

The Graduate - Part I



Occasionally in the arts, a work manages to speak to its contemporaries in a powerful and timely way that seems to capture the essence of its era. The usual fate of such works is that they become historical artifacts, of interest only to historians and sociologists. A few works, however, manage to continue to speak across time, renewing their hold on each generation because of their richness, complexity, and treatment of universal concerns and experiences.

This ability to transcend different eras is what makes a work a classic. In American film history, one such work is *The Graduate*, originally released in 1967. In the more than two decades since it first became a box-office phenomenon, *The Graduate's* reputation as one of the great American comedies has grown and deepened with its treatment of a young man's initiation into life's mysteries. Even more important is its sympathetic probing of the angst felt by so many college-educated American youths. -- HOWARD SUBER

As you watch this movie, please answer the following questions. Most of them are simple content questions, though a few (esp. the **Metaphor Alert** questions) will require a bit more thought than can be given during your actual viewing (think about these and answer them later). You should also **jot down any connections between this movie and the novel, *Candide***, that occur to you.

Questions – Complete each Viewing Day's Questions that night. I (or the sub) will initial each day that is done the following day (for 20 points each). Answers that are turned in Friday will receive an additional 25 extra credit points. ALL other Questions are due November 20 (the day after Illuminated Texts) and count for 400 points. This will NOT be a lot of homework IF you are answering them every night (you also have 2 days without class to work on them next week). They must be hand-written **on a Separate Sheet of Paper, using complete sentences in your answers.** They may not be typed. Do not have separate sections for italicized and non-italicized. Questions that are in italics do not need to be immediately answered, but instead require more time and thought. If you miss ANY part (even if it is 5 minutes or less) you must rent (stream) it and take an oral test before you will be given credit. The sub is keeping track.

For your Illuminated Texts: Make sure you use the Tutorials found on our Website – and make sure you test out your VIDEO (no Power Points will be accepted). You will upload your Illuminated Texts directly to our Google Classroom (in the Illuminated Text folder for your period). They must be uploaded and TESTED (test them by clicking on them in the folder once you upload them). These Projects **are worth 800 points.**

1a. Write down ANY connections between this movie & the novel, *Candide* as you watch the entire movie. Keep a running list.

1b. **Watch the opening carefully:** What is Ben (Dustin Hoffman) traveling on (not the airplane)? *How does this specifically hearken back to Candide – think how they get into El Dorado (and other places)? Remember this as you're jotting connections down.*

1c. Where is Ben returning from? *How is school (like in Candide) a destination? You should be able to relate. Think of (and hopefully relate) our Search Activity (remember the box in the upper left?)*

2. Why is a party being thrown for him? How does he feel about the party being thrown for him? *Why does he keep trying to get away? Think of this in terms of what you answered for 1b & 1c.*

3a. What is the "one word" that Mr. Macquire makes such a big deal about telling him? *(After having seen the entire movie: why **this word**?) How does it echo so much of what Ben rejects in society?*

3b. *How does that one word seem to fit into the bigger picture of the people who surround Ben at the party and presumably in Society in general. Now take it farther (more introspectively speaking) Why is it so hard for*

people like Alma, Bird (and even Leo) from The History of Love or Gregor (The Metamorphosis) to fit in – how does little Alma cope (with all of the “plastic” in her life)?

4. Who asks Ben for a ride home? Why is she scared to go home by herself (or so she says)?

5. What does Ben accuse her of trying to do? What scene in Paris (from *Candide*) is this reminiscent of?

6b. How is Ben like *Candide* in his encounter with Mrs. Robinson. (BE SPECIFIC)



7. What gift does Ben demonstrate in the pool? What are his parents trying to do by giving him the gift, the car, etc? What does this have to do with the 6 kings, or *Candide* and Cacambo getting to El Dorado, or the ships that reached their destination, etc.

7b. How is what Ben does in the pool similar to his life at this point and time? How does it echo what happened to him at the party? To the opening (on the walkway)? Relate this to the life of *Candide* (at least up to the point of the purchase of his farm). Relate this to the poem “Not Waving But Drowning”.

7c. You are about to read The Things They Carried (which takes place roughly the same time as this movie)– in that book, the main character’s world shifts from his home where he grew up, to Vietnam. In that novel – one character is described as having “gone Vietnam”. Do you believe part of Ben’s problem with fitting in with his old world – is that he has already moved on to something else? Explain with specifics. (you may want to wait until the movie is completely over before answering this).



8a. Where does Ben arrange to meet Mrs. Robinson? How is the location important – think *Carnivale* (from *Candide* & the six kings- you may want to wait till you watch part 2 to answer this). At the hotel – there is a wedding reception that Ben wanders into – how does this bring the different “worlds” – the things that Ben despises about the older generation together with the younger generation?

