Movie Guide:
Using the Film “Fight Club” in High School ELA, Social Studies, and Health Ed

Created by: Lindsey Eaton, Kat Broadwell, and Michael Watson

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Dr. Redmond
Appalachian State University

Introduction

*Fight Club* is a fictional movie that was made in 1999. It was based on a novel by Chuck Palahniuk (1996) and follows the unnamed protagonist, the Narrator, through his daily life dealing with insomnia and his emotional disorders. He forms a friendship with an eccentric man named Tyler Durden that quickly turns into something he didn’t expect it to be when the two of them start a fight club that grows from a boyish game into a national organization that employs threats, violence, and vandalism. This movie is designed for High School students and concentrates in the areas of English, Social Studies, and Health Education. The activities in this Movie Guide are connected to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and NC Essential Standards in the following subject areas: English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Health Education.
Using this Guide

*Fight Club* is an engaging and enjoyable film that appeals to high school aged students and young adults while also being relevant to several areas of the North Carolina Essential Standards and National Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Some subject areas in this guide include: English Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies, and Health Education. This guide is organized to clearly connect specific scenes to state standards. For example, in the Social Studies section the standard WH.H.1.3, in which students use Historical Analysis and Interpretation to identify issues and problems in the past, consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past, analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causations, evaluate competing historical narratives and debates among historians, and evaluate the influence of the past on contemporary issues, is used in association with a Venn diagram to compare elements of socialism and dictatorship in *Fight Club* to the Nazi Regime of WWII Germany.

This film and its lessons appeals to adolescents and can be associated with the Developmental Dimensions of Adolescents as described in the National Middle School Association’s Article “This We Believe.” For example, the article claims that young adolescents are “…physically vulnerable because they may adopt poor health habits or engage in experimentation with alcohol and other drugs and high-risk sexual behaviors” (Characteristics of Young Adolescents, 45). One can also interpret these high risk behaviors and poor choices to include violent or aggressive behaviors when in a physically vulnerable state such as the one the main character of the film is in. Also, since the film portrays a counter culture that slowly develops whose main principle is to reject the norms of society, young adolescents may relate to this as they are developing cognitively and intellectually. Characteristics of Adolescents says students “are inquisitive about adults and are keen observers of them; depending on their cultural upbringing, some young adolescents also may often challenge adults' authority” (46). The biggest test of development that “Fight Club” has to offer is to the moral conscious of the young adolescent. The characters and events in the film can be seen as controversial and there is no clear right and wrong or a
clear truth. Students become “increasingly capable of assessing moral matters in shades of grey” particularly through this film (46).

In order to engage and actively incorporate students into the learning process, a teacher needs to use AIME, Amount of Invested Mental Effort. Using AIME questions and guiding ideas in the classroom draws the line between “teaching at” a student and “teaching” a student. These questions provoke higher order thinking and more time spent by the student engaged in the learning materials. This is done throughout this activity both by intriguing students with film clips and by provoking them with questions to consider that relate to what they are watching. For example, in the ELA activity “The Internal Monologue,” students watch a handful of clips showing the Narrator’s use of the internal monologue while they are prompted to think about how it affects the emotion and flow of that scene. Then, they are asked how it would be different without it. These questions require active investment and participation and answers are not simple facts that can be recalled.

In using film and other media in classroom activities, research suggests that students learn more and are more engaged when:

- They view short scenes followed by activities
- They have been given cues and clues to look and listen for prior to screening. For examples they might be asked to make inferences about characters, or comment on how different media techniques contribute to the mood created in a scene.

It is important to note that this film has received an R rating by the Motion Picture Association of America for “disturbing and graphic depiction of violent antisocial behavior, sexuality and language” (IMDb). However, for the purposes of our instructional guide, we have selected key scenes that do not contain graphic violence, extensive bloodshed, foul language, or sexual images or references to be used in activities. This film continues to be very popular with adolescent audiences, even years after its release, because it features and deals with issues and experiences that high school students grapple with daily, including violence and sexuality. By developing an instructional guide for using the film, we are able to directly address the nature and needs of adolescent learners and cultivate essential critical thinking skills that will enable them to more fully deal with films that include violent content. Our movie guide is intentionally designed to provide opportunities for students to critically examine the concept of violence and engage in guided learning about the negative effects of the violence.
About the Movie

In the movie, *Fight Club*, an unnamed Narrator who has been suffering from insomnia for the past six months and has started to feel a sense of boredom in his life. He begins going to various self-help groups for disease and addiction looking for some kind of emotional comfort. It is here that he meets the interesting woman, Marla, who also attends meetings for issues she does not have. Then, the Narrator wakes up on a flight next to a man, Tyler Durden, who is talking to him about death. The man hands him a business card. When the Narrator gets off the flight, he finds that his home has been blown up due to a gas leak and that he has nowhere to go. He calls the man from the plane. Tyler is a carefree man with a unique sense of style. He makes soap for a living and lives in an abandoned house. The two go to a bar together and upon leaving Tyler asks the Narrator to hit him. Enthralled with this raw emotion exhibited through the violence, the two beat each other up in the street. They continue this practice until more men start participating and the legendary basement “Fight Club” is formed.

