

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Jessica Campbell, Ph.D.

## ***Dead Poets Society* (1989)**

Peter Weir

### OVERVIEW

**Director** Peter Weir (1944- ) is one of the best-known Australian filmmakers. He participated in what has been called the Australian New Wave in the 1970s, directing distinctive films like *The Cars that Ate Paris* (1974), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and *The Last Wave* (1977) that made use of Australian settings. Weir's global status grew with *Gallipoli* (1981) and *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), the latter of which won an Oscar. Weir went on to make several Hollywood movies, including the acclaimed *Witness* (1985) and *Dead Poets Society* (1989), both also Oscar winners. Weir began making films less frequently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but has maintained an international reputation.

**Film** *Dead Poets Society* chronicles a few months at a prestigious American boys' boarding school in 1959. The school's rigid rules and focus on tradition are challenged by new English teacher, John Keating, who encourages the boys to think for themselves by writing their own poetry and by exploring how poetry makes them feel, regardless of what the author may have intended. The film echoes some aspects of Weir's earlier work, including the rigid single-sex boarding school in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and an outsider's effect on a community (which recalls *The Last Wave*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and *Witness*).

**Background** As with *Witness*, Weir was not involved at the beginning of this project but came on board as director later on. He worked with some collaborators from previous films, including John Searle for cinematography and Maurice Jarre for the score. *Dead Poets Society* starred Robin Williams, by then a famous Hollywood actor fresh from *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987). Some of the pupils were played by young actors (including Robert Sean Leonard, Ethan Hawke, and Josh Charles) who went on to greater fame. At the 1990 Academy Awards, *Dead Poets Society* was nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Director, and it won the prize for Best Original Screenplay.

### SYNOPSIS

In 1959, a new school year begins at prestigious boys' boarding school Welton Academy. A new English teacher is introduced: an alum named John Keating. Several of the senior boys—Neil Perry, Knox Overstreet, Charlie Dalton, Richard Cameron, Stephen Meeks, and Gerard Pitts—greet each other and meet a new student, Todd Anderson. These boys are surprised by the non-traditional teaching methods of Mr. Keating, who encourages them to think for themselves about everything they read. To make his point about independent thinking and the need to resist conformity, Keating has them do unconventional activities like standing on desks and walking around in circles. The boys discover that when Keating was a student, he belonged to a group called the Dead Poets Society. Keating—after noting that the current administration would probably disapprove of the society—tells them that the group used to sneak away to the “Indian cave” off campus to read and recite poetry about “sucking out all the marrow of life,” as Thoreau put it. Led by Neil, the boys decide to revive the society.

Over the course of the autumn, while the boys periodically gather in the Indian cave to read poetry, play music, eat snacks, and talk about their hopes, they confront various challenges. Knox falls in love with a girl from the local high school and tries to tear her away from her football-player boyfriend. Neil successfully tries out for the part of Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the local town hall. Neil's father discovers Neil's participation in the play and is furious, forbidding him from acting ever again. Neil commits suicide. Welton Academy's headmaster searches for a scapegoat and settles on Mr. Keating. As Keating leaves the school, several senior boys stand on their desks and declare “O Captain, my Captain!” quoting a Walt Whitman poem to which Keating had introduced them.

## CHARACTERS

*John Keating* – English teacher at Welton

*Neil Perry* – student at Welton

*Todd Anderson* – student at Welton

*Knox Overstreet* – student at Welton

*Charlie Dalton* – student at Welton

*Richard Cameron* – student at Welton

*Stephen Meeks* – student at Welton

*Gerard Pitts* – student at Welton

*Mr. Nolan* – headmaster at Welton

*Mr. Perry* – Neil's father

*Chris* – local girl, love interest of Knox

*Chet Danburry* – Chris's boyfriend

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **John Keating**

John Keating is a graduate of Welton Academy who has recently returned to the school as an English teacher. Keating tries to instill in his students a love of literature based on its expression of fundamental truths about human life. He encourages the boys to think for themselves about everything.

*Teacher* Central to Keating's character is his identity as a teacher. He says to Neil that he loves teaching and would give up everything else in life in order to devote himself to it. Indeed, Keating lives an austere life as a teacher at Welton, occupying only a small room and participating in no social life outside the school.

