become the greatest sheep pig of all time. He learns to herd sheep with a little help from Farmer Hoggett.

*The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959) - This movie portrays the harrowing story of a young Jewish girl who, with her family and
their friends, is forced into hiding in an attic in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam.

_Dumbo_ (1941, animated) - Mrs. Jumbo wishes for a baby, but when the stork finally delivers, the baby has a distinctive enhancement: gigantic ears.


_The Jackie Robinson Story_ (1950) - This is a Biography of Jackie Robinson, the first black major league baseball player in the 20th century.

_Little Man Tate_ (1991) - A seven-year-old child prodigy longs for the “ordinary” experiences of a normal childhood as his cocktail-waitress mother battles with his school director.

_Pocahontas_ (1995, animated) - See above.

_Sounder_ (1972) - The Morgans, a loving and strong family of black sharecroppers in Louisiana in 1933, face a serious family crisis when the husband and father, Nathan Lee Morgan, is convicted of a petty crime and sent to a prison camp. After some months, his wife Rebecca sends the oldest son, who is about 11 years old, to visit his father at the camp.

**School:**

_Dead Poet’s Society_ (1989) - See above.

_A Little Princess_ (1995) - After her mother died and her father enlists to fight for the British in WWI, young Sara Crewe goes to New York to a boarding school her late mother attended. She soon clashes with the severe headmistress, who attempts to stifle Sara’s creativity and sense of self-worth.

_School of Rock_ (2003) - When down and out, rock star Dewey Finn gets fired from his band and he faces a mountain of debts and depression, he takes a job as a 4th grade substitute teacher at an uptight private school where his attitude has a powerful effect on his students. He meets Zack, a ten-year-old guitar prodigy, who could help Dewey win a "battle of the bands" competition, which would solve his financial problems and put him back in the spotlight.

**Self-esteem:**

_A Bug’s Life_ (1998, animated) - Flik, a resident misfit ant, sets out on a journey to find "bigger bugs" to save his colony from the evil
grasshoppers. Yet he mistakenly ends up getting a group of circus bugs for the job, which gives the ants hope.

*Babe* (1995, animated) - See above.

*The Bad News Bears* (1976) - Coach Buttermaker brings aboard girl pitching ace Amanda Whurlizer, who happens to be the best player around. Brimming with confidence, the Bears look to sweep into the championship game and avenge an earlier loss.

*Chicken Run* (2000, animated) - Having been hopelessly repressed and facing eventual certain death at the chicken farm where they are held, Rocky the rooster and Ginger the chicken decide to rebel against the evil Mr. and Mrs. Tweedy, the farm's owners. Rocky and Ginger lead their fellow chickens in a great escape from the murderous farmers and their farm of doom.

*Ever After* (1998) - See above.

*The Incredibles* (2004, animated) - A family of undercover superheroes, while trying to live the quiet suburban life, are forced into action to save the world.

*Pollyanna* (1960) - Even after having lived the hardscrabble life of a missionary's daughter all her life and seen the loss of both parents, young Pollyanna Whittier refuses to be depressed. When she must go to live with her cold, spinsterish aunt in a town inhabited by embittered, unfriendly souls, Polyanna wins over everyone and transforms the town.

*Rudy* (1993) - Rudy grew up in a steel mill town where most people ended up working. He wants to play football at Notre Dame instead. But his grades are too low, his athletic skills are poor, and he is only half the size of the other players. Rudy is determined to overcome the odds and fulfill his dream of playing for Notre Dame.

*Searching for Bobby Fischer* (1993) - Josh Waitzkin, a prepubescent chess prodigy refuses to harden himself in order to become a champion like the famous but unlikable Bobby Fischer.

*October Sky* (1999) - This movie portrays the true story of Homer Hickam, a coal miner's son who was inspired by the first Sputnik launch to take up rocketry against his father's wishes.

**Single Parents and Divorce:**

*Author! Author!* (1982) - While facing the stress of his play being produced on Broadway, a playwright raises his son, his stepdaughters, and his stepsons.
*Bye Bye Love* (1995) - This story focuses on the lifestyle of three divorced men. It reveals their relationship with their children, ex-wives, and girl friends.

*Corrina, Corrina* (1994) - See above.


*Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) - After a bitter divorce, the dad, an actor, disguises himself as a female housekeeper to spend secret time with his children held in custody by his ex-wife.

*The Parent Trap* (1998) - Identical twins Hallie and Annie were separated at birth when their parents divorced. After the two meet at a summer camp, they begin plotting to reunite their estranged parents.
Adolescence (Ages 13-18)

**Pride and Prejudice**

**Director:** Joe Wright  
**Producers:** Tim Bevan, Liza Chasin, Eric Fellner, Debra Hayward, Paul Webster  
**Screenwriter:** Deborah Moggach  
**Cast:** Keira Knightley, Talulah Riley, Rosamund Pike, Jena Malone, Carey Mulligan, Donald Sutherland, Brenda Blythen, Simon Woods, Matthew MacFadyen, Tom Hollander, Kelly Reilly  
**MPAA Rating:** PG  
**Year of Release:** 2005

**Review**

This sumptuous new screen adaptation of Pride and Prejudice shows a fresh take on the story of Jane Austen’s novel.

Social mobility is the goal for the hysteric Mrs. Bennet in marrying off her five well-brought-up daughters. But her second-born, Lizzie, and her older sister, Jane, stubbornly stick to their romantic ideals. Conveniently, the objects of their affections, Mr. Bingley for Jane, and his best friend, the standoffish and snobbish Mr. Darcy for the intelligent, outspoken Lizzie, are rich and come into town to stir up trouble and steal hearts. When they first meet, Lizzie starts disliking Darcy because he slighted her at a ball.

Not long after this ball, Jane is invited to dine at the house in which Bingley, his sisters, and Darcy are staying. Upon her arrival, she falls ill with a fever and Lizzie goes and cares for her sister. As Darcy comes to know her better during the course of her visit, his unfavorable opinion of Lizzie is challenged. In spite of himself, Darcy begins to find her playful manners intriguing.

After the sisters arrive back home, it appears that Jane will soon marry Mr. Bingley. But Lizzie hears that Mr. Darcy talks his friend out of proposing because he believes that Mrs. Bennet and the younger girls are boorish and predatory. Lizzie becomes furious with Darcy for interfering. At a party, a handsome and charming
officer, George Wickham, reveals to her a scandalous story about how Mr. Darcy ruined Wickam’s prospects by refusing to give him a valuable living that had been bequeathed to the officer in Mr. Darcy’s late father’s will. Lizzie is shocked at Mr. Darcy’s callous nature and her dislike of him increases.

In her time, women were not allowed to own property or inherit estate assets. Getting married was their best chance for financial security. Passive, docile women accepted dull, boring husbands in exchange for security, but Lizzie is unwilling to compromise. When a wealthy cousin, Mr. Collins, proposes to her, she rebels and refuses his offer, although her mother is upset and angry.

A subsequent scene shows Lizzie surprised about Darcy’s proposal to marry her in the soaking rain. Both seem infused with spontaneous passion as they break into heated shouting. Later, at home, when Lizzie is in the midst of pondering over Darcy’s arrogant conduct, he visits her again. The suitor begins pacing around the room until, suddenly, he bursts out into a declaration of love for Lizzie. She is amazed and stunned, not only by this announcement, but also by Darcy’s insulting method of a second proposal. Angrily, she refuses him again.

Because he deeply cares about Lizzie, Mr. Darcy is upset and writes a letter convincingly defending himself against the accusations that she leveled at him in her refusal of his offer of marriage. When she receives the letter, she finds its contents difficult to believe. However, gradually she comes to understand Darcy’s point of view and her hatred of him dissipates.

Some time later, Lizzie and her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner are invited to visit Darcy’s estate. They mistakenly believe that the Darcy family is away from home for the summer. When Lizzie and Mr. Darcy see each other she is astonished at the drastic change in his character and recognizes her love with him. Later she enjoys learning about Darcy’s role in uniting her younger sister Lydia with Wickham who had abandoned the girl earlier.

Lady Catherine, Darcy’s aunt, visits to gain a promise from Lizzie never to enter into an engagement with Mr. Darcy. The young
woman, of course, refuses to oblige the aunt’s imperious demands. Instead, she overcomes her pride and prejudice, acknowledges her love for Darcy, and marries him.

Theoretical Contemplation

When we watch a film, we know that we are seeing a highly edited version of reality. The film’s creators have selectively chosen to highlight some events and leave out others, in order to evoke certain feelings and focus our attention on certain themes. They create an illusion of reality and we make a decision to accept it as real. In a similar way, we look at our own reality through a highly personal lens. We may think and feel as if we are seeing an objective reality but, in fact, we choose to edit out certain information and experiences and focus on others. We see life through the filter of our own personal histories, beliefs, and blind spots.

