The Graduate

Discussion Questions and Note Taking Guide

Adopted/adapted 2015: North Seattle Community College, Introduction to American Film, [JC Clapp](http://facweb.northseattle.edu/jclapp/)

**NOTE:** You are not required to systematically go through and answer every single question. However, you should consider all of these questions pre and post viewing of the film. Utilize the questions as well as our Socratic dialogue (after the viewing) to fuel your ideas and ultimately your essay. Remember to use specific examples from the film to illustrate your point(s). During our conversation, respond (civilly) and elaborate on what your classmates have to say.

1. How do you interpret the title of the film? In what ways is the title a reflection of the content and overall message you are about to see?
2. Carefully take apart the opening scene of the film. Notice how it is shot (look at everything from what's in the background, what's included and what's not, the pace, the music/sound, etc.) and the effect that the cinematography has on the viewer. What emotions are evoked? How does this scene set you up for the rest of the film?
3. What symbols did the filmmaker employ? How are they embedded in the story? What do they ultimately suggest?
4. Who or what represents the antagonist of the film?
5. Discuss the use of the soundtrack (the music) for *The Graduate*. Why do you think the songs used were chosen? Why were the songs placed where they were in the movie?
6. How would you describe the tone of the film? What specific techniques contribute to the tone?
7. Where would you pinpoint the climax of the film? Why does the moment you chose represent the height of dramatic tension?
8. Look at how sound (or silence) is used -- other than the music. Pick a particular scene, such as when Benjamin is in the scuba suit, and comment on how the sound is used (and for what purpose).
9. Notice how the characters are framed and how the scenes are composed. A famous shot from this film is the one where Mrs. Robinson's leg makes a triangle frame around Benjamin. What effect does this framing have on the viewer? What does this tight framing communicate? Choose a few other scenes where characters are literally (and figuratively) "framed" or "boxed" in -- and explain how the literal framing reflects the character's psychological state.
10. When Benjamin and Mrs. Robinson are in bed together at the hotel notice all of the dark/light contrasts in color (white sheets, dark shadows, etc.). Also, notice all of the strong vertical and horizontal lines in the hotel room. What might these contrasts in light and lines indicate? What sense can you make out of them?
11. Keep in mind the scenes with Mrs. Robinson and Benjamin together and compare them to the scenes with Ben and Elaine together. What do you notice about the differences? Look not only at where they take place (inside/outside) but the lighting, mood, music, and framing.
12. How does the final scene in the film compare/contrast with the opening one? Be specific.
13. Films communicate cultural messages. What might this film be saying about the late 1960's: about relationships, about coming of age, etc.? Explain what cultural messages the film communicates -- and be sure you tell us how you came to that conclusion (using detailed examples).
14. What do you believe is the thematic meaning of the film? How, specifically, is that theme communicated by Nichols?