*Free-thinking* Despite Welton's insistence on tradition and discipline, Keating has his own values and promotes them to his students. These values include love, risk-taking, and individuality, summed up in his mantra *carpe diem*. Keating encourages his students to move around during class and to think for themselves—methods that prompt other teachers to call him “unorthodox.”

*Generous* Keating goes above and beyond his responsibilities as a teacher in his generosity toward his students. He teaches them in the ways he believes will be best for them, even though other teachers criticize him for it. He also offers personal help to Todd and to Neil when they are struggling.

### **Neil Perry**

Neil is a Welton student in his late teens who is torn between following his own passions (chiefly for writing and acting) and obeying his father's instructions that he get good grades and become a doctor. Neil is also a leader, instigating the revival of the Dead Poets Society and reaching out to his shy roommate, Todd.

*Passionate* Neil is bursting with enthusiasm; he signs up for multiple extracurricular activities and is the ringleader of the revival of the Dead Poets Society. Above all, though, he is passionate about acting, which he says he has always wanted to try but could not because of his father's interdiction.

*Determined* Neil persists despite opposition. He reinstates the Dead Poets Society even though some of the other boys are worried about getting caught. He acts in the play despite having to deceive his father to do so. His determination to live life his way is ultimately so strong that he commits suicide when his father insists on a different kind of life.

*Generous* Like Keating, Neil is generous. He is particularly generous toward Todd, his shy new roommate. Neil introduces himself and his friends to Todd on the first day of the year and insists that Todd

join the Dead Poets Society. He also comforts Todd when Todd's parents send him the same birthday gift they had sent the year before.

### **Todd Anderson**

Todd is a senior but a new student at Welton, having previously studied at a different school. His brother was a star student at Welton, and his parents expect similar performance from him but offer him little affection. Todd is curious but very shy, struggling to speak up in class.

*Shy* Todd's shyness is his predominant characteristic. He has a hard time talking to his teachers and is terrified by Keating's assignment to write and recite an original poem. Todd also does not want to read poetry aloud at Dead Poets Society meetings. Overcoming his shyness is Todd's primary journey in film; he ultimately defends Keating quite vocally.

*Ethical* Of all the boys, Todd seems most disturbed by ethical qualms when they are essentially forced to blame Keating for indirectly causing Neil's suicide. Although he is not able to resist his father's insistence that he sign the statement implicating Keating, Todd asks, "What's going to happen to Keating?" and speaks up for his teacher at the end of the film.

### THEMES

**Conformity vs. free thinking** Of the "four pillars" of Welton Academy, two are "tradition" and "discipline." Most of the classes at the school (including the Latin, trigonometry, and chemistry classes we briefly see) are very traditional in terms of the material taught and the teaching methods employed. The boys wear formal uniforms and address teachers as "sir." The introduction to the senior boys' poetry textbook provides a quasi-Cartesian formula for measuring a poem's greatness. John Keating's arrival at the school disrupts this conformity. Keating encourages the boys to think freely about everything—about poetry, about themselves, about life in general. He instructs them literally to tear the introduction out of their poetry textbooks—a directive that clearly shocks them but that they eventually follow eagerly. Neil and the other Dead Poets Society members seize on the encouragement to think for themselves: Neil acts in a play despite his father's disapproval; Charlie writes an article advocating the admission of girls to Welton; and Knox declares his love to a girl despite her football-player boyfriend's threats. Ultimately, though, Neil kills himself and Charlie is expelled; so, the film suggests that thinking freely in an environment that champions conformity can sometimes end in tragedy. This theme recalls Weir's earlier film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which also staged a conflict between tradition and independent thinking.

**Education** *Dead Poets Society* takes place almost exclusively at Welton Academy and explicitly explores the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to education. The traditional 1950s style clearly predominates at Welton, characterized by traditional subjects like Latin and techniques like rote memorization. Headmaster Mr. Nolan insists that these methods have worked for a hundred years so should not be questioned. The boys' parents, especially Mr. Perry, agree. Mr. Keating, though, has an entirely different approach to education. Instead of forcing the boys to remain in their desks, he often gets them on their feet and sometimes even takes them outside during class. He insists that literature matters not because it can be learned in a scientific way but because it expresses the most important parts of life and thus matters to us all because we are human beings. Keating encourages Knox in his writing of love poetry and talks Todd through the composition of a stream-of-consciousness poem inspired by Walt Whitman. Both Keating and the other teachers, despite their different approaches, firmly believe that their way is best for preparing the boys for life beyond Welton. Mr. Nolan believes just as strongly as Keating does that what happens in the classroom teaches not only academic subjects but also life skills.

