The Fault in our Stars:
A Movie Study Guide for Eighth Grade Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science
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**Introduction:**

The novel *The Fault in our Stars* by John Green is a narrated story by a sixteen year old girl with cancer, Hazel Grace. She is forced by her parents to attend a support group to help her cope with her illness, and she eventually meets Augustus Waters, a boy who also has cancer but seems to be doing well. Throughout the novel the audience sees/reads the importance of young adolescent love, and the importance of hardships. Hazel and Augustus experience many things that most young adolescents do not undergo, but the significance of how each character handles these hardships, and positive intakes is a great reading for young adolescents.

**About the Author:**

John Green is a New York Times bestselling author of four young adult novels including: *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Looking for Alaska*, *An Abundance of Katherines*, and *Paper Towns*. In 2006, he won the Michael L. Printz Award, and in 2009, he won the Edgar Award. Along with his brother Hank, Green has been producing vlogs on YouTube that are hugely popular (one of the most popular channels in YouTube history to be exact) with everyone from adolescents to adults.

**Using this Guide:**

*The Fault in Our Stars* is an engaging and enjoyable film that has appeal to 13 and 14 year olds while also being relevant to several areas of the North Carolina Essential Standards and the National Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Some subject areas addressed in this guide include English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. The guide is organized to clearly connect scenes to state standards. For example, **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.7** states that students should “Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.” One of the activities described in this guide asks students to complete an in-depth comparison of the book version to the film version of *The Fault in Our Stars* by choosing key scenes from both adaptations, including the Anne Frank House scene and others. This activity directly relates to the portion of the CCSS 8.7 which states that students should “analyze the
extent to which a filmed...production of a story or drama stays faithful or departs made from the text…” According to AMLE’s This We Believe, young adolescents, in the area of psychological development, “exhibit intense concern about physical growth and maturity as physical changes occur.” Many of the adolescent characters in The Fault in Our Stars are stagnated developmentally due to their experiences with cancer. The science activities in particular have students research the film representation of cancer and its comparison to real depictions of cancer and how the disease affects young adolescents in real life. In using film and other media in the classroom, research suggests that students learn more and are more engaged if: they view short scenes followed by activities and they have been given clues to look and listen for prior to each screening. For example they might be asked to make inferences about characters, or comment on how different media techniques contribute to the mood created in a scene. This technique is based on a concept called AIME, which was developed by Gavriel Salomon (1984). The term stands for the Amount of Invested Mental Energy or Effort. Salomon’s work proved that students engage in ‘shallow processing’ or ‘cognitive economy’ if they have not been told what to focus on during the viewing of a scene. When teachers preview a scene or clip ahead of time they are able to provide significant viewing guidance that results in higher student expectations, recall, and comprehension. While the novel The Fault in Our Stars revolves around the romance of a teenage relationship, according to Common Sense Media the intended audience is fourteen-year-old adolescents. The film adaptation is rated PG-13 for thematic elements, some sexuality, and brief strong language. This guide is for use in eighth grade, making both age rating for both the novel and film developmentally appropriate. There is only one scene with questionable content, and that is the scene in which the two main characters Hazel Grace and Gus engage in sexual activities. This scene will not be used in this movie guide.

About:

In the movie The Fault in Our Stars Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters are the main characters. They have both been diagnosed with cancer, however Augustus seems to be in remission when he and Hazel meet. It becomes clear that appearances can be deceiving. Hazel’s cancer, however, has never been anything but fatal. Even though Hazel and Gus experience extreme physical hardships as they both battle cancer, they still manage to have a great time together and find love with one another. For example, they meet their favorite author, read books they both have a common interest in, and experience typical teenage problems. In addition to the typical developmental issues of adolescence Hazel and Gus experience things that many do not have to encounter. Yet, they make the best of the time that they spend together. The Fault in Our Stars was released on June 6, 2014. It has won 18 awards and has been nominated for 11 additional awards. These awards include but are not limited to: the MTV Movie Award for Best Female Performance by Shailene Woodley, the MTV Movie Award for Best Kiss between Ansel Elgort and Shailene Woodley, the People’s Choice Award USA for Favorite Dramatic Film, and seven Teen Choice Awards for everything from Best Drama Film to Best Liplock, as well as numerous other awards.
Character Profiles:

Augustus Waters:

Augustus Waters is a seventeen-year-old diagnosed with Osteosarcoma, a cancer that starts in the bones. He is Hazel’s romantic interest, but they start out as just friends. His personality is outgoing and charismatic, and his main goal is to make something of himself before he inevitably passes away, so as to not be forgotten. He treats Hazel like any girl would want to be treated; for one, he gave her his cancer wish, yet he came along with her to Amsterdam to meet their favorite author.

