

## Laura Stokes 12.1 Final Teaching as a Form of Interpretation

To me this class seemed like building a house. You have to get the foundation first and then each portion of the house builds off of the previous steps. Each module in this course required an understanding of the previous one. It meant that you needed to have an understanding of one module in order to have a complete appreciation for the new module's concept. They all went hand in hand. At the same time, it was important to notice that each module had a specific point that would help to change the way you view and watch films. For me, each module gave me examples and reasons for why it was important to pay attention to certain aspects of both books and films.

The first detail that sticks out to me among module one is the need to pay close attention to detail. I learned how there can be many different perspectives that can be found by reading a book one way, thinking about something, and then being able to read it again in a completely different light. I not only noticed this throughout my reading, but through discussions that were held around *Charlotte's Web*. This story offered lots to be discovered by the reader, and it is almost impossible to catch all of the things between the pages. However, as the week went on, and we were required to post in a discussion forum about various aspects surrounding *Charlotte's Web*, I realized that there were many things that I had missed when I had read the story. Different people, aside from myself were able to "read" the book, and view the films, and they took things away that had never crossed my mind. However, when I read their interpretations and looked at why they felt a certain way about something that happened in the story, I was able to see the book in a way that I had not done in the past. It also allowed for me to get others' opinions about things that I may have had questions on. Getting their opinions helped to clarify some of the things that I had been confused about. At the same time, it allowed me to look closer at details that I had missed in my initial reading and viewing of the films. When I went back to view the films again, looking at the various ideas that had been brought to my attention in the discussions, I was able to focus on parts of the film that I feel like I missed the first time around.

Aside from just the reading of the text, module one also made me look more closely at how the films are meant to give the audience a certain feeling. Depending on the light, sound, and even characters, the entire movie can be changed by simply altering those simple factors. I learned that the details are present in films as well. I always pride myself in "catching the mess-ups in films. What I mean is that when there are mistakes in a film, such as a pony tail is on the left side of the character's head in one clip and the next, it switches sides. Those are details and I have paid attention to that before. However, after this module, I realized that there were reasons that the filmmaker framed certain objects. We talked about the smoke house and in the second *Charlotte's Web* when the men are standing in the barn talking, you can just see the gloom and focus in on the smoke house and you know that the filmmaker wanted that scene to be a meaningful one. They wanted the audience to pay close attention to the smoke house and think about its meaning. There were other significant things such as that, and I have learned to really look

out for them when I am watching films. I have also learned to pay close attention to the music choices that the filmmaker uses when making the film. There is a reason that one scene may have music that is sad or depressing, and yet upbeat and happy in the next clip. The fun is now trying to decipher why the filmmaker did this and what the significance it. This is something I didn't do before, but I notice myself paying closer attention to it now.

The idea surrounding interpretation played a huge role in how I read the *Charlotte's Web* book, viewed the movies, and the way that I looked at other various books throughout the course, and outside of this class. I try to push myself to read a book, or watch a film, but I am constantly questioning, "is that the only way this was supposed to be presented?" The answer is most definitely no, but it can be a challenge to force yourself to think outside of your comfort zone and push your own limits. To try and see a book or film in a way that is not normal for you is difficult, but it opens your eyes to new things and it is almost like a new book or film. At the same time, you are able to broaden your understanding of a text or film because you are able to see it from different perspectives. As difficult as it can be, overall it will help you because you will have your eyes opened to new concepts and ideas from the same book or movie that you felt only offered a certain point or amount of information.

After I had learned how to challenge myself to try and interpret things in different ways, I began to look at the way that films and books were related. I learned to build on such interpretations and to think about the way that a book had been interpreted to turn it into a film. How was this book "read" by the filmmaker to produce a film that turned out this way? I questioned my belief in the accuracy of the film. Did I feel that the filmmaker interpreted the book the way that the author wanted them to? Did I even know how the author meant for the book to be "read"? Aside from that was the fact that if I felt my interpretation was different, was I able to see how the filmmaker had interpreted the book to create the film? I had to use my newfound knowledge of interpretation to aide in my quest to truly understand the way in which films and books were related. I enjoyed having the opportunity to read some of the originals such as *Mary Poppins*, and *The Wizard Oz*. Since I have never been exposed to them, I was able to read them using the concept of interpretation to decide how I had viewed the movie as a child, and how I viewed the movies now. I was then able to compare them to the books that I had never read before. With the ability to understand the way in which the books were both the same and different from the films I was able to see things that I had overlooked when I was a child. I also noticed things in the films, thanks to reading the books, that I had never noticed before. It also made me question why things had been changed from the books to the films as well as what the significance of the changes were. Why did the filmmaker feel they were necessary? These were all things that affected how I view films now.