**Family** *Dead Poets Society* presents family as chiefly a source of pressure rather than comfort for the students of Welton Academy. The film's first few scenes take place on the first day of the new school year, when the parents join the boys for a start-of-year assembly and then say goodbye to them. We see Todd's parents expressing the hope that Todd will be as good a student as his older brother was during his time at the school. Similarly, Neil's father tells Neil that he has high hopes for his academic performance. Neil's father also tells Neil on that first day of the year that he must drop one of his

extracurricular activities: namely, the school annual. Mr. Perry is deaf to Neil's protests. Neil's friends chide him for caving to his father's demands, but they acknowledge the truth of his reply that they, too, obey their parents even when they do not want to. Ultimately, Neil's conflict with his father is so strong that it costs him his life: he commits suicide when his father says that instead of acting, ever again, he must go straight to military school, then to Harvard, then to medical school. The nurturing support that family should provide comes instead from the boys' relationships with each other, and from Mr. Keating.

**Love** Welton is an all-boys school, and the film does not present any homosexual characters. But one of the students, Knox Overstreet, does fall in love (at first sight) with a girl he meets on a foray into town. Knox initially experiences this love as both overwhelming and hopeless, since the girl, Chris, is "practically engaged" to another teenage boy. While at a Dead Poets Society meeting, though, Knox is inspired to "seize the day" and to call Chris. He later kisses her forehead and reads her an original poem, despite her boyfriend's threats that he will kill him. Mr. Keating encourages Knox's writing of poetry about love, noting that love is one of the "great themes." Even though Chris tells Knox to leave her alone, the film suggests that she is in fact drawn to him as well; Knox is rewarded for his persistence when she agrees to attend Neil's play with him, even as she insists that he is "so infuriating." Romantic love also comes up in the form of a photograph of a woman that Neil sees on Keating's desk; Keating explains that she is in London and that he prefers to be at Welton teaching.

**Acting** In a literal sense, acting is a theme of *Dead Poets Society* in that Neil has always wanted to act and seizes on the opportunity to try out for a local production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Neil gets the part of Puck, and the film shows parts of his successful performance. Mr. Keating and Neil's fellow Dead Poets Society members praise his performance, though his father is unmoved by it. But the film also suggests that Neil and the other students are forced to "act" all the time in front of their parents and teachers. Keating says as much to Neil when Neil comes to him for advice after his father tells him he must quit the play the day before it opens. Neil freely explains to Keating why acting means so much to him, but when Keating suggests that he say the same thing to his father, Neil says that he cannot tell his father how he really feels. This prompts Keating to say that Neil is "acting" in front of his father. These boys' strict families and the rigid rules of Welton Academy force the boys to act parts they do not believe in.

**Poetry** *Dead Poets Society* is beloved by many English teachers because of its protagonist's ringing statements about the importance of literature. Mr. Nolan, Welton's headmaster and previously a teacher of English, subscribes to the more traditional approach to works of literature as artifacts that can be studied scientifically. Mr. Nolan praises the boys' textbook introduction that offers instructions for determining the greatness of a poem by plotting its importance and its technical skill on a graph. Mr. Keating, on the other hand, tells the boys to tear this introduction out of their books and calls it "excrement." He tells them that they can decide for themselves what they like based on how it resonates with them. Keating says that poetry is worth studying not because it can be dissected but because it gives voice to the deepest feelings human beings can experience. Perhaps surprisingly for modern audiences, *Dead Poets Society* presents the reading of poetry as a potential source of adolescent rebellion. The film suggests that the senior boys' reading of poems by Thoreau, Tennyson, and others encourages them to make bold decisions in their own lives.