8b. Do you remember in Everything is Illuminated, as they were searching for Trachimbrod, they also passed a wedding (at a cemetery)? In Macbeth, the title character says that “Life is tale told by an idiot...filled with sound and fury, signifying nothing.” If weddings and funerals are the “sound and fury”, how does the location of their rendezvous place – with it weddings, receptions, comings and goings (like the *Carnivale*) make even more sense?

8c. How does the Wedding Reception at the hotel make sense given 1) the state of Mrs. Robinson’s marriage 2)

Sounds of Silence By Simon and Garfunkel (P. Simon, 1964)
Hello darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk with you again, Because a vision softly creeping, Left its seeds while I was sleeping, And the vision that was planted in my brain Still remains Within the sound of silence.

In restless dreams I walked alone Narrow streets of cobblestone, 'Neath the halo of a street lamp, I turned my collar to the cold and damp When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light That split the night And touched the sound of silence.

And in the naked light I saw Ten thousand people, maybe more. People talking without speaking, People hearing without listening, People writing songs that voices never share

And no one dare Disturb the sound of silence.

"Fools" said I, "You do not know Silence like a cancer grows. Hear my words that I might teach you, Take my arms that I might reach you." But my words like silent raindrops fell,

the ending of the film (obviously you want to wait till you finish the movie to answer this one).

9. How does Ben seem more like the character of Candide when he is at the hotel, then when he is interacting with his parents? Explain (deep).

10. How are the Ben's choices – as he sees them – of a graduate college reminiscent of Candide's choice of punishments for deserting? Be specific in your answer – quoting from the movie and book as needed.

The Graduate - Part II



Aside from some very specific connections (see yesterday's and today's questions) there is a *greater* link between *Candide* and *The Graduate*, between the characters of Ben and Candide. In all of his travels what was it that Candide seemed to be doing? Was it simply about finding Cunégonde, or did it go beyond that? What did he find in the end (was the end point Cunégonde or was it the garden?) What is Ben looking for (how does the song above fit into this)? Do you (as seniors or advanced juniors) ever find yourself in the same situation as Ben? Have you ever felt "underwater" with people pushing you under? During the movie today, think about these larger connections (and write them down of course)

Remember to keep writing down ANY connections you see between the movie and the novel, *Candide*.

1. What aspect of his life do Ben's parents object to? What do they *forget* (that perhaps Mrs. Robinson does not). Is there an unknown world that Charlotte does not know about Alma & Bird (in *History of Love*)?

2. What does Ben want to do with Mrs. Robinson that she is very reluctant to do? In *Candide*, the title character is asked why he loves Lady Cunegonde (by the people trying to trick him with the fake Cunegonde). He is asked if he ever received any letters from her? What does he answer? How does this relate to the nonitalicized part of this question – and what are its implications.

3. Why did Mrs. Robinson marry her husband? Do you believe that this contributes to her unhappiness, drinking, etc. Relate this to the second part of question 2. Does this (and then how or how not) resemble Candide's decision to marry Cunegonde at the end of that book? Relate this to Alma's fear (of a never-ending trail of sand, of ending up like Misha's parents).

4. With the questions above (#1 & #3) in mind, and question #7b from Part I, do you see an emotional connection between Ben and Mrs. Robinson?

5a. What was Mrs. Robinson's major in college? Why is she so sad to talk about it? Why is Ben so surprised by it?

5b. What does her answer, its implications, and Ben's reaction to it have to do with Martin's answer to Candide about having to look into someone's heart to see who has suffered more.

5c. Think back to *The History of Love* and Alma's Uncle Julian's letter to his wife were he asked her to think back about art – and how she used to be passionate and care about it – also think back to his standing over Alma's bed and his wish that she would always care about Art – how can you artfully (pun completely intended) connect this to Mrs Robinson – her first and second answers as well as Ben's reaction to her answer (at first and later).



6. When Mrs. Robinson implies that Ben isn't good enough for her daughter which character and situation from *Candide* is this reminiscent of (think quarterings)?

7. Why does Ben first agree to take Elaine out for a date? Then why does Ben treat Elaine so rudely at the start of their date?

8. What is funny about Ben's treatment at the hotel? Relate this to Candide's treatment in Venice once it is discovered that he has money.

9. What is Ben's biggest fear? Think of the pool, plastics, and his parents. What does he realize that he was doing to Elaine (when he makes her cry)? What was he becoming? Do you remember Leo's decision to not become the kind of person "who kicks dogs"? Connect. Why must Ben change? Connect this to Candide and

Cacambo's decision to leave El Dorado – what were they afraid of? Connect it quickly to Alma's list of things that she will never do.