I use this movie analogy as a tool to help clients become conscious of, question, and eventually release negative views about themselves and their lives. I explain to them that their beliefs can help them or mislead them. These beliefs are often not accurate reflections of the current reality. In other words, they are cognitive distortions. These distortions can prevent clients from developing healthy self-esteem and realizing their goals in life. I teach them that what they take to be real is, in fact, often a filtered version of reality, and encourage them to think of it as their personal myth of reality or their old inner movie.

Cinema Therapy

I had used Cinema Therapy with 14-year-old Brianna before to treat her Dysthymia as well as her self-esteem issues. However, I did not expect that she would be fascinated with a movie like Pride and Prejudice. Brianna is sensitive and artistically inclined, but is still a typical teenager. Her response to this film confirmed for me that the effect of metaphors in movies can be powerful even if the characters portray a life that is completely different from a client’s life.

Brianna told me that she had “become obsessed” with this movie. I encouraged her to describe what moved her so deeply. She told me
that she loved how “some characters walk away from certain incidents, say, ’I fucked that up’, and then things work out at the end anyway.” Early in the movie,” Brianna continued, “Lizzie gets very angry when she asks Mr. Darcy to dance, and he refuses. She feels even more hurt when he continues to insult her. But she gets over the rejection and her pride.”

I asked Brianna in which way this reminded her of herself. She responded, “I like Lizzie because I am just the opposite. I always take things personally and that I often beat myself up when somebody doesn’t like me. That’s why I rarely like to meet new people or try new things like my friends do.”

During our further exploration, I understood that Brianna’s negative self-image was based on cognitive distortions, which I explained to her as an old inner movie. Some of the roots of this inner movie seemed to lie in her relationship with her mother who frequently attacked her daughter in a harsh way for mistakes Brianna made.

Reflecting on _Pride and Prejudice_ with Brianna, we discussed that she might have responded to Lizzie positively because the strength and courage that she saw in this character helped her recognize a new, more appropriate inner movie. I asked my client to watch _Pride and Prejudice_ again with this new understanding in mind. During our following sessions, she continued to refer to the effect that the movie had on her. With time, her new, positive view of herself sank in more.

I also decided to encourage Brianna’s mom to use more adequate parenting techniques. She was responsive, started criticizing her daughter less, and used increasingly more positive reinforcement.

Brianna began to let go of her defensive guard when new challenges were presented to her or when she met new people. The quality of her existing relationships improved too. Her self-esteem increased and her depression symptoms appeared significantly reduced.

**Guidelines for Questions**

- What character did you admire most?
• Do you have a negative view of yourself or your life that this character does not have?
• Could this negative view be based on an old *inner movie*?

**Guidelines for Interventions**

• Describe the following metaphor to adolescents: By watching the movie character his or her admired qualities are “copied” into your own *inner movie screen* with a new, more appropriate *inner movie*. At the same time the old, undesired *inner movie* gets “erased”.
• Instruct teens to write their new, healthy view or belief on cards, and to place these notes at prominent places around their room, so that they can be seen frequently throughout the day.

**The Truman Show**

**Director:** Peter Weir  
**Producers:** Edward S. Feldman, Andrew Niccol, Scott Rudin, Adam Schroeder  
**Screenwriter:** Andrew Niccol  
**Cast:** Jim Carrey, Laura Linney, Noah Emmerich, Natascha McElhone, Ed Harris  
**MPAA Rating:** PG  
**Year of Release:** 1998

**Review**

*Truman Burbank lives in Seahaven. He works as sales executive at an insurance company, seems happily married to Meryl, and does not find it suspicious that she describes household products in the language of TV commercials. He lives an ideal life in an ideal, if limited, world. Truman accepts his reality, shrugging off the occasional odd moment that just does not seem to fit the picture. He is happy, more or less. And yet a subtle uneasiness seems to pervade his inner world.*

*We gradually learn that Truman’s outer world is an elaborate hoax perpetrated on him by television producer and director Christof.*
Truman was adopted at birth by Christof’s television company and his life has been televised every second of every day, from that moment on. For thirty years, he has been the unwitting star of the longest running, popular documentary-soap opera in history. Seahaven (“sea heaven”) is actually a gigantic soundstage. Truman Burbank (in Burbank Warner Bros., Disney, NBC etc. are located) lives under the gaze of 5,000 hidden TV cameras. Everyone around him is an actor: his mother, father, best friend, wife, coworkers, shopkeepers, street-sweepers, etc. And all the actors overact: the mother is too motherly, the best friend is awfully true blue, and the wife is ever so wifely.

This whole monstrous fabrication is paid for by corporate advertising. From his control room high in an artificial “sky,” the god-like Christof and his minions work 24/7 to maintain Truman’s complex illusion of reality and to prevent him from discovering the truth.

In a flashback, we learn that Truman had survived a boating accident as a boy in which his “father” drowned. Christof had staged a violent "storm" that swept Truman’s dad off to sea. This traumatic experience prevented Truman from setting his foot into a boat ever again. Because Seahaven is surrounded by the ocean, his water phobia kept him from discovering the boundaries of this illusionary human-made paradise.

Truman secretly still loves his former college sweetheart, Lauren. Another flashback shows that they met in a library (symbol of the knowledge of good and evil). The actress, Sylvia, who played Lauren developed real feelings for Truman. She believed that he should know the truth about his existence and took him to the beach, where they could not be heard. They kissed with the pounding surf in the background (to scare Truman away). Before she was able to reveal anything, she was quickly rushed away and eventually banished from the show. When Truman heard that Lauren had moved to Fiji with her family, he agreed to marry Meryl, who now serves the show as a more reliable pro.

Several unexplainable events start to make Truman suspicious. A strange man leaps out of a Christmas present shouting incongruous
protests and then is quickly wrestled out of the living room. Truman’s dead father appears and is taken away too. When a studio light falls from the “sky”, Truman suspects that he is somehow being watched. He feels that something is missing and thinks that he might find it in Fiji, with Lauren. But everybody, especially Meryl, tries very hard to prevent him from leaving. His attempts to cross a bridge are prevented by some cleverly staged events by Christof.

Truman’s desire to find the truth as well as Lauren is a compelling force that ultimately drives him to face and conquer his great fear of the ocean. He charters a boat, enters the water that kept him contained, and is soon exposed to the anti-Christ, “Christ-off’s”, worst tempest. For Christof, the demands of the show take precedence over any other values. Into the manufactured deadly storm, he broadcasts his threatening voice down to Truman "I AM the Creator...", while Lauren whispers a simple prayer as she is watching the Truman Show on TV. Soon Truman is knocked out by the storm and lies with his arms outstretched on the boat as though he died. Ropes form the sign of the cross on his chest, emphasizing his crucified-like body posture.

Suddenly the sea is calms down and the sun starts shining. Truman awakens and continues to sail fearlessly until he unexpectedly crashes into the “end of the world”, the back wall of the gigantic sound studio in which he lives. He leaves the boat and walks on the ledge, as if walking on water, to a set of stairs leading up to a door. Christof warns him about the challenges that he will have to face if he enters real life through this door. But Truman becomes a true man as he steps through the door and escapes the cameras as well as the confines of his limited world and worldview.

The filmmakers devised a carefully crafted object lesson, full of metaphors and symbols, on the need to question our perceived reality, on self-determination, on truth seeking, and on overcoming fear.

Theoretical Contemplation

What we take to be real is, in fact, often a filtered version of reality. In perceiving the world, it is as if our eyes and ears were a camera
and microphone. Instead of actually witnessing reality directly, we frequently watch what can be called an inner movie, on a screen inside our heads. And this screen is often unreliable. Our inner movie plays the story that we tell ourselves about the world around us and about who we are. Most of these stories and beliefs about reality are formed as an adaptive response to our reality at an earlier time. These beliefs are not accurate reflections of the current reality any more.

Introducing the metaphor of the inner movie to clients in conjunction with recommending movies that play with our perception of reality, such as Truman Show, helps them question distorted beliefs as well as projections. Other movie examples are Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004), Stay (2005), The Matrix (1999), Pleasantville (1998), Solaris (1972 and 2002), Thirteenth Floor (1999), Total Recall (1990), and Vanilla Sky (2001).

Cinema Therapy

The mother of 16-year-old Sierra called me because her daughter’s school counselor had recommended that she start therapy. Sierra obsessed about her relationship with her boyfriend Tyler. She hardly slept any more and was not able to focus on her schoolwork. Sierra tried to escape her emotions by overeating. Her impulse to overeat seemed especially intrusive at night when nobody was watching.

