

Unit: Growing Up and Growing Older

Film: *Atonement*

Director Joe Wright (*Pride and Prejudice*) gives Ian McEwan's bestselling novel a sumptuous treatment for the screen that should come to be regarded as one of the defining films of the epic romantic drama. Indeed, everything about this film stems from those three words: there is little here that is not epic, romantic, and dramatic, and *Atonement* is a film that masterfully expresses the overarching sense of adventure and emotion that such stories are meant to convey. In this instance, the story centers around the love story of highborn Cecilia Tallis (Keira Knightley) and housekeeper's son Robbie Turner (James McAvoy, in a star-making turn), in England shortly before World War II. Despite their class differences, they are powerfully attracted to each other, and just as their relationship begins Robbie is tragically forced away due to false accusations from Cecilia's younger sister Briony (Saoirse Ronan). She has a crush on Robbie, too, and after reading a private letter he sent to Cecilia, and then witnessing the first expression of their mutual love but mistaking it for mistreatment, her resentment grows until it leads to her telling the lie that will send Robbie away. Soon World War II breaks out; Robbie enlists and is posted to France, Cecilia is a nurse in London, and Briony, now age 18 and aware of what she has done, tries to atone for her actions--but none of them will be able to get back what they have lost. Knightley and McAvoy are perfectly cast as the young star crossed lovers, and the young Ronan is particularly impressive, but it's clear that the real star of this film is the director. Wright allows *Atonement* to revel in every moment of its story and each scene is compelling in its own way, but that now famous extended shot with Robbie on the beach at Dunkirk--filmed in one take and sure to be considered one of the great long tracking shots in film history--is the most memorable moment in this remarkable film. *Atonement* is an excellent example of what can happen when a great book meets great filmmaking. This is one that is not to be missed. --Daniel Vancini, Amazon

The movie, *Atonement*, is primarily set in England at the beginning of World War II.

Students, if, at first, you think this picture is not something you can connect to, at about the 22-minute mark the young man will type something he shouldn't have, and then the plot thickens...

Also, at about the 65-minute mark, there is an extended walking scene through Normandy beach in France showing the destruction of vehicles and horses. This is an example of "scorched earth," wherein the military will destroy what they cannot take with them rather than leave it in enemy territory. (Just weeks ago, our President was widely criticized for leaving billions of dollars of weaponry in Afghanistan.)

You probably will mainly discuss the younger girl, Briony, considering you are dealing with childhood misunderstandings and experiences for your first essay. However, it you identify with Robbie or Cecilia, that is up to you.

Here is the link to the movie:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/4ddb01ujfz69x5s/Atonement%20%282007%29%201080p%20BDRip%20AAC%20x264%20%28multisubs%29-tomcat12.mp4?dl=0>

Assignment: Write about a significant turning point in your life, something that changed your outlook, something good or bad that helped make you who you are today. Draw similarities and/or differences between your own youth and that of characters from this unit. Concentrate on relationships with peers, parents, and other adults in your life and the lives of the characters you select.

It is essential that you make some references to at least two of our readings in this section as well as to the film we watched. If you refer to the film and all three of the readings, your extra effort will benefit you. Without these references, your paper will be incomplete! You can try to relate to each story separately, but mentioning the youth dilemmas of the characters and of yourself is essential.

This assignment is due Thursday, October 1. It should be about two pages minimum. You may use Grammarly to help with your grammar and punctuation. Please email it to me as an attachment, preferably as a docx file, not an pdf please.

