



**"ONLY IN THEIR DREAMS CAN MEN TRULY BE FREE,  
'T WAS ALWAYS THUS, AND ALWAYS THUS WILL BE." —JOHN KEATING**

**Plot Summary:** Painfully shy Todd Anderson has been sent to the school where his popular older brother was valedictorian. His roommate, Neil, although exceedingly bright and popular, is very much under the thumb of his overbearing father. The two, along with their other 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, and is changed for life.

**Cast and Characters:**

Robin Williams	....	John Keating
Robert Sean Leonard	....	Neil Perry
Ethan Hawke	....	Todd Anderson
Josh Charles	....	Knox Overstreet
Gale Hansen	....	Charlie Dalton
Dylan Kussman	....	Richard Cameron
Allelon Ruggiero	....	Steven Meeks
James Waterston	....	Gerard Pitts
Norman Lloyd	....	Mr. Nolan
Kurtwood Smith	....	Mr. Perry
Carla Belver	....	Mrs. Perry
Leon Pownall	....	McAllister
Alexandra Powers	....	Chris Noel

## POETRY AND LITERARY ALLUSIONS IN THE FILM:

### O Captain! My Captain!

by Walt Whitman

- O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
5 But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.
- 10 O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up - for you the flag is flung - for you the bugle trills,  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths - for you the shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;  
Hear Captain! dear father!  
15 The arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.
- 20 My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;  
Exult O shore, and ring O bells!  
25 But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

### To the Virgins, Make Much of Time

by Robert Herrick

- Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,  
Old time is still a-flying,  
And this same flower that smiles today,  
To-morrow will be dying.  
5
- The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,  
The higher he's a-getting,  
The sooner will his race be run,  
And nearer he's to setting.  
10
- That age is best which is the first,  
When youth and blood are warmer;  
But being spent, the worse and worst  
Times still succeed the former.
- 15
- Then be not coy, but use your time,  
and while ye may, go marry;  
For having lost just once your prime,  
You may for ever tarry.

**O Me! O Life!**  
by Walt Whitman

O ME! O life!... of the questions of these recurring:  
Of the endless trains of the faithless—of cities fill'd with the foolish:  
Of myself forever reproaching myself. (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)  
Of eyes that vainly crave the light—of the objects mean—of the struggle ever renew'd:  
Of the poor results of all—of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me:  
Of the empty and useless years of the rest—with the rest me intertwined:  
The question, O me! so sad, recurring—What good amid these, O me, O life?

*Answer.*

That you are here—that life exists, and identity:  
That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.

**Excerpt from *Walden***  
by Henry David Thoreau

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear, nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

**The Ballad of William Bloat**  
by Raymond Calvert

In a mean abode on the Skankill Road  
Lived a man named William Bloat;  
He had a wife, the curse of his life,  
Who continually got his goat.  
5 So one day at dawn, with her nightdress on  
He cut her bloody throat.  
  
With a razor gash he settled her hash  
Oh never was crime so quick  
10 But the drip drip drip on the pillowslip  
Of her lifeblood made him sick.  
And the pool of gore on the bedroom floor  
Grew clotted and cold and thick.  
And yet he was glad he had done what he had  
15 When she lay there stiff and still  
But a sudden awe of the angry law  
Struck his heart with an icy chill.  
So to finish the fun so well begun  
He resolved himself to kill.

20 He took the sheet from the wife's coul' feet  
And twisted it into a rope

And he hanged himself from the pantry shelf,  
'Twas an easy end, let's hope.  
25 In the face of death with his latest breath  
He solemnly cursed the Pope.

But the strangest turn to the whole concern  
Is only just beginning.  
30 He went to Hell but his wife got well  
And she's still alive and sinning.  
For the razor blade was German made  
But the sheet was Belfast linen.

**Excerpt from "Ulysses"**  
by Alfred Lord Tennyson

It little profits that an idle king,  
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
5 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.  
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink  
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd  
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those  
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when  
10 Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades  
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;  
For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known; cities of men  
15 And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;  
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,  
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.  
I am a part of all that I have met;  
20 Yet all experience is an arch where thro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
For ever and forever when I move.  
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
25 As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains: but every hour is saved  
From that eternal silence, something more,  
A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
30 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.  
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,  
35 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,--  
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill  
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild  
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees  
Subdue them to the useful and the good.

40 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
Of common duties, decent not to fail  
In offices of tenderness, and pay  
Meet adoration to my household gods,  
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

45 There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:  
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,  
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me--  
That ever with a frolic welcome took

50 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed  
Free hearts, free foreheads--you and I are old;  
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;  
Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,

55 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.  
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:  
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep  
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,  
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

60 Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
Of all the western stars, until I die.  
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
65 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;

70 One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

### The Prophet

by Abraham Cowley

Teach me to Love? go teach thy self more wit;  
I am chief Professor of it.  
Teach craft to Scots, and thrift to Jews,  
Teach boldness to the Stews;

5 In tyrants courts teach supple flattery,  
Teach Jesuits, that have traveled far, to Lye.  
Teach fire to burn and Winds to blow.  
Teach restless Fountains how to flow,  
Teach the dull earth, fixt, to abide,

10 Teach Woman-kind inconstancy and Pride.  
See if your diligence here will useful prove;  
But, prithee, teach not me to love.