Tyler had told Sierra that he loved Sierra very much, but her jealousy drove him crazy. Her boyfriend became increasingly frustrated because she kept interrogating him about his encounters with other girls. Sierra felt helpless and out of control with this behavior. She was also embarrassed about the fact that she secretly checked his computer for evidence of infidelity when she visited him and he temporarily left his room.

After a few sessions, Sierra revealed to me that her dad had several affairs when she was a small child. Her mom found out about it and frequently complained to her about his behavior and “men in
general”. My client believed that her mother didn’t have the courage to leave her marriage.

At one point Sierra said, “when I am with Tyler, I know deep inside that he is not cheating on me. But when I don’t see him, my doubts become really strong.” As soon as she seemed ready to question her jealous beliefs, I told how the plot of an inner movie tells a story about ourselves and other people, which is often based on early life experiences. Sierra seemed open to movie metaphors. Since she loved films, she was excited about my suggestion to watch Truman Show at home.

In our subsequent exploration she questioned more strongly what she had perceived as the “reality” of Tyler’s cheating. She also saw how her “escape” into addictive overeating helped her feel better, but created a “false reality” that did not resolve anything. I asked my client whether she could see herself - as Truman did - facing the challenge of leaving this false reality behind.

This way of viewing herself allowed Sierra to face the “real world” of difficult emotions when they arose, especially when she had an impulse to overeat. During our sessions, she started working with her feelings around her jealousy and developed tools to process them successfully. Gradually she was able to let go of her jealous obsession and started eating more consciously.

**Guidelines for Work with Older Adolescents Who Are Able to Work With Metaphors**

Before the movie:

Watch how Truman goes through a change from an oblivious and fearful person in a false world into a man who courageously wants to find the truth, although this means having to face the challenges of the real world.
After the movie:

- Does a mature or wise part of you sometimes wonder whether certain beliefs that you hold about yourself and/or others are distorted or not “real”?
- What would it take to question these beliefs and eventually, like Truman, “step through the door” toward authenticity and truth?
- In case of an addiction: What would it take to bring up the courage to face the “real world” of sometimes difficult emotions?
- Would you be interested in learning tools to work through such emotions successfully?

**The Dogwalker**

**Director:** Jacques Thelemaque  
**Producers:** Hilary Six, Linda Miller, Diane Gaidry, Toni-Ann Parker, David Diaan  
**Screenwriter:** Jacques Thelemaque  
**Cast:** Diane Gaidry, Pam Gordon, Lyn Vaus, Lisa Jane Persky, Alan Gelfant, John Nielsen, Kerry Bishop, Alan DeSatti  
**MPAA Rating:** PG  
**Year of Release:** 2002

**Review**

Dogs have it better than some humans in this movie. The pets enjoy a pampered existence, while those who get paid to exercise them live marginally on the fringes of Los Angeles.

The Dogwalker follows the moving, transformational journey of Ellie Moore who crosses the continent from Buffalo, New York, to Los Angeles to escape from her abusive boyfriend. When she arrives, Ellie is promptly robbed of all her possessions and reduced to living on the streets. After a failed attempt at prostitution, she wakes up in a public park and meets Betsy, an older, genuinely eccentric, misanthropic, but talented professional dog-walker. It turns out that Betsy needs some help as well, and Ellie becomes her apprentice.
The relationship between the cranky old dog-walker and her unstable new helper proves the catalyst for the emotional journey Ellie must undertake. In Betsy, she finds a mirror of herself - a lonely, angry, complex woman whose own troubled past proves disturbingly close to her own. The women slowly learn that they have more in common than they first realized. Ellie discovers that Betsy’s demeanor hides a past more dark and damaged than her own. They bond by showing each other their scars, the results of being battered. Betsy had killed her abusive husband in his sleep. Because she was sentenced to many years in prison, she lost all contact with her children.

In walking the dogs, Ellie finds lost pieces of herself. She fumbles with the leash to her life - struggling to hold on as it pulls her toward a vision of brighter future before her past can catch up with her. Learning to walk the dogs becomes a metaphor for gaining control over her life.

Eventually, Ellie learns that Betsy is dying of cancer. She inherits the dog-walking business. During Betsy's final days, Ellie's former boyfriend returns. Now Ellie is forced to use the disciplinary strength she has had to learn as a dog-walker and becomes a newly independent woman.

Cinema Therapy

The 18-year-old high school senior, Alyssa, came to see me because her best friend urged her to start therapy. Alyssa’s depression prevented her from applying for college. Her divorced mom supported her treatment. Alyssa had rarely seen her father since she was twelve years old.

My client felt desperate and helpless because her 21-year-old boyfriend of six months, Adrian, had been verbally abusive, especially under the influence of alcohol. Alyssa felt very attached to him although he refused to address his drinking problem. Adrian was her first boyfriend. She did not want to confront him about his demeaning attacks because part of her believed that she might deserve to be treated this way. Besides, she feared that she might agitate Adrian even more with a confrontation. He always
apologized and asked for forgiveness after he calmed down from an outburst of rage. Then she gained hope that things will improve.

Within a couple of sessions, my client understood the cyclical pattern of her boyfriend’s behavior. Although she had become increasingly anxious and depressed during this relationship, Alyssa did not consider a break-up. She was afraid that she might get even more depressed after a separation. My client was afraid she would feel like when her dad left the family.

In response to my inquiry, Alyssa told me that she had sometimes been reprimanded by her father as a small child although she always did her best to please him. Since she was receptive to movie metaphors, I explained that her father’s criticism might have created a psychological imprint, which I call an undesired inner movie. Our inner movies play the stories that we tell ourselves about the world around us and about who we are. The plots of these inner movies often tell stories about our world and ourselves that are often based on early life experiences.

Projecting a childhood “movie” on today’s reality, Alyssa struggled with the conviction that there was something wrong with her, that she did not have a right to speak up and free herself from an abusive situation. This helped my client start to understand that her self-doubts, her fear of separation, as well as her belief that standing up to her boyfriend could lead to more conflict, made her stuck, resentful, anxious, and depressed.

Because Alyssa loved movies, she was excited about my suggestion to watch The Dogwalker. I encouraged her to pay attention to Ellie’s character development and to imagine herself in Ellie’s role. Alyssa was fascinated by my suggestion and watched this movie several times while she paid close attention to Ellie’s changes. The movie became a catalyst for my client’s psychological development. In Cinema Therapy language, I explained to her that, by observing Ellie’s transformation, she “copied” the character’s healing experience into her own “inner movie screen” and at the same time “erased” her old, undesired inner movie.
Within a few weeks, Alyssa developed a more positive self-image that led to increased autonomy in most of her relationships. Eventually she felt strong enough to confront her boyfriend about his abusive behavior and alcoholism. Adrian’s continued lack of receptivity started to make her angry now. It did not take very long, until Alyssa told me that she had broke up with Adrian. Consequently, we have mostly worked on the grief of her first relationship. Eventually she opened up to working on developing her career goals.

**Theoretical Contemplation**

In this *Cinema Therapy* approach, *The Prescriptive Way*, specific films are prescribed as a kind of “teaching tale” to model specific problem-solving behavior or to help our clients to access and develop their potential. They are guided to “become” a character in their imagination who models desired behaviors and skills. This is a way to help clients acquire the film character’s attributes.

This approach is based on the understanding that watching a movie can put clients into a light trance state, similar to the state often achieved via guided visualizations. Like trance work, watching movies in this way guides them toward a mature or wise inner part. Subsequently, this part helps clients overcome problems and strengthen previously unfamiliar positive qualities.

**Guidelines for Questions and Suggestions for Older Adolescents**

- Did you see one or several characters who modeled behavior in certain parts of the film that you would like to emulate?
- Did these character(s) develop certain strengths or other capacities that you would like to gain as well?
- Imagine yourself as one of these characters when you watch the movie. Imagine yourself with the mature or wise aspects of the character’s personality.
- How would your life look like if you had the character’s qualities or capacities?
- Imagine yourself using these qualities or capacities in your life.
The Use of Cinematherapy with Adolescents in a Residential Setting - A Window Through the Wall of Aggression
By Donald J. Kearly
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Engaging adolescents in therapy can be challenging. A therapist may find that the methods normally used with adults are not effective with an adolescent due to the developmental stage that they are experiencing during this part of their lives. This is particularly true when working with adolescents who struggle with the symptoms of oppositional-defiant disorder, conduct disorder, bipolar disorder, and/or learning disorders. Verbal and physical aggression are common coping strategies with this population, and many of them have been placed in residential treatment as a result of these actions. In cases such as these, the adolescents can receive the special services they need in school as well as in the cottages where they live, by staff trained in working with people who have these types of problems. However, even with specialized training working with these clients can be very challenging and difficult. This is particularly true when working with them in individual psychotherapy.