As men young and old flock to the house to be part of Tyler’s army, the simple boyish club starts to take a new form. And before he can stop it, the Narrator is starting to see that Tyler has a bigger goal in mind that affects lots of people. They call it Project Mayhem and it involves a series of events that destroy the city. Tyler has also involved himself in a relationship with Marla that sets the Narrator on edge. In an effort to stop Project Mayhem from unfolding, the Narrator travels to all the places he knows Tyler has been to, only to get there seconds after he has been there, which leads him to the ultimate realization: he has been Tyler Durden all along and the only way to save himself is to destroy Tyler Durden.

Originally a novel by Chuck Palahniuk, the film *Fight Club* (1999), was directed by David Fincher. It was nominated for one Oscar in 2000 for Best Effects and won the Online Television and Film Associations award for Best Film Editing in 2000 (IMDb).
Character Profiles

**Tyler Durden**: He is the protagonist in the film played by Brad Pitt. He supports himself by making soap until he co-finds Fight Club, a national terrorist group. He is eccentric and has many psychopathic characteristics. He acts as the man in charge and everyone in Fight Club obeys him.

**Narrator**: Also refers to himself as “Jack” throughout the film played by actor Edward Norton. He is an insomniac office worker who joins with Tyler Durden to create Fight Club. He is not satisfied with his life and is constantly looking for more meaning. He even attends cancer support groups for some inspiration. In the end, it is revealed that his alter ego is Tyler Durden.

**Marla Singer**: She is the main female character played by Helena Bonham Carter. She meets the narrator at a support group for testicular cancer. She is crazy and vulgar and ends up having a sexual relationship with Tyler Durden, despite the fact that the narrator is in love with her.

**Key Subject Areas**
Subject Area 1: English Language Arts

Common Core State Standards:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4**

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.


**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3 A-E**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

a. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

c. Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

d. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

e. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

Source: [http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/)

**Key Ideas and Details: The Internal Monologue**

Connection of internal monologue to concept as media literacy as a construction

Connection of internal monologue to audience

Idea of internal monologue as a gateway into thought

Incorporation of a character’s internal monologue into other stories.
Activity 1: The Internal Monologue

Part One: Discussion

Use a collection of scenes that include the Narrator’s internal monologue. These clips will be shown in chronological order. All clips have been selected because of the quality of the Narrator’s monologue and because the scenes lacked severe violence, sexuality, and language use.

Play scene one: 0:03:54 - 0:04:45 “Copy Scene”

- Ask students to evaluate the monologue by asking:
  - “What do the thoughts of the narrator add to the story line?”
  - “What would we lose if they weren’t there?” Replay clip without volume and ask “What was lost without the use of monologue?”

Play scene two: 0:08:40 - 0:10:42 “Support Group Scene”

- Remind students to be thinking about what the internal monologue is adding to the scenes.
- “What does this monologue let you know about the narrator? What about his emotions?”
- Instruction note: The internal monologue is a product of a character’s thought, so it expresses their thoughts and emotions, like the characters feelings about the support group.

Play scene three: 0:38:18 - 0:39:30 “House Scene”

- Ask students “How is the explanation of the house significant to the story?”
- “Why was it necessary to include this description?”
- “What does it say about Tyler’s Personality?”
- “What does it say about the Narrator’s mental state?”

Play scene four-six because of their close proximity in the film: 1:40:55 - 1:41:26 “Near Life Experience Scene,”
Part Two: Write a Story

After discussion about mentioned clips, ask students to write their own story about fictional characters or a personal narrative in which the concept of the internal monologue is utilized for at least one character, using the internal monologue of the Narrator and classroom discussion as an example.

Key aspects of the internal monologue include:

- thoughts
- feelings
- opinions that may contain ideas controversial to other characters
- thoughts that make a simple character more complex
- offer a connection to the audience that stretches beyond the story presented in the third person

EXAMPLE: “Do you want to go to prom with me?” He asked.

   With a blank face and sweaty palms I said, “Sure.”

   I did not want to go to prom with him. I never wanted to go anywhere ever.”
Key Questions:
“How do the internal thoughts of the character contribute to the story line?”
“What effect(s) does the use of internal monologue have on the characters involved?”
“How would the story be different if these things were spoken aloud or not at all?”
“What is the significance of hearing a character’s thoughts and feelings?”
“How can you incorporate an internal monologue into a story/internal narrative?”

Subject Area 2: Social Studies

NC Essential Standards for Social Studies:

WH.H.1.
Apply the four interconnected dimensions of historical thinking to the Essential Standards for World History in order to understand the creation and development of societies/civilizations/nations over time.

