

Name:

Date:

**“Dead Poets Society” Movie Guide**  
**Directed by Peter Weir (1989)**

1. What kind of school is Welton Academy? What evidence leads you to believe this?

2. Welton Academy has four pillars: TRADITION. HONOR. DISCIPLINE. EXCELLENCE.  
Rank these pillars from least important to most important (in your opinion). If you were Headmaster of a boarding school, what would your four pillars be?

3. What do you gather from the first conversation you see between Neil and his father? How would you characterize Neil’s father?

4. What is the director’s purpose for showing multiple examples of the other teachers’ classes before finally showing Mr. Keating’s class?

5. What does Mr. Keating say the students should call him? What is it a reference to?

6. Do you agree with Keating that words and ideas can change the world? Why or why not?

7. Give an example of Mr. Keating’s unconventional teaching style.

8. Though this film was released in the late 1980s, the setting of the story is the 1950s. How does the setting impact the film?

PREVIEW

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9. Why does Mr. McAllister suggest that if the boys follow their dreams, they will resent Mr. Keating?

PREVIEW

10. What is one example of a tradition you follow? What are the dangers of tradition generally speaking?

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11. What gift does Todd get for his birthday? What does this show about his relationship with his parents?

PREVIEW

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12. What does Mr. Keating mean when he says to Charlie, "Sucking all the marrow out of life doesn't mean choking on the bone." ?

13. How is signing the papers that condemn Mr. Keating similar to the exercise in the courtyard? Who is the only student not to sign the document?

PREVIEW

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14. What is the significance of Todd standing on his desk at the end of the movie? Why did the director choose Todd to be the first one to do it?

15. What character archetypes do you recognize in this film? An archetype is a kind of character that pops up in stories all over the place and displays certain cliché characteristics. Archetypal characters are recognizable because we have seen them before, in different forms, and we know their traits and understand their motivations because they are based on a common template (for example: the damsel in distress or the bully).

16. What does Keating want most for his students to do in life?

17. What is something YOU could do this week to “seize the day”?

18. “We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for.”

How does you feel about the quote above? Agree? Disagree? Explain.

19. Who does this movie appeal to the most?

20. In this film, there is an obvious struggle between being a romantic and being a realist. Do you think you could be both? Why or why not?

21. What is your honest opinion of the film? Give the movie one criticism and one praise.

22. Why does Neil feel like suicide is his only option? What other options did Neil have?

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### Free Verse Activity

Free Verse Poem by Walt Whitman: "O Me! O Life!"

Oh me! Oh life! of the questions of these recurring,  
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,  
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)  
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean, of the struggle ever renew'd,  
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me,  
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,  
The question, O me! so sad, recurring—What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here—that life exists and identity,  
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

### *What will your verse be?*

*Mr. John Keating from "Dead Poets Society" asks his students the same question after reciting the poem "O Me! O Life!" by Walt Whitman. Now, it's your turn to answer. What will your verse or contribution to life be? What makes you feel alive? What is your purpose?*

**The task: Write a free verse poem about what your "verse" will be. A free verse poem lacks a consistent rhyme scheme, metrical pattern, or structured form. Your poem should follow a natural rhythm of speech and must include a title.**

Message and Theme	The main idea of your poem expresses sincere emotions or thoughts. The theme and message of your poem is clear and easily identifiable.	10 Points
Language	You include imagery, figurative language, or sound devices (such as anaphora or repetition) in your poem. Your word choice is carefully selected to enhance the poem.	10 Points
Creativity and Originality	Your poem is creative and original. It includes rich details. It is evident that you put thought and effort into your ideas and emotions.	10 Points
Form	You follow the rules of a free verse poem. Your stanza breaks are effective, deliberate, and helpful to the reader.	10 Points
Conventions	You use proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage in your poem.	10 Points

**Total Points: 50**