**Youth** Except for John Keating, all of the film's major characters are in their late teens. They experience various things typical of young people of that age. Knox falls in love for the first time. Neil finds a passion for acting, and he also tries to deal with the fact that his father's demands on him conflict with that passion. Meeks and Pitts build a radio in order to listen to contemporary popular music. All the boys seem physically to be bursting with energy, often running around and moving and clapping when not under the watchful gaze of their teachers. The boys' youth is also evident in their impressionability. They have clearly been marked enough by their strict parents to obey the school's rigid rules, but they are also very struck by Keating, and some of them make significant changes in their lives that can be indirectly traced back to his insistence on free thinking and on prioritizing love and individuality over rote learning and tradition. Knox and Neil, in particular, evince the strong emotions common to young people. They and Charlie also express youthful impetuosity and risk-taking – so much so that Charlie ends up expelled and Neil ends up dead.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think John Keating bears any responsibility for Neil Perry's death? Why or why not?
2. Does Keating remind you of any teachers you have had? If so, did you like those teachers? If not, speculate about how you think you might have responded to such a teacher.
3. What do you think the future holds for the surviving Dead Poets Society members? In what ways are their lives changed by what has happened throughout the year?
4. What did you think of the relationship between Knox and Chris? Did you find the film's portrayal of this relationship to be sweet, problematic, or something in between? Why?
5. Keating characterizes literature as the expression of the most basic experiences of human life. Can you think of a work of literature that has struck a chord for you? What is it and why does it resonate with you?

[excellent questions—the kind Keating would have asked—but probably best to put them at the end of the essay: a strict Mr Nolanesque rule]

## SCENES

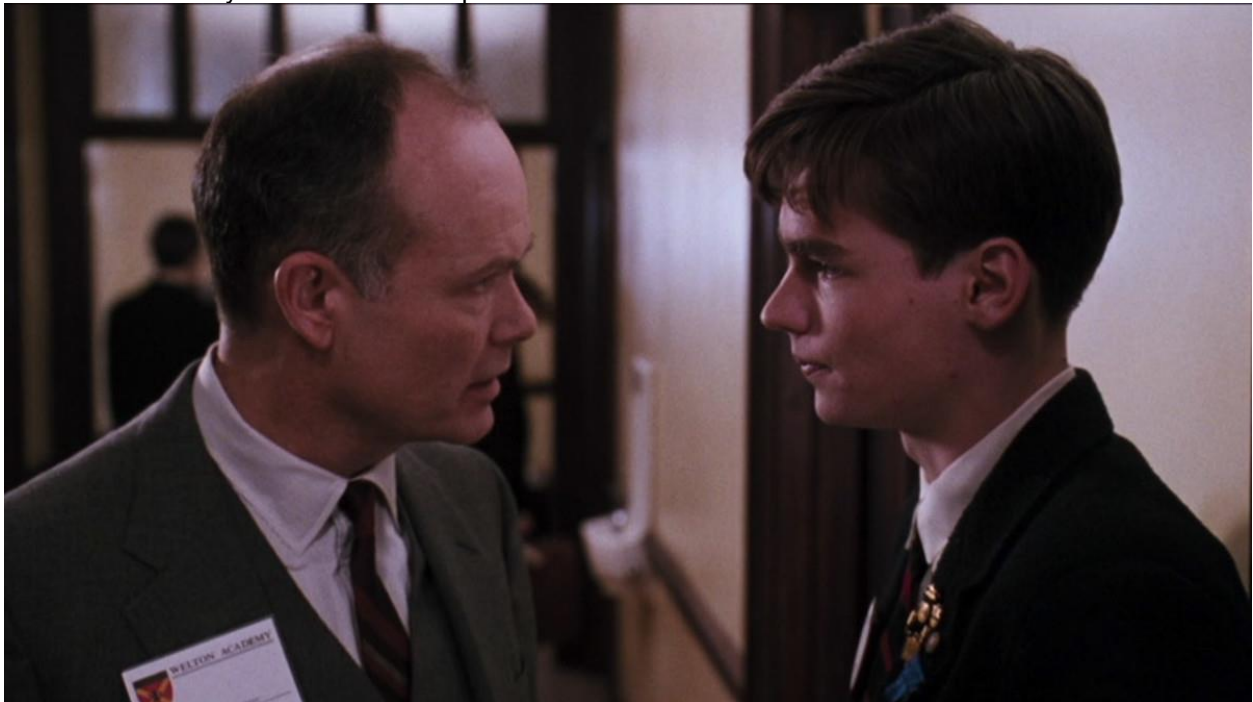
**New school year** – Several dozen formally dressed boys and their parents participate in the opening assembly for the academic year at Welton Academy. At the headmaster's instigation, the boys recite the four pillars of the school: tradition, honor, discipline, and excellence. The headmaster observes that the school was founded one hundred years earlier, in 1859. He also announces that the school has a new English teacher named John Keating.