I met my first client outside the dining hall of the residential treatment facility where he lived. Leonard (fictitious name), was a 15-year-old boy who suffered from multiple diagnoses including bipolar disorder, conduct disorder, impulse control disorder, and learning disabilities. His file indicated he had been in group homes and residential treatment facilities almost his entire life. A stack of behavioral reports documented his frequent violent and unpredictable outbursts. Other staff warned me that no mention should be made of his family, particularly his parents, as he had reacted with extreme aggression in the past. In addition to the aforementioned behavioral problems, his file contained documentation of his low verbal abilities, which I later learned would be a common weakness among many of the adolescent boys who were in this residential treatment center. I knew I had my hands full and as a new therapist I felt ill equipped to help him. How
could I work with someone who had these kinds of problems? How could I reach him?

Upon our introduction and his being informed that he would be transferred to a new therapist, he expressed a series of explicatives and refused to meet with me. Through tearful eyes, he made threats directed toward his previous therapist and me. The previous therapist had been struggling with various techniques to establish a working relationship with this client, including allowing him to bring music CDs to listen to during the therapy session. It was only after I promised to allow him to continue bringing music CDs to therapy that he was able to calm himself enough to return to his dorm. I kept that promise, which resulted in us listening to music together during the first few sessions. Needless to say, there was very little therapeutic dialog during that time period. My goal was simply to establish trusting relationship with this very troubled young man.

After reading the almost daily behavioral reports containing documentation of his physically aggressive behavior toward other boys and staff, I realized that the incidents were often preceded by a “verbal power struggle.” To help Leonard understand what a power struggle meant he was shown a segment from the movie The Breakfast Club (1985) during one of our individual sessions. In particular, the scene I chose for him to view was the one involving the character John Bender (the conduct disordered student) getting into a power struggle with Principal Richard Vernon. A verbal exchange occurs between Bender and Principal Vernon, escalating to the point where the principal repeatedly says, “Do you want another [weeks suspension]?” to which Bender repeatedly and defiantly replies, “Yes!” with the result being that his suspension is extended by many weeks. Upon seeing this scene, Leonard spontaneously said, “That’s me!” and started talking about his own behavior, and how similar to Bender he felt he was. I was astonished by Leonard’s response. My highest expectation was for him to comment about the film’s character, perhaps projecting his own feelings into Bender. I did not expect him to talk about his own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. He pleaded to continue watching more of the movie, which we watched together. At other points in the film,
he verbalized his similarities to Bender, which led to brief, yet very significant, discussions.

After seeing how Leonard reacted, I decided this film could possibly be a useful tool during therapy with my other adolescent clients. The same scene with Bender and Principal Vernon was shown to other clients, who also identified with the character Bender, enabling us to use the movie scene as a launching pad for therapeutic discussions. This was working! I had accidentally stumbled across a tool to help my clients. It was only later that I learned that this new technique is being used in a variety of situations. Cinematherapy had provided a window, or conduit, through the fortress of aggressive defense, which could be used to establish meaningful dialog. However, at the same time I was feeling excited about this tool, I had nagging feelings that perhaps this result was a fluke and that other films may not have the same result.

The treatment team, consisting of other psychotherapists, schoolteachers, recreation therapists, psychiatrists, and dorm counselors agreed that I should continue using films. Therefore, I continued with this technique. The next film shown to Leonard was This Boy’s Life (1993), which depicted a boy growing up in the 1950s who had to endure an extremely verbally and physically abusive stepfather, as well as a passive and emotionally unavailable mother. This movie, like The Breakfast Club, helped open the window of therapeutic discussion, and stimulated the verbal processing of childhood trauma and parental disappointments that Leonard had experienced in the past. Leonard particularly responded to scenes involving broken promises from the stepfather, stimulating memories of his own father.

Interestingly, the closer the movies illustrated the client’s actual life, the less effective they were. For example, movies such as Hoop Dreams (1994) and Boyz in the Hood (1992) tended to evoke aggressive, tough-guy responses to various scenes. These movies depicted urban, low-income families plagued with problems such as poverty, drug abuse and in the case of Boyz in the Hood deadly violence. These films were too close to their own lives for comfort, thus stimulating Leonard and others to respond defensively. Movies such as The Breakfast Club, which was set in the 1980’s, and This
Boy’s Life, set in the 1950’s provided a safe psychological distance where the clients could examine similarities between their lives and those shown on the screen.

Because of the nature of residential treatment, it was not possible for me to assign a movie for the client to watch between sessions, as is normally the case with adult clients in individual therapy. In this particular facility, the residents, or students, are only allowed to watch selected television programs and movies in a group setting. A set of movies is pre-selected by cottage counselors, and the final selection is made by popular vote. Therefore, it is necessary for Cinematherapy films to be viewed in short segments during the therapy sessions. Before I introduced to my clients the use of films in our therapy sessions, some rules, or guidelines were developed and agreed upon with each client. First, the therapist reserves the right to choose the films. Occasionally, the client may be allowed to choose from several movies that are pre-selected by the therapist. Second, the therapist and client must have discussions before and after the film segment. Third, the therapist or the client can pause the film for discussion at any time during the segment. Fourth, some segments of some movies may be skipped. An example of the latter rule is the scene from The Breakfast Club where in one scene the students enjoy the effects of marijuana, which may not be appropriate to show to a vulnerable client.

This particular technique of using the films during the individual therapy session by showing segments in each session borrows some concepts from Self-Psychology; in particular the ideas of temporal continuity and cohesion. Miller (1996) describes temporal continuity as the perception that one is the same person throughout time, and that memories of experiences at different times all relate to the individual who feels “I am the same.” In other words, when a person looks back upon their life there is a sense of being the same person at age 3, 5, 15, 25, and so on. We maintain this continuity by use of our memories and our inner voices. Parents also play a crucial role in helping children form a sense of continuity by responding to our needs as infants, validating our feelings, and attending to our affective states. When parents are seen as dependable and constant across time, children develop a sense of continuity of themselves. When parents act erratically, as might be
seen with mentally ill and/or drug addicted individuals, the child fails to develop this sense. With the residential population for which I work, many of the clients lack a sense of their personal “sameness” throughout time, possibly related to the frequent changes in living arrangements and erratic behavior of caregivers that they have experienced throughout their development. I propose that by showing segments of a film each week until the film is finished gives the client a time anchor and sense of regularity that helps support the client’s sense of temporal continuity, and as a side effect, develop a sense of trust and dependability in the therapeutic alliance.

The other concept from Self-Psychology may apply is cohesion. Cohesion occurs when one’s feelings, thoughts, and experiences are coordinated and synchronized, and we are able to seek out new experiences and assimilate them. Cohesion is the feeling that one is “together” or whole. The opposite of cohesion is fragmentation, which is the state where thoughts, feelings, and experiences become disorganized in the mind, and can lead to feelings of confusion, discomfort, and an inability to focus. New experiences cannot be appropriately integrated, and can seem confusing and frightening.

The clients we see tend to be fragmented much of the time, and the use of film helps them to focus and assimilate enough to absorb and process aspects of the psychotherapy process. The movies shown in segments help provide a focal point, and can be very engaging, even to the most distracted/fragmented clients.

An example of the engaging quality of films occurred when I was asked to fill in for a group therapist. I did not know anything about the clients in this particular group, except that they had similar problems as the clients described previously. The theme of their group therapy at that time was team building. I decided to try Cinematherapy with this group by showing segments of the movie White Squall (1996). Based on a true story, this film depicts a group of teenage boys who spend 8 months aboard a ship. They must learn to set aside their differences to succeed and survive the voyage. As with individual therapy, the film was stopped at various points to discuss what was happening and relate it to the group members’ lives. Considering that this group contained boys who suffer from conduct disorder, oppositional disorder, and other
psychological problems that affect their interpersonal behavior, the group was successful in that some of the members were able to verbalize their feelings and observations regarding teamwork. An unexpected result was that they insisted they be allowed to watch the movie in its entirety, even though the group session was finished.

It is important to note that there is a paucity of empirical research regarding the use of this technique. Since it is a tool rather than a theoretical orientation like cognitive-behavioral, client-centered, insight-oriented, etc., it may be more useful for researchers to examine differences in the conversations during therapy sessions rather than attempting to measure therapeutic outcomes. One possibility for research would involve videotaping or audio taping the therapeutic sessions (with the client’s written consent of course) and coding these tapes for number and type of “therapeutic verbalizations.” These verbalizations would include comments made by the client that relate to their feelings, thought, or behaviors. Other verbalizations such as small talk, appointment logistics, and other non-therapy related talk would not be coded. The hypothesis would be that using films during individual therapy with adolescents increases therapeutic verbalizations. This could lay the groundwork for research that measures long-term outcomes.