Hazel Grace:

Hazel Grace is a sixteen year old teenager who is diagnosed with Thyroid cancer with metastasis forming in her lungs. She meets Augustus Waters in her support group and she begins to spend time with him, eventually falling in love with him. She enjoys reading, but only reads one novel in particular called *An Imperial Affliction*. Her dream is to meet Peter Van Houten—the author of the novel she always reads. She does not like her support group, but goes to please her mother because she feels it will make her happy. However, when she meets Augustus Waters in the support group, she begins to really enjoy the time.

Peter Van Houten:

Peter Van Houten is the author of the book that Hazel and Augustus read, which is called *Imperial Affliction*. Hazel and Augustus were very excited to meet this man who they admired, but to their great surprise he was a total jerk towards them. Hazel and Augustus wanted to discuss some of the characters in the novel, but he wouldn’t give them an answer because he claimed the story was made up and he didn’t plan on writing anymore. However, Peter has a change of heart and, in the end, he attends Augustus Waters’ funeral in support of Hazel.
Isaac:

Isaac is friends with both Augustus and Hazel. He has a rare form of eye cancer rendering him blind. He is mired in a negative state of mind after his girlfriend, Monica, left him after he became blind. Dealing with these young adolescent issues while also combating hard life issues like cancer, make it harder for him to remain positive. There is irony in Isaac’s name because a religious character in the Bible, also named Isaac, is blind.

English Language Arts:

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.7 Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

Activity One: Film Constructions

- Before watching the film, students will read the novel *The Fault in Our Stars*.
- Students will be divided into pairs and each pair will be assigned a specific key scene from the novel (i.e. Anne Frank House, Hazel in the hospital, Gus and his G-tube, etc.) to analyze in the film version.
- Students will watch their key scenes, and they will then compare and contrast the film scene to the novel scene.
  - Students will focus on stylistic choices and other film constructions that change the way the audience experiences the media.
- Students will share their analyses with their classmates and discuss why certain aspects of their scene were excluded, why more was added to the scene, etc.

In their cross-textual comparison, Students will be prompted to focus on stylistic choices and other film constructions that change the way the audience experiences the story.

Key Questions:

*How do media constructions affect how the audience consumes and interprets media?*
*Why do directors and producers change the presentation of key scenes and moments from books when they adapt books into movies?*

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2.E
Establish and maintain a formal style.
Activity Two: Eulogy as a Celebration

- Teacher will evaluate students' prior knowledge by asking students to do a "Think-Pair-Share" to define their conception of 'eulogy' in their own words.
- Students will view the final scene from the movie where Van Houten gives Hazel the eulogy Gus wrote for her.
  - Previewing Questions
    - What effect can the use of elements like voice-over and flashbacks have on a scene from a film?
    - After reading the novel and thinking about the ending scene in particular with Hazel reading Gus’ eulogy for her, how is Gus’ eulogy different from other eulogies?
- Give students a choice between writing a eulogy for a character from the novel/film (i.e. Gus, Hazel, Isaac, etc.) or writing a eulogy for someone close to them (or even themselves) that is celebration of the person, like Gus’s eulogy for Hazel.
- Inform students that the eulogy does not have to be limited to someone who is dying, and that this writing process should be a celebration of the person life that they choose to write on, and it should not be sad.
- Students will present their eulogies if they so choose. This can be done by exchanging eulogies with a classmate.
- After reading their partner’s eulogy, students will use their computers to find an image of what they think the person in the eulogy looks like. Students will use specific examples from their partner’s eulogy to explain why they think the subject of the eulogy looks the way they imagine.