WH.H.1.3
Use Historical Analysis and Interpretation to: 1. Identify issues and problems in the past. 2. Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past. 3. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causations. 4. Evaluate competing historical narratives and debates among historians. 5. Evaluate the influence of the past on contemporary issues.

“Just let go,” Tyler says as he convinces the Narrator that getting in a car crash is good for his psyche.
Clip: Scene where Tyler Durden is driving the car the members of fight club are answering his questions with robotic answers
Time Code: 1:37:46 to 1:38:42

Activity 1: Government Systems

- First, facilitate a class discussion/lesson on Nazi Germany and their system of government. Define fascism and what characteristics make up a fascist government; Have the class discuss how principles from WWII are still relevant today
- The students will watch the clip where Tyler Durden is driving and the men in the back seat are answering his questions with the answers that he wants
- Have the class compare Project Mayhem and the Nazi regime by making a Venn diagram. Students will likely claim that Project Mayhem is an accurate example of a fascist society and be able to collect specific evidence from both the film and their research to support this claim.
- After, I will provide students with a list of other examples of fascist societies. (China 1930s, France 1940s, Ireland 1930s, Italy 1920s-1940s) Students will be expected to conduct appropriate research and write a two page paper describing their topic and the...
outcome that fascism had on it. This will be like a mini research paper that should include a proper works cited page.

Key Questions: What are some characteristics of Tyler Durden? What similarities does Tyler Durden have with Hitler? What are some differences? What other fascist regimes did your research find? In your opinion, do you think Project Mayhem displays enough characteristics to be considered fascist? Did you find any other examples of fascism that Project Mayhem relates to more?

Notes: Students should be thinking about how principles/issues from World War II are still relevant in today’s society. Students should be making a claim to say whether or not they think Project Mayhem is a proper example of fascism or not. Their Venn diagram should be their evidence.
Subject Area 3: Health Education

NC Essential Standards for Health Education

Interpersonal Communication and Relationships

9. ICR.1.5
Explain how power and control in relationships can contribute to aggression and violence.

Mental and Emotional Health

9. MEH.2.1
Identify causes and symptoms of depression and mental disorders.

9. MEH.2.2
Design useful help-seeking strategies for depression and mental disorders.


Activity 1

- Prepare the students to view the scene where Jack is interrogated by the police at 2:01:00 to 2:02:37.
- Before viewing ask the students to watch how the Police treat Jack,
  - Why are they treating him like that? What is keeping them from listening to the new orders that he gives them?
- Once the video clip has been watched see what the students have to say about the police officers behavior and guide them in a discussion on the effects of power and its influence on relationships.
  - Discussion boosting dialogue: When Tyler talks to the police he tells them things that he will say in the future and tells them to never listen to him if he is ever against the cause. This power has caused a conflict in Jacks relationship to the police officers because they only see him as Tyler Durden and they are following through with the violent act that he told them to do as Tyler.
Can you think of a time where you told someone to do something even if you tell them not to? Did they listen? Why or why not? Were you in a position of power over this person? Did it result in violence or an argument?

Activity 2: “Mental Health Activity”

- Break the students up into groups of two to research.
- Half of the groups will research depression and half of the class will research mental disorders that will be assigned
- Hand each group a guiding questions worksheet: What is depression? How does depression affect someone? What are the causes of depression? What are some signs and symptoms of depression?
- Read this dialogue out to the class and see if anyone can pick up on the signs and symptoms of the mental health issues that Jack is suffering. Can anyone in the classroom pinpoint dissociative identity disorder

“Jack holds his head, walks around, at his wit's end.”

JACK

Why... why... why...?
TYLER
Why what?

JACK
Why can't I get rid of you? Why can't I just wish you away?

TYLER
You need me.

JACK
No, no, I don't.
(Pause)
I thank you, I really do. Thank you, but I don't need you anymore.

TYLER
Look, I can be selfish, I know that.
(Pause)
I'm not blind to my own failings...

JACK
Noooo, please...

Jack backs up against a window, numb and weary.

TYLER
From now on, we'll share Marla.
We've been spending too much time apart...

JACK
... no, no, no...

TYLER
No more running off without you.
From here on out, we do it together.

JACK
Why are you doing this?!

TYLER
I'm doing this for us.

JACK

Please understand... I've gotten all
I can from this, Tyler.

TYLER

(sullen)

If I leave, you will be right back
where I found you...

JACK

I swear on my life, I won't...

TYLER

You will. You know you will.

Jack stares at Tyler, tears welling up, hangs his head. He
looks at the gun in his hand...

TYLER

Can you live with that?

Jack stares at the gun a long time... then...

Jack brings the gun up, PUTS THE GUN IN HIS MOUTH.

Tyler cocks his head.

TYLER

What are you doing?

JACK

What have you left for me?

TYLER

Why do you want to do that? Why do
you want to put that gun in your
mouth?

JACK

Not my mouth. Our mouth.

Tyler is calm.


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