So how does a therapist begin using films in therapy? My suggestion is to develop hypotheses regarding the client’s strengths and weaknesses. After the idea of showing them films is introduced, the therapist needs to choose the films carefully. Besides using the categorized movie suggestions in this part of this course, there are several books and websites mentioned in Chapter 8, Resources, that identify specific films for particular psychological problems. Another avenue is to check an online movie database such as the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), do a plot summary search using specific keywords related to the client’s issues such as “family”, “child”, “adolescent”, “adoption”, etc.
Categorized Movie Suggestions for Adolescence

Each film speaks to a number of different subjects, issues and themes and usually has more than one message. Therefore most of the movies that are mentioned here could be categorized in several different ways.

**Abuse and Molestation:**

*Bastard out of Carolina* (1996, rated R, only for older adolescents with adult supervision) – Bone is a poor white girl so named because she was born right after her mother survived a terrifying car crash. While Bone is still a small child, her single mother, Anney, is courted by Glen, who takes out his rage on Bone both physically and sexually. Bone becomes even more disillusioned at her mother's inability to get away from her monstrous husband.

*The Best Little Girl in the World* (1981, TV) - Casey Powell, the quiet daughter of an overbearing and abusive mother and unassertive father, feels pressure to be the good girl of the family after her troublesome older sister gets pregnant. Casey retreats into her secretive world of self-starvation.

*This Boy's Life* (1993) - A rebellious 50s teenager continually gets into trouble by hanging out with the wrong crowd. His mom marries the mechanic, but they soon find out that he is an abusive alcoholic. Her son makes efforts to cope with the violent stepfather.

*Dolores Claiborne* (1995, rated R, only for older adolescents with adult supervision) - When Vera Donovan is found dead after falling down a flight of stairs, Dolores Claiborne is considered a prime suspect in her murder. Word of the affair reaches New York-based journalist Selena St. George, Dolores's estranged daughter. Selena's father, Joe St. George, died under mysterious circumstances 15 years before. Police detective John Mackey and Selena learn the ugly truth that Dolores killed her husband after he sexually abused his daughter.

*Jane Eyre* (1996) - Jane Eyre, orphaned, is left to live under the charity of her Aunt Reed. After living ten years of mistreatment and segregation in her Aunt's home, she is then sent to a boarding school for young girls and grows up to become a teacher.

*The Prince of Tides* (1991, rated R, only for older adolescents with adult supervision) - Tom Wingo, a rudderless, unemployed football coach, is suddenly jarred out of his lethargy when he travels to New
York because his twin sister has just tried to kill herself. In New York, he meets her psychiatrist, Susan Lowenstein, and learns to deal with memories of abuse as a child. His mother Lila was married to an abusive alcoholic and later to a rich man whose abuse was mental rather than physical.

*Shattered Spirits* (1986, TV) - Martin is an alcoholic with a bad temper, who takes his frustration out on his family when he loses his job.

*Sling Blade* (1996, rated R, only for older adolescents with adult supervision) - Karl Childers is a mildly retarded man who spent most of his life in a mental institution. When Karl was a boy, he was severely mistreated by his abusive father. At age 12, Karl found his mother having intercourse with a man who tormented him endlessly. He snapped, flew into a homicidal rage, and killed both individuals by decapitating them.

*Something About Amelia* (1984, TV) - Amelia’s father is sexually abusing her. Eventually the problem is discovered and Amelia is removed from the home. In family counseling, Amelia has a chance to listen to her father apologize. She struggles with her own guilt.

*A Thousand Acres* (1997, rated R, only for older adolescents with adult supervision) - The Lear-like farmer, Larry Cook, decides to divide up his thousand-acre farm among his three daughters, but he disinherits his youngest, Caroline, an attorney, when she expresses hesitancy. The other sisters, Ginny and Rose, take up the offer, even though they were sexually abused by their father as children.

**Adoption:**

*Harry Potter Series* (2001 - 2007) - Young Harry Potter’s parents have died in a car crash when he was still a baby, and he is being brought up by his mean Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. On his 11th birthday, he discovers the life of a wizard at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Throughout his subsequent school years he has to face Dark Arts teachers and other dark forces bent on destroying him.

*Losing Isaiah* (1995) - An African-American baby, abandoned by his crack-addicted mother, is adopted by a white social worker and her husband. Several years later, the baby’s mother finds out her son is not dead, as she thought before, and goes to court to get him back.
Bullies:

*American Graffiti* (1973) - Curt and Steve have gotten into a prestigious college, but each has second thoughts on the night before they are going to leave for the school. They spend a final evening cruising the strip and have every adventure possible before dawn when they will each have to decide what they will do.

*Ever After* (1998) - This movie tells the "real" story of Cinderella, Danielle. She is made a servant by her new stepmother after her beloved father died. One stepsister is quite kind but the other one bullies Danielle, who grows up to be a happy and strong-willed young lady. One day she falls in love with handsome Prince Henry, who has troubles of his own at home.

*It* (1990) - Seven youths have to defeat a demonic creature named Pennywise, which dresses in a clown suit and terrorizes a 1960's town in Maine. When Mike Hanlon suspects that the supernatural menace that he and a group of friends battled as children has returned, he begins to call his friends to remind them of the oath they swore: if It returned again, they would come back to Derry to do battle again.

*The Kite Runner* (2007) - In Afghanistan, on the verge of the Russian invasion, two friends, Amir and Hassan, are to be torn apart forever as a result of Amir’s fearful act of betrayal. He witnesses the rape of his friend by bullies but does nothing to stop it. This sets in motion Amir’s courageous quest for redemption.

*Mean Creek* (2004) - When Sam Merrick is beaten up by local bully George Tooney, Sam's older brother Rocky and his friends Clyde and Marty lure the bully into the woods to seek vengeance.

*Mean Girls* (2004) - Raised in African bush country and home-schooled by her zoologist parents, 15-year-old Cady Heron thinks she knows the survival of the fittest, especially when she joins an alpha girl group at her new high school led by Regina. As she finds out about Regina's plans to just walk all over her, Cady encounters psychological warfare and unwritten social rules that teenage girls face.

*The Mighty* (1998) - This movie tells the story of a strong friendship between Connor, with Morquio's syndrome, that physically deformed him, and an older boy, Max, who looks like a slow-moving idiot who is always bullied because of his size.

*My Bodyguard* (1980) - Students need to develop survival strategies in their high school because bullies rule.
Conflict with Parents:
*The Baby-Sitters Club* (1995) - Seven thirteen-year-old girls leave their younger interests behind as they enter the worlds of babysitting, attraction to boys, and conflicts with parents.

*Drop Dead Fred* (1991) - A young woman, Lizzie, battles with her controlling mother and finds comfort and confusion with the appearance of her imaginary childhood friend.

*Freaky Friday* (2003) - An overworked mother and her daughter do not get along. When they switch bodies, each is forced to adapt to the others life for one freaky Friday.

*Thirteen* (2003, younger teens need to watch with parental guidance) - Tracy Freeland is a thirteen-year-old girl who just wants to fit in and cuts herself. Her relationship with her mother is put to the test as she discovers drugs, sex, and petty crime in the company of her cool but troubled best friend, the most popular girl in the 7th grade, Evie Zamor.

*Parenthood* (1989) - The Buckman family suffers and enjoys all the events that occur: estranged relatives, the "black sheep" of the family, the eccentrics, the skeletons in the closet, and the rebellious teenagers.

Coping with Fear:
*American Graffiti* (1973) - See above.

*Free Willy* (1993) - Jesse, a street kid runs afoul of the law and gets caught vandalizing the marina, but his social worker gets him off the hook provided he cleans up his mess at the marina. When the boy learns that a beloved killer whale is to be killed by the aquarium owners, the boy risks everything to free the whale.

*Gulliver’s Travel* (1996, TV) - Gulliver returns after a long time abroad and tells his strange stories. He had to cope with fear when he was thought to be a giant in the Land of Lilliput, but was only six inches high in the Land of Brobdingnag. His experiences are allegories about the real world.

*Harry Potter Series* (2001 - 2007) - See above.

*It* (1990) - Seven youths have to courageously defeat a demonic creature named Pennywise, which dresses in a clown suit and terrorizes a 1960’s town in Maine. When Mike Hanlon suspects that the supernatural menace that he and a group of friends battled as children has returned, he begins to call his friends to remind them
of the oath they swore: if It returned again, they would come back to Derry to do battle again.