Key Questions

*How is the eulogy you wrote similar to the eulogy Gus writes Hazel?*
*What do you imagine would have been the outcome if Gus had just asked Van Houten to write a eulogy for Hazel without telling him anything about her?*

Science

NC Essential Standard for Science
8.L.1 Understand the hazards caused by agents of diseases that affect living organisms.

Activity One: Fictional Portrayal of Cancer

- Before watching the Anne Frank House scene from the film prepare students to pay attention by asking specific pre-viewing questions or prompt, employing AIME. Students should pay attention to the physical aspects of the character, Hazel, and notice the effect that her actions have on her.
  - Previewing Questions:
Recall the Anne Frank House scene from the novel. How did Hazel describe the experience of walking up the stairs? What sort of limitations did her cancer impose on her?

How do camera angles affect how we view a scene? Think about the impact of high and low camera angles on how a scene appears to the audience.

Watch the scene in which Hazel climbs the stairs in the Anne Frank House

Reflect on the scene with students, talking about the purpose of the scene and the story it creates about people with cancer. Have students discuss the way the scene was constructed (i.e. camera angles, music, lighting, etc.) and how that affects the way the viewer sees Hazel and her cancer.

Students will create a hypothesis to answer the following question: Would Hazel realistically have been able to climb the stairs with the amount of challenge/lack thereof that is portrayed in the film? Students will then work in groups, finding research from multiple different sources, to confirm or reject their hypothesis.

Each group of students will share their findings with the class. As a whole, the class will reflect on the original question and come to a consensus.

Key questions:
Describe how the scene portrays disease and health? What factors are included? What is omitted?
Why might media represent disease in this way?
What are the effects of cancer on a person’s body and the way they experience life? (answered through researching their hypothesis)

Common Core State Standards
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.9
Compare and contrast the information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic.

Activity Two: Variations

Before watching the scenes from the movie, prepare students to pay attention by asking specific pre-viewing questions or prompt, employing AIME.

Students should pay attention to information that is included about the characters’ medical conditions and what information is excluded, looking for the what, where, when, why, and how of characters’ “cancer stories”.

Watch several scenes from the film in which the “cancer stories” of characters are revealed. This might include the introduction to Hazel and her lung cancer (Hazel Cancer Reveal scene), the introduction to Patrick and his “Ball” cancer (The Literal Heart of Jesus at the support group meeting).
Jesus scene), and the scene where we learn about Gus’s cancer (Hazel and Gus Heart to Heart in Amsterdam).

- Discuss student reactions and responses. What details of each character’s story are included? What details are omitted?
- Students will work in groups to research a specific type of cancer and what the causes of it are/might be as well as other information about the disease.
- Students will then use their research to create a character with a cancer story. The questions of what, where, when, why, and how should all be addressed in the cancer story and it should be clearly grounded in research.

- Provide a range of choices for students to present their characters (e.g., as a video, as a Facebook profile, as a print interview, etc.)
- After the project students will reflect on their construction of media within their groups. They should reflect on how their project created a specific view of disease both through their media choice and information gathered, and how accurate they think this view is.

Key questions:

- What are the variations within one category of diseases?
- What are the causes of varying diseases/conditions?
- How does the film representation vary from the reality of disease?
- Why are the causes left out of the film?

**Social Studies**

NC Essential Standard and Clarifying Objective for Social Studies 7.G.2.2: Use maps, charts, graphs, geographic data and available technology tools (i.e. GPS and GIS software) to interpret and draw conclusions about social, economic, and environmental issues in modern societies and regions.

Activity One: Mapping

- Students will work in partners to discuss key scenes from the novel and film.
- Students will use Google Maps to chart the characters’ movements throughout the film (ex: Children’s Hospital in Indiana, places in Amsterdam the characters visited, etc.)
- Students should plan their map of life events before using the Maps app, selecting 4 number locations and writing a description for each.
- Students will then use Google Maps to plot out destinations that have been important to them in their own lives (i.e.: their house, favorite vacation spot, etc.)

Key Questions:
How can the use of programs like Google Maps help us to gain a better understanding of important places in media?