One of the things that I had mentioned in a paper I wrote during this module was my love for the books written by Nicholas Sparks. I always look forward to the films because they have always lived up to my expectation. However, there are sometimes things that I notice that are different when the book goes from text to the big screen. I now take these differences, sometimes good, or bad, and decide why

they are there. I don't necessarily get upset with them, nor do I feel let down because they are there. Instead, I try to look at the book and decide which type of interpretation the filmmaker had to make the film. I can usually find some relief now with books turned film. It can also work the other way around. There are books that are sometimes written after the film, and this can allow for different interpretations as well. Is the book as good as the film? Better? Did the author gain the correct perspective that the filmmaker wanted? The questions can all be turned around, and this is now something I enjoy looking at.

In the last module, I looked at how everything from the entire course almost seemed to come together. I was able to see that the whole concept of interpretation can actually be influenced by outside factors not necessarily a person's choice. What I mean is that the media and culture can play a role in what is considered an appropriate interpretation of a book or film. In this module, I noticed how a person's background or way of life can affect why they interpret them the ways that they do. For example, one religious group interpreted the books in an evil way, while another group used a more positive light to view the books. They felt that the books gave children a good example for good values. On the other hand, there are also those people who over analyze and interpret the book in ways that we think are completely different from what we, or the author thought was meant to be the meaning. This module just opened my eyes to the fact that influences such as sexuality, religion, experiences can change the ways in which people interpret the films and books. There is also the idea of how the media can control the way that a book or film is interpreted. In one of the articles that I read it mentioned the idea that a book was marketed and placed on a shelf, and yet it may not be very popular and thus be removed from the shelf shortly after. There is also the possibility of it never even making it to the shelf in the first place because of the fact that marketing directors don't feel that it will be popular. This means that people are really only given a chance to enjoy books that are deemed acceptable by the media and marketing directors. What does this mean for the books that may give readers enjoyment? They are simply pushed aside and people are not given the option to say that the book is good or bad. The marketing directors seem to be the ones who get to decide what will be the "book of the year".

Another thing that I learned throughout all of the modules was the need to pay attention to details. The slightest change in detail can alter a perspective or interpretation completely. In reading the books and then watching the films, I think that I was more aware of details that I would have missed had I just watched the films. I think in order to get a full understanding of the title as a whole, you need to have both read the books and viewed the film or films. As we have learned the interpretation from one to the other can be so different that it is important to allow yourself the opportunity to have a well rounded idea of the way in which the text was written, and the way the film is being portrayed. If we look back at *Charlotte's Web* that is the perfect example of how differently things can be viewed. That book was made into two completely different movies. It is strange to think that since they are both based on the book how different can they be, but in all honesty they are almost like two separate stories. The fact that such different interpretations can exist opened my eyes to the possibility of even more than two. Those were just two

examples of the numerous possible interpretations. A person's personal experience or lifestyle can alter the way in which they interpret things, and this is an important detail to take into consideration when deciding why a film or book was interpreted a certain way. Someone of lower class may interpret a movie about wealth as a fantasy type movie. Whereas a higher class person may interpret the same movie as a normal day to day lifestyle since that is what they experience on a daily basis.

When it comes to applying everything that I have learned in this course to my classroom, I am overwhelmed at the activities that I can now do with my students. I had mentioned earlier in the course that I use the book and the video of *The Polar Express* in my classroom at Christmas time. I work with my students to pick out differences and things that they notice are the same. I could take this a step further and ask them how they are feeling at certain points during the film. We learned in this course to look at camera angles, pay attention to soundtracks and music as well as to notice characters. If I can find out from my students how they feel during parts of a film, that can help me to figure out how it is that they are interpreting the film. Using *Polar Express* as an example, there are parts of that where I have noticed some of my students in the past feeling scared. I think that is partly the point of the filmmaker and then again, that can be how I interpret the film. But if a child notices a scene and says that they feel excited, such as the scene where the train is going through the mountains on the way to see The North Pole, I think that the filmmaker truly wanted that scene to be one where the audience did feel excited and anticipate the arrival. Kids pick up on these types of things, but it is easy to overlook it and think that it may be above their comprehension level. They may not fully understand the fact that people can see and read the same things and interpret them differently, but they can help you to figure out how it is that they interpret something. This can help you as the teacher to piece together an idea of the way that your class interprets a film as a whole or individual scenes, how you felt it should have been interpreted, and what the point was that you felt the filmmaker was trying to make.