*The Kite Runner* (2007) - See above.

*Star Wars* (1977 - 2005) - This adventure movie follows the patterns of the courageous Hero's Journey in ancient mythical stories.

*Whale Rider* (2002) - On the east coast of New Zealand, the Whangara people believe that their ancestor, Paikea, escaped death when his canoe capsized by riding to shore on the back of a whale. From then on, Whangara chiefs, always the first-born, always male, have been considered Paikea's direct descendants. Pai, an 11-year-old girl in a patriarchal New Zealand tribe, believes she is destined to be the new chief. But her grandfather Koro is bound by tradition to pick a male leader. Pai loves Koro more than anyone in the world, but she must courageously fight him and a thousand years of tradition to fulfill her destiny.

*White Squall* (1996) - This film tells the true story about ship school called the "Albatross" run by the captain, Christopher "Skipper" Sheldon and his wife, Dr. Alice Sheldon. In 1960, the couple took aboard eight teenage boys for eight months to gain camaraderie, experience, discipline, or whatever their parents feel they lack. The voyage has its scary downs as well as ups.

**Drugs and Alcohol:**

*28 Days* (2000) - After getting into a car accident while drunk, Gwen Cummings is given a choice between prison or a rehab center. She chooses rehab, but is extremely resistant to taking part in any of the treatment programs they have to offer. After getting to know some of the other patients, Gwen gradually sees that she does have a serious problem. The path to recovery is easy, and success will not be guaranteed, but she is now willing to give it a try.

*The Basketball Diaries* (1994) - This movie depicts the descent of a successful high school athlete, accompanied by his hophead friends, into heroin addiction, street hustling, and petty crime, with little help from the disturbed adults in his life.

*Boyz n the Hood* (1991) - This story of life in South Central Los Angeles follows the fortunes of a group of young blacks. Struggling to escape the violence and drugs, some of them opt for education, pinning their hopes on college; others are caught up in the violence that is endemic to the neighborhood.
Brokedown Palace (1999) - Alice and Darlene, best friends, decide to take a trip to Thailand to celebrate high-school graduation. While there, they are befriended by charming Australian rogue Nick Parks. Nick convinces them to take a weekend side trip to Hong Kong, but at the airport, they are busted for smuggling drugs.

Dazed and Confused (1993) - This film chronicles several teens’ experiences of peer pressure, sexual development, intimacy, as well as alcohol and drug use.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) - This movie shows Southern California high school archetypes and activities: surfers, hangers-on, drugs, “tough” teacher, the mall - all used to humorously portray angst-ridden and hormone-driven teen development.

Hoosiers (1986) - Based on the true story of a small-town Indiana team that made the state finals in 1954, this movie chronicles how a coach with a checkered past trains a small town high school basketball team to become a top contender for the championship.

Not My Kid (1985, TV) - Susan Bowers is the rebellious teenage daughter of a successful surgeon. When her secret life as a druggie comes to light, her parents turn to a controversial drug intervention program, where streetwise counselors deal with tough kids on their own terms. The girl's parents want to remove her from the program because it upsets them that their daughter is being forced to associate with addicts who admit to stealing and trading sex for drugs. They remain in denial until their daughter admits at a family confrontation meeting the extent of her drug addiction. The Bowers learn that their daughter's rehabilitation will not only be a long haul but also an exercise in family dynamic exploration.

Over the Edge (1979) - Contemporary rock music is the background for the portrayal of alienated teens engaged in antisocial behaviors.

Thirteen (2003, younger teens need to watch with parental guidance)

Grief, Death, and Dying:

My Bodyguard (1980, loss of a sibling) - See above.

The Boy Who Could Fly (1986) - Because Eric is unable to verbally communicate and his parents died when he was five in a plane crash, he faces the constant threat of institutionalization by unsympathetic social workers who believe he is a threat to himself and the community because Eric has an affinity for climbing onto
rooftops and standing on window sills. As the story progresses, he exerts an enthralling force of change on all those around him.

*Fly Away Home* (1996) - Amy's mother is killed in an auto wreck. Amy is miserable in her new life with her father until she discovers a nest of goose eggs that were abandoned when developers began tearing up a local forest.

*Forrest Gump* (1994) - After his mother died, Forrest Gump, while not intelligent, is accidentally present at many historic moments, and connects with his true love, Jenny.

*The Natural* (1984) - An unknown middle-aged batter named Roy Hobbs with a mysterious past appears out of nowhere to take a losing 1930s baseball team to the top of the league in this magical sports fantasy. With the aid of a bat cut from a lightning-struck tree, Hobbs lives the fame he should have had earlier when, as a rising pitcher, he is inexplicably shot by a young woman.

*I Never Sang for My Father* (1970) - A father-son relationship is shown depicting a powerful father and his passive, disappointed son in the context of the father's senility and the death of the mother.

*Life As A House* (2001) - When George Monroe is diagnosed with terminal cancer, he takes custody of his misanthropic teenage son, Sam, for whom quality time means getting high, engaging in small-time prostitution, and avoiding his father. Eventually they heal their relationship.

*My Life* (1993) - Bob is dying of cancer. His wife, Gail, is expecting their first child. With a prognosis of only a few months of life left, Bob decides to record just about every aspect of his life on videotape. This movie explores the growth and appreciation for life that can result from a person's anticipation of their own death.

*One True Thing* (1998) - Ellen Gulden, a career woman in New York, reassesses her parents' lives after she is forced to care for her cancer-stricken mother. This film shows how a family member's sickness and death can expose the dysfunction of a family.

*Ordinary People* (1980) - This film shows the impact of the death of the prized son on the merely normal brother as reflected through his relationships with his accommodating father and his narcissistically depressed mother.

*Shadowlands* (1993) - See above.

*Terms of Endearment* (1983) - See above.

*Truly Madly Deeply* (1990) - Nina is paralyzed by grief at the death of her boyfriend Jamie, but is even more unprepared for his return
as a ghost. This movie demonstrates the grieving process. As a ghost, Jamie permits her to experience the stages of grief.

Unstrung Heroes (1995) - See above.

**Eating Disorders:**
The Best Little Girl in the World (1981, TV) - See above.
Dying to Dance (2001, TV) - When Alyssa joins the ballet group, she finds herself in a dilemma regarding her eating and exercise patterns. She lives on a strict, near starvation diet, exercises excessively and takes Amphetamines. Her loss of strength and stamina results in a dangerous accident and subsequent hospitalization.
Freeway II: Confessions of a Trickbaby (1999 - only for older teens) - Crystal is a teenager who is sentenced to juvenile hall, but sent to a prison hospital for treatment before she will be incarcerated. In her hospital cell, the guards are made aware of Crystal's bulimia and supervise her meals. This doesn’t prevent her from binge-eating. She purges after every meal.

**Anorexia Nervosa in Other Movies:**
Dying to Be Perfect (1996)
For the Love of Nancy (1994)
Hunger Point (2003)

**Bulimia Nervosa in Other Movies:**
Agnus (1995)
Center Stage (2000) - dancer
Drop Dead Gorgeous (1999)
Elephant (2003) - purging together for social support
Heathers (1989)
Life is Sweet (1990) - dysfunctional family
Seabuiscuit (2003) - male horseracing jockey
When Friendship Kills (1996)
Zoolander (2001) - male model
301, 302 (1995, Korean)

**Fantasy versus Reality:**
The Boy Who Could Fly (1986) - See above.
Enchanted (2007, partly animated) - Beautiful princess Giselle is banished by an evil queen from her magical land and finds herself where there is no true love: the reality of modern-day Manhattan. First she is shocked by this strange new environment that doesn't
operate on a "happily ever after" basis. Giselle falls in love with a charmingly flawed divorce lawyer who has come to her aid even though she is promised to a perfect fairy tale prince back home. The film goes back and forth between the storybook view of romance and the cynicism of the real world.

*Hook* (1991) - In this remake of the “Peter Pan” movie the role of the “too-busy-for-his-children father,” issues of development, and growing up are explained.

**Ethical Decisions:**

*Eve's Bayou* (1997 - for older teens) - Doctor Louis is married to beautiful Roz, but he has a weakness for attractive women patients. One day Louis is flirting with married and sexy Metty Mereaux, not knowing that he is observed by his youngest idealistic daughter Eve. Eve cannot forget the incident, which is traumatic for her and shares a secret with older sister Cisely. This leads to her father’s tragic death.

*Quiz Show* (1994) - Based on a true story, this movie shows how Richard Goodwin, an idealistic young lawyer working for a Congressional subcommittee in the late 1950s, discovers that TV quiz shows are being fixed. His investigation focuses on two contestants on the show, Herbert Stempel, a brash working-class Jew from Queens, and Charles Van Doren, a popular English instructor at Columbia University and the product of one of America's most renowned literary families. Goodwin uncovered the facts that exposed the deception, and sent shock waves reverberating across America.