NC Essential Standard
7.H.1 Use historical thinking to analyze various modern societies.

Activity Two: Hazel, Augustus, and Anne
- Students will form small groups and research the holocaust. Students should be able to explain what happened and why, and the effect that it had on people.
- Next, provide students with the opportunity narrow their research to specific focus of Anne Frank and her story, focusing on understanding the importance of the annex where she stayed. Each group will then research Anne Frank and collect quotes/readings from her diary that pertain to her experience in the annex.
- Each group will then research Anne Frank’s experience specifically and collect quotes/readings from her diary that pertain to her experience in the annex.
- Before watching the movie scene from the Anne Frank house, prepare students to pay attention to the role that the setting plays in the scene.
- Students will then discuss what they think about the appropriateness of the use of Anne Frank’s annex in the film. Students will then decide which stance their group takes; Are they for or against the use of the Anne Frank house as the background to the scene?
- Students will stay in their groups and find contemporary media sources (e.g. reviews or critiques) that discuss the use of the Anne Frank house as a setting for the film. One source might be Kiss in the Anne Frank Attic: Did ‘Fault in Our Stars’ Go Too Far? from NBC News. (Bratu Becky, June 11th 2014, http://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/movies/kiss-anne-frank-attic-did-fault-our-stars-go-too-n129116).
- Students will work in their small groups to create an argument that will be presented to the class. In their argument they should address what the purpose of including the Anne Frank house as the setting might be as well as what the messages sent by including it actually are (intent vs. impact).
- Students will present their arguments to the class and then the class will reflect on the different points of view together.

Key Questions:
How does the way we think about Anne Frank and the Holocaust affect our thinking about this modern film?
When we allude to history in modern media, it has an impact on our thinking. How, in particular, do movies change how we view history? Does it change how we view modern media? How?
Why are historical allusions included in modern media?
Additional Resources

We have included a list of eight different websites and other related materials that could help students and teachers as they work with the novel *The Fault in Our Stars*’ activities and discussion questions in the guide. This section serves as an opportunity for teachers who use this movie guide to learn more about media literacy and the topics seen in this guide. The websites and other materials listed include lesson plans and activities that pertain to the novel in interactive and creative ways.

*Book Rag* is an online resource for teachers to find many teaching resources for different works of literature. Resources for *The Fault in Our Stars* includes lesson plans, test/quiz/homework ideas, and daily lessons, among other things. [http://www.bookrags.com/lessonplan/the-fault-in-our-stars/#gsc.tab=0](http://www.bookrags.com/lessonplan/the-fault-in-our-stars/#gsc.tab=0)

*Shmoop* is another online resource that offers a plethora of teaching resources within its website for the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and many other works of literature. It provides summaries and analyses full of depth and interspersed with humorous and colorful comments by former collegiate students with degrees in various fields. They provide lesson guides and quizzes, as well as good discussion questions. Everything written on the site is written in teen-friendly language. [http://www.shmoop.com/fault-in-our-stars/table-of-contents.html](http://www.shmoop.com/fault-in-our-stars/table-of-contents.html)


*Teacher Vision* creates lesson plans for teachers that involves students and engages students with the novel with questions before, during, and after reading the novel. [https://www.teachervision.com/skill-builder/reading-comprehension/48617.html](https://www.teachervision.com/skill-builder/reading-comprehension/48617.html)

*Youtube* offers many videos about the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* ranging from annotated footnotes to book club chats, as well as clips from different scenes in the film version of

![Figure 18 A graphic depicting a quote by Augustus Waters in the film.](image-url)
the novel.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfPBohFluFwo1jzJ4aplVzRdJRMnu0sXv

*TeachingBooks.net* offers many resources to use with *The Fault in Our Stars*, including other books. It displays information about the author (like the author’s website), lesson plans and activities, vocabulary lists, and interviews with the author. http://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=28782&a=1

*Teachers Pay Teachers* provides teachers with formal lesson plans that connect *The Fault in Our Stars* with other works of literature, as well as elements of English Language Arts such as figurative language and writing activities. https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/The-Fault-in-Our-Stars-Comprehensive-Unit-Bundle-Common-Core-Aligned-690004
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