**New student** – The boys say goodbye to their parents; some of the younger boys are crying. Two of the older boys realize that they will be roommates and introduce themselves to each other as Todd Anderson and Neil Perry. Todd is new, but his older brother was a famously successful student at Welton. Three other older boys named Charlie Dalton, Knox Overstreet, and Stephen Meeks come to Todd and Neil's room and introduce themselves to Todd.



**Parental orders** – Neil's father, Mr. Perry, reappears and tells Neil that he is taking too many extracurriculars this semester so has to drop the school yearbook. Neil protests that he is the assistant editor this year. Mr. Perry is angry with Neil for arguing with him and says that he can do what he likes after medical school; Neil gives in. The other boys initially tell Neil he should stand up to his father but then admit that they also do what their parents tell them.





**New classes** – Classes begin; the older boys attend classes in chemistry, Latin, and trigonometry. Then they enter Mr. Keating's English class. Keating enters the room whistling and then walks back out of it, urging the boys to follow him. They are shocked at being told to leave the classroom but ultimately obey. Keating takes them to the school's entryway, where he encourages them to look at the old photographs of students from decades earlier. Keating has one of the boys read the poem that begins "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" and observes that this poem, as well as the Latin phrase "carpe diem," reminds us that we will all one day die so must take advantage of the time we have. He refers also to Walt Whitman's "O Captain, my Captain!"



**Knox meets Chris** – The boys discuss the class after it ends, observing that it was weird but also a nice change of pace. Knox tells them that he has to eat dinner at the house of some friends of his parents' named the Danburrys. He expects them to be old and boring. When he arrives, though, the door is opened by a young blond girl, who introduces herself as "Chris." Knox returns to the school later that evening and tells the other boys that he has met a beautiful girl, but that she is practically engaged to Chet Danburry.



**Independent thinking** – Back in English class, Keating instructs Neil to read part of the introduction to their textbook. This introduction proposes a formula for determining the greatness of a poem. When Neil has finished reading, Keating says this introduction is “excrement” and tells the boys to rip out the page, and in fact the entire introduction, from their textbooks. They are shocked but ultimately do it. Another teacher hears the sound of ripping from the hallway and comes into the room, thinking that the boys are goofing off; he is surprised to realize that Keating is present and in fact has instructed them to do this. Keating tells the boys that in this class, “you will learn to think for yourselves.” He insists that we read poetry because it expresses the most important things in life.