*Needful Things* (1993) - Leland Gaunt, the devil in disguise, comes to a pleasant little New England town, and opens a store. What this kindly Satan sells is whatever you need, from relief from pain to an object, which you have always coveted. The Faustian price is corruption. Soon town is wracked by jealousy, spite, violence, and murder.

*Scent of a Woman* (1992) - Prep school student, Charlie, needing money agrees to look after the blind, grumpy, retired Lt Col in the US army, Frank Slade, but the job is not at all what he anticipated. Charlie saves Slade’s life when he realizes that the extravagant weekend is a prelude to a planned suicide.

*Stand and Deliver* (1988) - Jaime Escalante, a dedicated mathematics teacher in a Hispanic neighborhood, inspires his
dropout prone students to learn calculus to build up their self-esteem and do so well that they are accused of cheating.

**Lying:**
*American Pie* (1999) - At a high-school party, four teenage friends enter a pact to lose their virginity by prom night. Even though they use lies, this is not as easy as they had thought.

*Pocahontas* (1995, animated) - The daughter of a Native American tribe chief and English soldier share a secret romance when English colonists invade 16th century Virginia.

*Stand by Me* (1986)

*Thirteen* (2003, younger teens need to watch with parental guidance) - See above.

**Illness and Disability:**
*A Walk to Remember* (2002) - Landon Carter and Jamie Sullivan find themselves unexpectedly thrown together after a practical joke between Landon and his friends leaves a boy in a hospital. As punishment, Landon is forced to partake in some after school activities including the spring play. Against his own expectations and the scorn of his friends, Landon finds himself falling in love with this outwardly plain girl who possesses a strong passion for life, although she is fatally ill.

*Children of a Lesser God* (1986) - James is a new speech teacher at a school for the deaf. He falls for Sarah, a pupil who decided to stay on at the school rather than venture into the big bad world. She shuns him at first, refusing to read his lips and only using signs. The movie explores the difficulty that can exist between two people in relationship where one is disabled and the other is not.

*David and Lisa* (1962) - This movie portrays the relationship of an obsessive-compulsive adolescent boy with an autistic girl in a residential setting.

*Girl Interrupted* (1999, for older adolescents) - This movie is based on writer Susanna Kaysen's account of her 18-month stay at a mental hospital as a teenager in the 1960s.

*I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1977) - An institutionalized girl, suffering from internal demons, responds to a caring psychiatrist.

*Lorenzo’s Oil* (1992) In this inspirational true story of extraordinary efforts parents find a remedy for their fatally ill son.
The Mighty (1998)
Mask (1985) - A boy with a massive facial skull deformity from cardioniodiaphysial dysphasia, a bone disease, and his biker gang mother attempt to live as normal a life as possible under the circumstances. The film demonstrates how the boy’s character allows him to triumph over his physical limitations.

Moving:
Avalon (1990) - A Polish-Jewish family comes to the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century. There, the family and their children try to make themselves a better future in the so-called Promised Land.
Footloose (1984) - Teenager Ren and his family move from big-city Chicago to a small town in the West. He is in for a real case of culture shock. Though he tries hard to fit in, the streetwise Ren cannot quite believe he is living in a place where rock music and dancing are illegal.
The Sandlot (1993) - Scotty Smalls moves to a new neighborhood with his mom and step dad, where he doesn’t know a soul. The neighborhood baseball guru Rodriquez takes Smalls under his wing, and soon he’s part of the local baseball buddies.

Peer Relationships and Friendships:
The Breakfast Club (1985) - Five teens spend a Saturday together on school detention and come to know each other by the end of the day. They display adolescent humor and intellectualization.
American Graffiti (1973)
Brokedown Palace (1999) - Alice and Darlene, best friends, decide to take a trip to Thailand to celebrate high-school graduation. While there, they are befriended by charming Australian rogue Nick Parks. Nick convinces them to take a weekend side trip to Hong Kong, but at the airport, they are busted for smuggling drugs.
Caddyshack (1980) This movie portrays the coming-of-age story about a working-class adolescent at a suburban high school. It also shows effects of peer pressure and social climbing on adolescent relationships.
Clueless (1995) - This movie depicts interactions between different cliques of adolescents at a suburban high school. It also shows effects of peer pressure and social climbing on adolescent relationships.
Dazed and Confused (1993) - See above.
Dead Poet’s Society (1989) - See above.
Heathers (1989) - This movie offers darkly humorous descriptions of approaches to social-climbing, the frictions between differing cliques, obsessions with self and fitting-in, and suicide and murder in a high school setting.
Little Women (1994) - With their father away fighting in the Civil War, Joe, Meg, Beth and Amy grow up with their mother in somewhat reduced circumstances.
Lucas (1986) - Lucas, a socially inept fourteen year old, experiences heartbreak for the first time when his best friend and Maggie, the new girl with whom he is in love, fall for each other.
The Mighty (1998) - See above.
The Outsiders (1983) - Teens born on the wrong side of the tracks, striving to survive gang wars, engage in their versions of chivalry and honor.
Rebel Without a Cause (1955) - Jim Stark is the new kid in town. Here he hopes to find the love he doesn't get from his middle-class family. Though he finds some of this in his relation with Judy, and a form of it in both Plato's adulation and Ray's real concern for him, Jim must still prove himself to his peers in switchblade knife fights and "chickie" games in which cars race toward a seaside cliff.
Sixteen Candies (1984) - The 15-year-old Samantha has a crush on the most popular boy in school, and the geekiest boy in school has a crush on her. Her sister's getting married, and with all the excitement the rest of her family forgets her birthday. Her grandparents are horrendously embarrassing.

Pregnancy:
Juno (2007) - Faced with an unplanned pregnancy, Juno chooses parents for her unborn child.
Stand and Deliver (1988) - See above.

Prejudice, Being Different than Others:
Beautiful Thing (1996) - This movie depicts adolescent working-class boys’ growing attraction for one another, from initial lingering glances to their irrefutable love, which so magnificently illustrated at the end of the film. Themes are their coming-out story, sexuality, parenting, and peer relations.
Boys Don’t Cry (1999 - for older adolescents) - Brandon Teena, a transgendered teen, prefers to live in a male identity until it is discovered he was born biologically female. Brandon becomes the victim of a hate crime.

Brokeback Mountain (2005, only for older adolescents with parental guidance) - This film tells the story about a forbidden and secretive relationship between two gay cowboys and their lives over the years.

Crash (2004 - for older adolescents) - Focusing on racial prejudice, this movie portrays several stories that interweave during two days in Los Angeles, involving a collection of inter-related characters.

Dances with Wolves (1990) - Lt. John Dunbar is exiled to a remote western Civil War outpost. He befriends wolves, encounters and is eventually accepted into the local Sioux tribe. This makes him an intolerable aberration in the military.

Do the Right Thing (1989) - When frequent customer and angry black activist, Buggin Out, notices that Sal’s pizzeria Wall of Fame features only Italian-American celebrities, he demands that African Americans are represented as well. In this predominantly black neighborhood in Brooklyn, everyone’s hate and bigotry smolders and builds until it explodes into violence. This movie explores race relations in the US without taking a definite stance.

The Great Debaters (2007) - At the small Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, a black institution in the South of the 1930s, the school’s English professor, Melvin Tolson, is a taskmaster who demands the highest standards from his underdog debate team. One night traveling late, they have they happen upon a scene where a white mob has just lynched a black man and set his body afire. They barely escape with their own lives. And daily life for them is fraught with racist peril. Tolson has been singled out by the local sheriff as a rabble-rouser. Eventually the team wins the national championship.

Hairspray (1988 and 2007) - This movie gives an affectionate view of Baltimore teens, their families, stereotypes, and racism, at the start of the rock’n’roll era.

The Man Without a Face (1993) - This movie is about love of justice and about freedom from prejudice. Justin McLeod is a former teacher who lives as a recluse. His face was disfigured from an automobile accident and fire in which a boy was incinerated and for which he was convicted of involuntary manslaughter. He is also suspected of being a pedophile. Chuck is a young boy determined to get into the same military as his father. Desperate for a tutor, Chuck
encounters McLeod, and together they begin to help each other deal with a world that has shunned them both. The town's suspicion and hostility gets ignited.

*My Son, the Fanatic* (1998) - A morally complicated father-son relationship is portrayed in this movie about a family of immigrant and first-generation South Asian Londoners, some of whom return to conservative beliefs and practices.