10. What does Mrs. Robinson say that she will do to keep Elaine away from Ben? *Look back to question 3 at—how does that affect your answer? Try to be empathetic – to see her point of view (even if only for an instant).*

11. *The aquarium, the car, the pool: Where (or to what) is Ben "back to" once that Elaine is out of his life? Again what does this have to do with Candide's (preGarden) search for Cunegonde? Remember the ships?*

12. What announcement does Ben make to his parents? Where does Ben go to find Elaine?

The Graduate - Part III

The ending: Pay very close attention to the ending of this movie; after the church, and on the bus. After finishing *Candide*, some readers are disturbed by the novel's ending. There is even a point before the end (of *Candide*) where Voltaire write that "It would be natural to suppose that, after so many disasters, Candide should lead the most pleasing life imaginable, married at last to his mistress.." But it was not to be. It is not a "traditional happy ending." What about this movie? Is this a happy ending? Do you believe things will end "happily ever after?" Pay close attention to the faces of Ben and Elaine. What song does the director choose to end the movie with, and how does this fit in with the ending?



Questions - To Be Turned in November 20 on a Separate Sheet of Paper, using complete sentences in your answers. (400 points)

1. What is Ben's landlord worried that Ben might be? *Can you link this to Candide and Pangloss's reception when they arrive in Lisbon?*

2. How is Ben first seen by Elaine at Berkeley? *What does this suggest exists between them?*

3. Who is Elaine meeting at the zoo?

4. What emotion do you suspect Ben feels when he watches the *monkeys (the glass walls of the aquarium and here?) Explain. Compare to other images we've seen of Ben in earlier parts of the movie. See your earlier questions*



*5. How does Elaine react when Ben tells her the truth about her mother? Why? *Is there any poem we've studied that comes to mind? (think "truth hurts"). Explain the connection.* Pay close attention to the college boys on the stairs outside of Ben's room. One of them was originally going to be the star of this movie, and later on went on to become an Oscar-winning actor.

6. What is Elaine's initial response to Ben's proposal of marriage?

7. How does Elaine's boyfriend propose? What are his words? Look back to yesterday's question about Ben's biggest fear. *What is Elaine's boyfriend a part of? Remember that one word – at the party – how is he part of that? Why is Mrs. Robinson more comfortable with him?*

8. What surprising visitor (not Elaine) does Ben come home to find in his room? *How is Mr. Robinson (and Mrs. Robinson) like the Baron (Cunegonde's brother)? Remember when Ben shouted at her that she (Mrs. Robinson) felt he "wasn't good enough for her (Elaine)"?*



9. What is the name of the "ole Make-Out king?" How is everything in that Frat House the exact kind of thing that Ben despises, rebels against, and is afraid of becoming? If schools are designed to socialize us – make us part of society – how does that Frat House fit into this? How does it fit into that one word that Mr. Macguire wants to have with him? (see question 3 – Part 1)

10. How does Ben find out where the wedding is taking place?

11. At what point does Ben arrive at the wedding?

*12. What does Elaine say when her mother tells her that it's too late? *Elaborate on both of their meanings. How can you relate it to Mrs. Robinson's reaction to her old college major. Explain. Relate this carefully and thoughtfully to question (and answer) #5(a,b,c) from Part 2. OK – get ready to think hard: What does this have to do with little Alma's (from The History of Love's) decision to tell Misha that there was someone else she liked – how is what she is afraid of the same thing that Elaine is afraid of? Do you remember the excerpt we watched from the Sopranos? Christopher is about to join the witness protection program and give up his gangster life – and then he goes out to buy cigarettes and sees a family getting in their beat-up station wagon.*



*13. How do Ben & Elaine escape from their pursuers? Do they escape – is it over – is it happy – be sure to watch their faces (DO NOT LOOK DOWN FOR A MOMENT) – *how is it like Candide's arrival in Holland, in the New World, his finally finding Cunegonde? Why play this particular song at this moment (see the lyrics on Part II questions. What about the line about Gatsby (yes, pull it out) – that he did not know that it [his relationship with Daisy, Hudson's view of the New World] was already behind him. Also how is it like Sisyphus arriving at the top of mountain, only to see the rock roll down once more. If the last movie was called –*

Everything Is Illuminated – and that title really made sense given the ending of that film? How is the ending – and perhaps theme – of this (*The Graduate*) movie almost the opposite (*The Sounds of Silence*). Explain with specifics and the thought that this question demands. Go wherever you want with this but consider what does Ben graduate into – how does it fit into the comment about “plastics”? Why the looks on their faces – what are they becoming.