15 The God of Love, if such a thing there be,  
May learn to love from me,  
He who does boast that he has bin,  
In every Heart since Adam's sin,

I'll lay my Life, nay Mistress on't, that's more;  
I'll teach him things he never knew before;  
20 I'll teach him a receipt to make  
Words that weep, and Tears that speak,  
I'll teach him Sighs, like those in death,  
At which the Souls go out too with the breath;  
Still the Soul stays, yet still does from me run;  
25 As Light and Heat does with the Sun.

'Tis I who Love's Columbus am; 'tis I, Who must new Worlds in it descry;  
Rich Worlds, that yield of Treasure more,  
than that has been known before,  
30 And yet like his (I fear) my fate must be,  
To find them out for others; not for Me.  
Me Times to come, I know it, shall  
Loves last and greatest prophet call.  
But, ah, what's that, if she refuse,  
35 To hear the whole doctrines of my Muse?  
If to my share the Prophets fate must come;  
Hereafter fame, here Martyrdome.

**An Excerpt from "The Congo"**  
by Vachel Lindsay

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,  
Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,  
5 Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,  
Pounded on the table,  
Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom,  
Hard as they were able,  
Boom, boom, BOOM,  
With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom,  
10 Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM.  
THEN I had religion, THEN I had a vision.  
I could not turn from their revel in derision.  
15 THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,  
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.  
Then along that riverbank  
A thousand miles  
20 Tattooed cannibals danced in files;  
Then I heard the boom of the blood-lust song.  
And a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong.  
And "BLOOD" screamed the whistles and the fifes of the warriors,  
25 "BLOOD" screamed the skull-faced, lean witch-doctors,  
"Whirl ye the deadly voo-doo rattle,  
Harry the uplands,  
Steal all the cattle,  
Rattle-rattle, rattle-rattle,  
30 Bing.  
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM."

**Songs of Joy**  
by Walt Whitman

- O to struggle against great odds, to meet enemies undaunted.  
To be the sailor of the world, bound for all parts.  
O will I live to be the ruler of life, not a slave.  
To mount the scaffolds, to advance to the muzzles of guns with perfect nonchalance.  
5 To dance, clap hands, exalt, shout, skip, roll on, float on.  
O to have life hence forth the poem of new joys.  
To indeed be a god!

**Song of Myself (Section 52)**  
By Walt Whitman

- The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains  
of my gab and my loitering.
- 5 I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,  
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
- The last scud of day holds back for me,  
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the  
shadow'd wilds,  
10 It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.
- I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,  
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.
- 15 I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

**The Road Not Taken**  
by Robert Frost

- Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
5 To where it bent in the undergrowth;
- Then took the other, as just as fair;  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
10 Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,
- And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
15 Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.
- 20 I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, And I-

I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

### Sonnet XVIII

by William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
5 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
10 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

### She Walks In Beauty

by Lord Byron

She walks in beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:  
5 Thus mellow'd to that tender light  
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.  
  
One shade the more, one ray the less,  
Had half impair'd the nameless grace  
10 Which waves in every raven tress,  
Or softly lightens o'er her face;  
Where thoughts serenely sweet express  
How pure, how dear, their dwelling-place.  
  
15 And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,  
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,  
But tell of days in goodness spent,  
A mind at peace with all below,  
20 A heart whose love is innocent!

### from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

by William Shakespeare

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumber'd here  
While these visions did appear.



- 5 And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream,  
Gentles, do not reprehend:  
If you pardon, we will mend:  
And, as I am an honest Puck,  
10 If we have unearned luck  
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,  
We will make amends ere long;  
Else the Puck a liar call;  
So, good night unto you all.  
15 Give me your hands, if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.

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## Questions for Analysis:

Answer each of the following questions on loose-leaf paper as you watch the film.

1. What is the setting of the film? How does the setting impact the story?
2. Who is the protagonist? How do you know? Support your opinion with evidence from the film.
3. Characterize the boys. How does Mr. Keating affect each of them? (Neil, Todd, Charlie, Knox, Cameron, Pitts and Meeks.)
4. What are the major themes of the film? Support.
5. What is the tone of the film?
6. Discuss and explain three examples of foreshadowing used in the film.
7. Discuss and explain three examples of symbolism used in the film.
8. Choose a poem or work of literature from the film and discuss its significance. At what point does it appear in the film? Why? Who recites or alludes to it and for what purpose? How does it contribute to the film as a whole?
9. In what ways does this film illustrate the ideals of Romanticism? Which characters can be considered the most and least "Romantic"? Why? Support your answers with specific evidence from the film.