*School Ties* (1992) - A Jewish boy goes to an elite prep school in the 1950's and hides his religion until a jealous bigot forces it out in the open.

*Torch Song Trilogy* (1988) - Arnold, a quirky, gay entertainer, searches for love in a world that does not accept him. He slowly becomes more comfortable with himself as a man and as a homosexual.

*The Outsiders* (1983) - See above.

*Powder* (1995) - Raised by his grandparents, a young bald albino boy with unique powers has experienced the world only through books, never leaving the family farm. He is sent to a state home for boys where he has trouble fitting in socially. Some boys begin to view his potential and gifts with wonderment.

**School:**

*The Breakfast Club* (1985) - See above.

*My Bodyguard* (1980) - See above.

*Breaking Away* (1979) - This is a coming-of-age film about teens preparing successfully and unsuccessfully for college.

*Caddyshack* (1980) - See above.

*Clueless* (1995) - See above.

*Dead Poet’s Society* (1989) - Several students and friends meet Professor Keating, their new English teacher, who tells them of the Dead Poet’s Society, and encourages them to go against the status quo. Each, in their own way, does this, and is changed for life.

*The Emperor’s Club* (2002) - William Hundert is a passionate, principled, and idealistic prep school teacher who finds his tightly-controlled world shaken and inexorably altered when a new student, Sedgewick Bell, walks into his classroom. What begins as a fierce battle of wills gives way to a close student-teacher relationship, but results in a life lesson for Hundert that will still haunt him a quarter of a century later.

*Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) - See above.
Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986) - Ferris takes the day off school. He has a blast with his girlfriend and best friend while helping his friend deal with unresolved issues between him and his father.

School of Rock (2003) - When down and out rock star Dewey Finn gets fired from his band and he faces a mountain of debt and depression, he takes a job as a 4th grade substitute teacher at an uptight private school, where his attitude has a powerful effect on his students. He meets Zack, a 10-year-old guitar prodigy, who could help Dewey win a "battle of the bands" competition, which would solve his financial problems and put him back in the spotlight.

School Ties (1992) - See above.

Stand and Deliver (1988) - See above.

Self-esteem:

Ever After (1998) - See above.

Field of Dreams (1989) - Iowa farmer Ray Kinsella hears a voice in his cornfield tell him, "If you build it, he will come." He interprets this message as an instruction to build a baseball field on his farm, upon which appear the ghosts of Shoeless Joe Jackson and the other seven Chicago White Sox players banned from the game for throwing the 1919 World Series. When the voices continue, Ray seeks out a reclusive author to help him understand the meaning of the messages and the purpose for his field. This movie demonstrates how following one’s intuition can lead to fulfilling an important purpose.

Good Will Hunting (1998) - This movie portrays themes of emancipation (college-age), separation, and emotional growth. An intellectually gifted townie is shepherded by a psychologist who has been there himself.

Hoop Dreams (documentary, 1994) This film portrays teens trying to escape life in inner-city Chicago through sports while coping with their broken families and challenges of their personal development.

The Horse Whisperer (1998) Both a young girl and her horse are physically and psychologically traumatized. Slowly the healing of both ensues.

Mystic Pizza (1988) Later-adolescent girls deal with the issues of becoming one’s own person, the nature of relationships, and decisions about remaining in or leaving one’s home town.

The Natural (1984) - See above.
Rudy (1993) - Rudy grew up in a steel mill town where most people ended up working. He wants to play football at Notre Dame instead. But his grades are too low, his athletic skills are poor, and he is only half the size of the other players. Rudy is determined to overcome the odds and fulfill his dream of playing for Notre Dame.

Self-mutilation:
Thirteen (2003, younger teens need to watch with parental guidance) - See above.

Sexuality and Romance:
American Graffiti (1973) - See above.
American Pie (1999) - See above.
Beautiful Thing (1996) - See above.
The Blue Lagoon (1980) - Two children survive a shipwreck and are left alone on an island to grow into adolescence and an emerging sexual relationship.
Big (1988) - Josh Baskin makes a wish at a fairground machine to be big. He wakes up the following morning to find that his wish has been granted and his body has grown older over night. He gets a job in a toy company, and develops a relationship.
Brokeback Mountain (2005 - for older adolescents and with parental guidance)
Dazed and Confused (1993) - See above.
Juno (2007) - See above.
Kids (1995) - Telly, an amoral 17 year old slacker and HIV-positive skateboarder, sets out to deflower as many virgins as possible while a local girl who contracted his disease tries to save his next target from her same fate.
Men Don’t Leave (1989) - A single mother of two sons finds life considerably difficult on her own after the death of her beloved husband. Her teenage son is seduced by an older woman.
Reality Bites (1994) - In this study of Generation X manners, Lelaina, the valedictorian of her college class, films her friends in a mock documentary of post-education life. Troy is her best friend, a perpetually unemployed musical slacker. Vickie is a manager at the Gap who worries about the results of an AIDS test, while Sammy has problems grappling with his sexuality.
Sixteen Candles (1984) - See above.
Slums of Beverly Hills (1998) - This semiautobiographical story
follows a lower-middle-class teenager, Vivian, and her neurotic family in 1976 Tinseltown. She is curious about sex, likes an older neighbor kid, and wants a family that doesn't embarrass her. *Splendor in the Grass* (1961) - Deanie, a fragile Kansas girl feels unrequited and forbidden love for Bud, a handsome young man from the town's most powerful family. They are very much in love, but the pressures of society creates a rift in their relationship and drives her to heartbreak. Together they learn the harsh lesson of love and life in the 1920s and sadly go their separate ways.

*Summer of '42* (1971) - During his summer vacation on Nantucket Island in 1942, Hermie eagerly awaiting his first sexual encounter finds himself developing a contradictorily innocent love for the older Dorothy, who is married to an army pilot. When her husband returns to the front, Hermie shyly approaches her.

*Thirteen* (2003, younger teens need to watch with parental guidance) - See above.

*Torch Song Trilogy* (1988) - See above.

**Single Parents and Divorce:**

*A Home of Our Own* (1993) - A single mother packs up her six children and leaves Los Angeles in search of a place they can call their own. The oldest son misses life as he knew it in the city.

*Forrest Gump* (1994) - See above.

*Irreconcilable Differences* (1984) - Albert and Lucy fall in love, get married, and have a daughter Casey. Everything is wonderful, till success in business distract Albert and Lucy from each other and Casey. They soon divorce and neglect Casey, who goes to live with their maid who has been taking care of her. This film is about adults who get so immersed in their anger caused by divorce and remarriage that they barely remember their role as parents.

*Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979, younger teens need to watch with parental guidance) - After a mother walks out on a marriage, a father becomes the primary parent. The mother returns for a custody struggle and the child suffers and tries to copes.

*Men Don't Leave* (1990) - Beth, a mother of two sons finds life considerably difficult on her own after the death of her beloved husband. Due to debt she must move them to Baltimore, and deal with the hardships and all that comes with city life. Her son Chris starts dating an older woman, and his brother Matt is jealous of a friend who has two parents.
Stepmom (1998) - Anna and Ben, the two children of Jackie and Luke, have to cope with the fact that their parents divorced and that there is a new woman in their father's life, Isabel, a successful photographer. She does her best to treat the kids, but also loves her work and does not plan to give it up. But Jackie, a full-time mother, regards Isabel's efforts as offensively insufficient. The conflict between them is deepened by the sudden diagnose of cancer, which may be deadly for Jackie. They all have to learn a little in order to grow together.

The Story of Us (1999) - After 15 years of marriage, Katie and Ben believe temporarily that they might no longer love each other. They consider divorce. The couple has two children and who suffer through this process.

Table for Five (1983) - J. P. Tannen takes his three children for a vacation cruise after being absent for a long time. They usually live with their mother and stepfather. When the children's mother dies, J.P. fights to keep them from their stepfather. J. P. also tries to show his children that he loves them and the family comes together.

Tender Mercies (1983) - Alcoholic, broken-down, middle-aged country singer, Mac Sledge, gets a new wife and reaches out to his long-lost daughter. He tries to put his troubled life back together and find inspiration to resume his career.

Thirteen (2003, younger teens need to watch with parental guidance) - See above.

Trading Mom (1994) - Elizabeth, Jeremy, and Harry Martin don’t like their workaholic, nagging mother. They go to this mysterious gardener named Mrs. Cavour who tells them about an ancient spell to make their mother disappear. That night they say the incantation and the next morning, they wake up and they find their mother is gone. Mrs. Cavour tells the children about the Mommy Market, a place in town where they had about every mother you could think of. When the mothers they pick are not what they hoped for, they want their very own mom back and they must think of a memory of their own to remember her and break the spell. She returns when they wake up the next morning.