Another fun thing that I plan to use in the classroom is to continue with the concept of interpretation. I can read a book, not necessarily one of the books that we read in this class but a book that is relevant to what we are learning. I can again use the concept of interpretation to see how it is that all of my students interpreted the book. I can use art, or story writing or a different avenue to see their opinions. They can share their ideas with the class or with me, and that will allow others to see the different interpretations at a level that they can understand. We already do something similar to this in the classroom already and the students love it. I have them read a story, and then illustrate what they felt the main idea of the story was. Sometimes I have them do this individually, or other times I will give different books to 4 groups and they have to work together to do the same assignment. It is interesting to hear their discussions about what they think the main idea is. I have even witnessed them talking to each other and trying to find a medium that the entire group is happy with before they begin working and illustrating their book for the class. They are sharing their interpretations and trying to use higher thinking to step back and see the book from the other group member's perspectives as well. I

Think that this is extremely amazing to watch in a first grade classroom. They may not be aware that they are using interpretation, nor that they are discussing perspectives, but they are nonetheless. This opens up great communication skills for them to use later on when perhaps they will understand the concept of interpretation. It also makes me wonder if the fact that they are already doing this means that perhaps I may even be able to introduce that word to them and see if they are able to understand it as best a first grade student can. I think that my students could do it, and I am going to challenge myself to make a conscious effort to attempt to do this in my classroom.

I think one thing that I am also going to pay close attention to, is the way in which I portray things to my students. Aside from how they interpret the book is the way in which I present the information to them. In the last module, one of the articles mentioned that the media and marketing played a role in what we deemed was acceptable material to invest our time and money into. They didn't necessarily give us a chance to decide for ourselves, but instead presented us with something that they were "sure" would interest a large audience of people. The fact that they could remove books from shelves and replace them with books they felt were the ones that should be purchased shows the type of control that they had. Likewise, in a classroom, the teacher can be seen as the marketing director. Since I am now aware of the information that I will be presenting to my students, I also need to be aware of how I do it. For example, when reading a storybook, almost anyone can say they have had a story read to them by someone who used voices for the characters. I can read a book to children that may have a somewhat scary undertone if I read it to them using scary voices. However, if I read the same book monotone with no voices, the students will probably interpret it differently. It might be a book with a witch in it, who I use a scary cackling voice for, and the students might think that book is very scary. On the other hand, they may have a completely different interpretation of the book, if I present it to them with no voices. They may think the book was not scary to them, nor was it something they had any negative emotions towards. It really depends on the way in which the book was presented to them. I had never really thought of how this can affect the way that kids interpret information. Then again, I am now able to look at what things kids use to help them interpret information such as sound, colors, pictures etc. Some children may prefer a book with pictures and may interpret it a certain way based on the pictures while another child may enjoy a chapter book with fewer or no pictures. In this case, the illustrator is actually the one that is able to persuade the kids into interpreting the book the way that they wanted them to.

Likewise, in the classroom, we often times use film to help students get a different perspective on a topic that we are discussing, or we allow them a chance to watch a film on a story that we have been studying, such as *Polar Express*. When it comes to presenting them with the film, I think the teacher can still play a big role in this as well. You can guide them to think about questions before they even watch the film that can change the way that they are going to interpret it. For example, you may have them pay attention to the differences between the film and a book, however, if you hadn't given the guidance for them to search for that, some of them would have watched the film and not paid attention to that at all. Then again, you

may have the opportunity to give them different questions, or things to focus on that again will change the way in which they would have seen the film.

I think that the whole concept of interpretation as a whole is something that is very important for people of all ages, not just elementary school children. However, looking at that particular age group, the way in which they interpret things can help me understand them better. If a child is looking at the emotional aspects of a particular book or movie, this can tell me that overall they may be a more emotional child. Another student who may be focusing on the artistic values of the books or films may be more visually stimulated and have an interest in that. This is a great tool to help design my teaching strategies around because it will let me know what types of things will reach my students and which types of things interest them. As this course has taught me, the interpretations can be endless, however I think you can still group interpretations into categories. As I just mentioned, multiple children may view something differently, but they may all still be focusing on the emotional or visual aspect of the book or film. Despite the fact that their opinions will be different, this can still help me to shape my teaching strategies and hopefully help to reach my students' interests.

Overall, this course has given me multiple tools and ideas to help me use literature and film in my classroom in a productive way. Many times teachers make the mistakes of using those items incorrectly, and this results in their students not getting as much as possible out of such wonderful tools. I hope that with my new insights and ideas, I will be able to challenge my students and have them thinking at their full potential. It will also be a challenge for me, because some of the concepts can be a little bit confusing for first graders. However, I think that this course has given me what I need to be able to tailor the concepts in a way that my students will understand. It will be interesting to see how they react to my new plans to add a new bit of excitement with new activities into the classroom.