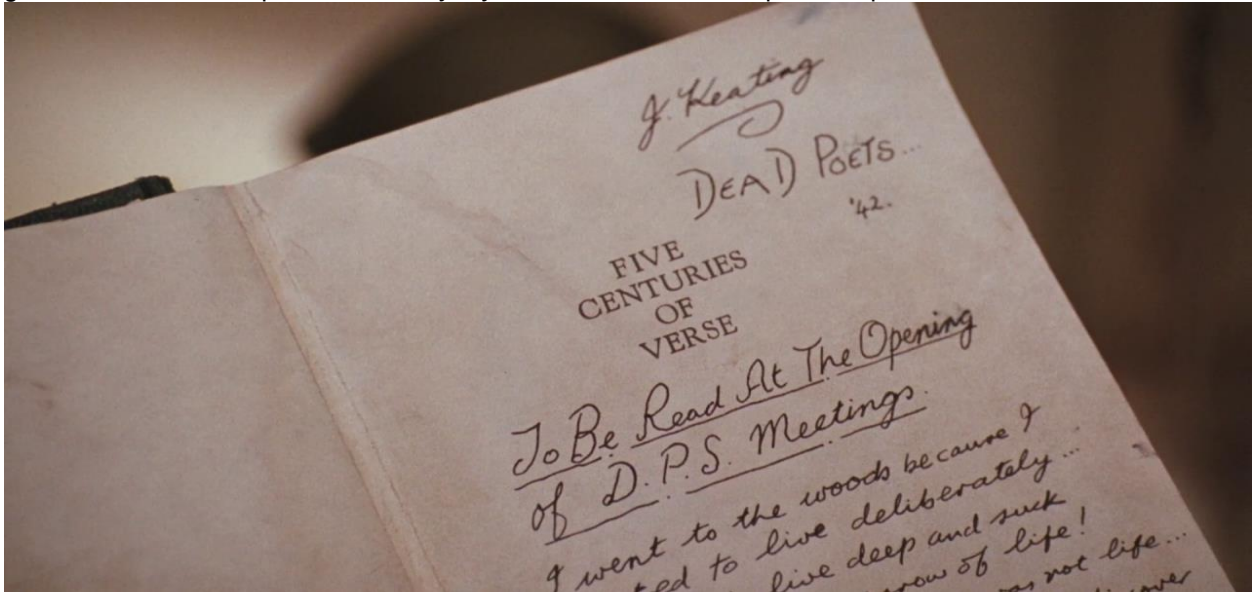




**Dead Poets Society** – At lunch, the other teacher tells Mr. Keating that he thinks his teaching methods are misguided. Neil approaches the other boys and shows them the annual from the year Keating graduated from Welton as a student. Next to Keating’s picture is a reference to his participation in something called the “Dead Poets Society.” The boys ask Keating what this was. “I doubt the present administration would look too favorably upon that,” he says. But he tells them that they used to gather at the old Indian cave and read poetry about “sucking out all the marrow of life.” After Keating walks away, Neil tries to persuade the other boys to reinstate the Dead Poets Society; some express doubts, but they ultimately agree.



**First meeting** – On his desk that evening, Neil finds a copy of *Five Centuries of Verse* in which Keating had signed his name and written the opening invocation for meetings of the Dead Poets Society. He takes it as he, Todd, Knox, Charlie, Cameron, Meeks, and Pitts sneak off in the dark to the Indian cave in the woods near campus. In the cave, the boys eat snacks, read poems from *Five Centuries of Verse*, and tell ghost stories. Charlie produces a *Playboy* centerfold and recites part of a poem about love.

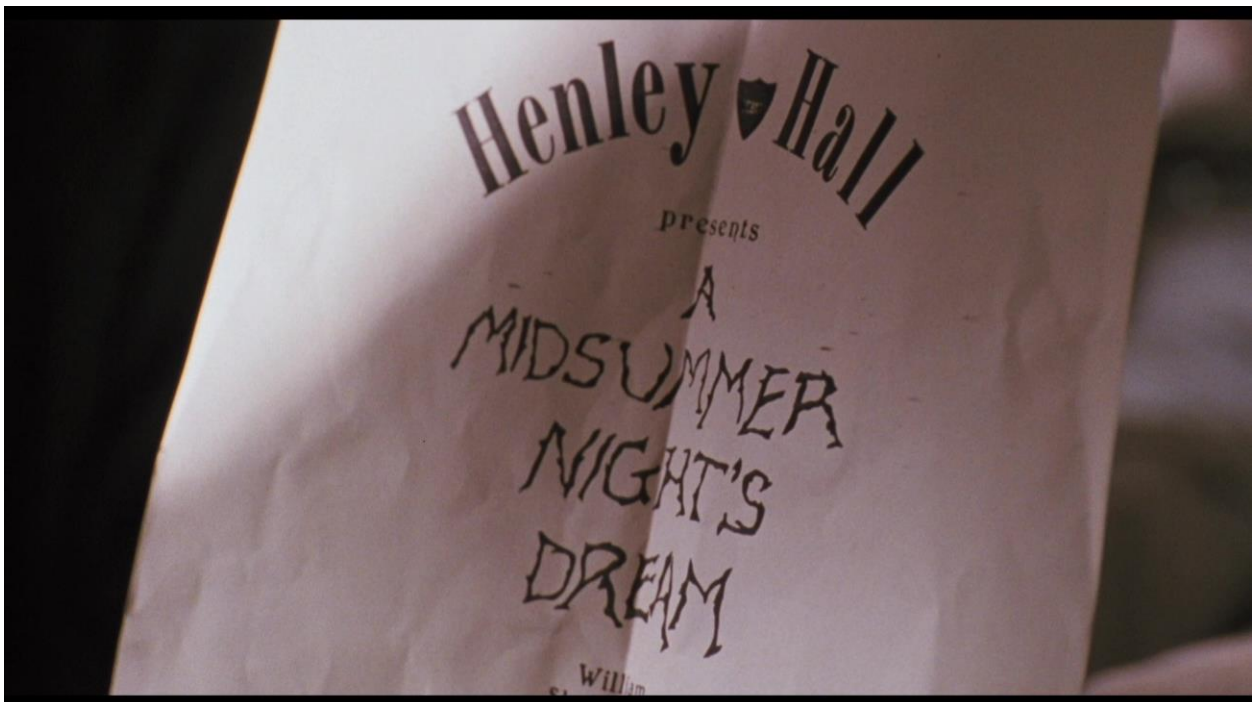


**New perspective** – In English class, Keating instructs the boys to write poems of their own, to be read aloud in class on Monday. He also introduces Shakespeare, eliciting groans from the boys. But Keating insists that Shakespeare can be done in a less formal way. He recites some lines in the style of Marlon Brando and of John Wayne. He reads a longer comic passage from Shakespeare, now eliciting laughs from the class. He stands on his desk, telling the boys that we all must look at things from a different perspective from time to time. He has them all come up and stand on the desk themselves, one by one.





**Weekend** – Meeks and Pitts construct a radio and dance to popular music. Todd tries to write his poem. Neil appears in their room and shows Todd a flyer for a local production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Neil announces that he is going to try out for this play because he has always wanted to be an actor but has always been prevented by his father from trying. Todd expresses concern that Neil will not be able to keep his involvement in the play a secret from his father.



**New ventures** – Knox rides his bike into town and finds Chris in a group of cheerleaders getting ready for the local high school's upcoming football game. She embraces Chet, causing Knox to sigh and ride away. Keating leads an activity outdoors in which the boys take turns reading a line of poetry and then kicking a ball. He plays stirring classical music on the portable record player to accompany this activity. Neil excitedly tells all the other boys that he got the part of Puck. He goes to his typewriter and forges a letter of permission from his father.





**Todd's poem** – In Keating's class, Knox reads a poem entitled "To Chris." Another boy grudgingly reads a very brief poem: "The cat sat on the mat." Keating then calls on Todd, who says that he did not write a poem. Keating brings him to the front of the classroom anyway and leads him through a sort of stream-of-consciousness process, inspired by a photo of Walt Whitman, that results in a spur-of-the-moment poem that impresses Keating and the other boys. Todd smiles.



**Carpe diem** – Another meeting of the Dead Poets Society takes place in the cave. Charlie plays a saxophone, which he says he prefers to the clarinet his parents make him play. Knox announces that he can't take it anymore and is going to call Chris. The other boys accompany him to the dormitory phone. He calls Chris, who invites him to a party at Chet's house the following weekend.



**Conformity** – Keating leads a class outside. He instructs three of the boys to walk around in a circle. They do so, eventually falling into step with each other, which leads the other boys to clap in unison. When they stop, Keating observes that everyone started out at his own pace but then conformed. He encourages them not to conform in life, quoting Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken."



**New ideas** – At the next meeting of the Dead Poets Society, Charlie shows up with two girls, to the other boys' surprise. Charlie announces that he is changing his name to Nuwanda. He also announces that he published an article in the school paper in the name of the Dead Poets advocating that girls be admitted to Welton. The other boys express concern that the administration will start asking questions about the Dead Poets Society. Meanwhile, Knox goes to the party. He gets stuck with a couple of football players while Chris dances with Chet. Later, he sits on a couch and realizes that Chris is sleeping next to him. "Carpe diem," he whispers, and kisses her forehead. Chet sees him and beats him up.





**Punishment** – An assembly is held and headmaster Mr. Nolan exhorts anyone who knows about the article to come forward. Charlie, with glee rather than remorse, announces himself. He is beaten with a paddle by the headmaster, who tries unsuccessfully to get him to reveal the names of everyone in the Dead Poets Society.

**Warnings** – Mr. Nolan tells Mr. Keating that he, too, used to teach English at Welton. He also tells Keating that he has heard of his unorthodox teaching methods and does not approve. Keating then goes to Charlie and tells him that “sucking out all the marrow of life” can go too far, because getting expelled from school would mean missing out on some good opportunities.



**Discovered** – Neil goes to rehearsal for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, smiling. When he returns to his dormitory, his father is there, furious at Neil's deception. He asks whether Mr. Keating put Neil up to it, which Neil denies. He instructs Neil to quit the play, despite Neil's protest that the play opens the next night. Neil goes to Keating's room and explains that his father is forcing him to quit the play. Keating encourages Neil to try to convey to his father how much he loves acting. Neil doubts that this will work; “I'm trapped,” he says, crying.



**Love declared** – Knox rides his bike to the local high school. He finds Chris and reads a poem that he has written for her, despite her protestations that Chet will kill Knox if he sees him. Knox returns happily to Welton, telling his friends what he did.



**Preparations** – Neil tells Keating that he did speak to his father, and that his father agreed to let him stick with the play. The other boys get dressed up to attend the play. Chris appears and tells Knox he has to stop pursuing her. He insists that he loves her. She agrees to go with Knox to the play on the understanding that if she does not like him by the end of the evening, he will leave her alone.





**Performance** – Neil performs the part of Puck. His fellow Dead Poets Society members, along with Keating, watch smilingly. Mr. Perry appears in the back of the auditorium halfway through the play. He is unmoved, but the rest of the audience responds enthusiastically. Keating and the Dead Poets Society boys try to congratulate Neil after the play ends, but Mr. Perry pushes them away and takes Neil off in his car.



**New plans** – Neil and Mr. Perry arrive at home, where Mrs. Perry is waiting. Mr. Perry says nothing about Neil's performance. He says instead that he will be removing Neil from Welton immediately and sending him instead to military school, then to Harvard, and then to medical school. Neil protests, but he is unable to really explain his feelings to his father. He holds on to the crown of twigs from his Puck costume. When his father leaves the room, he tearfully tells his mother that he was good in the play.



**Suicide** – After his parents have gone to bed, Neil stands in front of an open window wearing his Puck crown and no shirt. He then opens a desk drawer and pulls out a gun. Mr. Perry sits up in bed, saying he heard something. He and Mrs. Perry go downstairs and find Neil's dead body; they scream and cry hysterically.



**Mourning** – Charlie wakes Todd and tells him that Neil is dead. They and the other Dead Poets Society boys walk outside into the snow in their pajamas and coats. Todd vomits. He shouts, “His father did it!” and runs screaming into the snowy field. Keating, in his empty classroom, goes to Neil’s desk and cries.



**Search for the guilty** – At an assembly, Mr. Nolan states that Neil Perry’s death is a tragedy. He announces that, at the request of the Perrys, he will be conducting a thorough investigation. Knox, Todd, Charlie, Meeks, and Pitts sit together in a storage room. Charlie observes that Cameron is not there, and that Mr. Nolan will surely be looking for a scapegoat. Cameron appears and tells them that the administration is blaming Mr. Keating, and that he thinks they should all save themselves by agreeing with the administration that Mr. Keating put them up to the Dead Poets Society activities.





**Blame** – The boys speak to Mr. Nolan one by one. Todd learns that Charlie has been expelled. He takes his turn in Mr. Nolan's office, where he finds his parents waiting. At his father's prompting, Todd hesitantly confirms Mr. Nolan's statement that he was part of the Dead Poets Society, and that Mr. Keating encouraged reckless behavior in general and Neil's acting in particular. He sees the other boys' signatures on a written statement. He asks, "What's going to happen to Mr. Keating?" His father orders him to sign the paper.



**O Captain** – Mr. Nolan enters Keating's classroom and announces to the students that he will be substituting until a permanent replacement is found. He tells them to go to the introduction of the textbook and read the essay on "understanding poetry." Cameron informs him that they all ripped the introductions out of the textbooks. Keating enters the classroom to collect his personal belongings. Todd stands up and tells Keating that they made them sign the paper. Mr. Nolan shouts at Todd to sit down and at Mr. Keating to leave. Todd climbs on top of his desk and says, "O Captain, my Captain!" Mr. Nolan shouts at him to sit down, but he does not; instead many of the other boys do the same thing. Keating says, "thank you, boys," and leaves the classroom.

