

Sprockets

Toronto International FILM
Festival for children
April 14-18, 2008

A great deal of thanks and appreciation goes out to our teacher committees who volunteer their time to assist in the development of Sprockets lesson plans.

TITLE: **Max Minsky and Me**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: *Germany*

RELEASE YEAR: *2007*

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: *German*

DIRECTOR: *Anna Justice*

RUNTIME: *99 Minutes*

CURRICULUM LINKS: Science (creation theories,) History, Social Studies (gender role expectations, social marginalization; alienation Atheism,) how divorce impacts kids, Film/Media Studies (focus on camerawork and the use of the camera in the development of narrative, hero worship of Media icons) Physical Education (importance of physical activity in becoming a well rounded individual and developing self-esteem).

Focusing Question:

While watching the film, students should pay attention to how conventions and techniques are used to convey a message.

Teacher Endorsement:

"The budding sexuality of a young teenaged girl is suggested, though not overtly displayed. The main character is a self-proclaimed atheist which may cause some difficulties for schools with religious affiliations. The film is

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flat-out charming, very well scripted and extremely well acted by the two young leads. It offers many potential areas of study and has cross-cultural relevance for young teenagers, dealing with timeless issues faced by students everywhere. While subtitled, the film is not dialogue heavy and the text itself is very easy to read. The film is also strong technically with imaginative use of the camera, nicely understated special effects, and some arresting settings. Highly recommended."

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY:

MAX MINSKY AND ME (2007)

Pre-screening Preparation:

1. The main character is referred to as "Einstein Edelmeister" - knowing a bit about Albert Einstein might help put the nickname into context.
2. Have students do some research to learn a little bit about Jewish culture- especially what is a "Bat Mitzvah" and what is the "Torah".
3. Have the students look at a map to orient themselves, locate Germany (specifically the cities of Munich and Berlin) and Luxembourg.

During the Screening:

Have students think about the following questions during the screening:

1. What does the term "nerd" mean? What is a "nerd"? Why is Nelly considered a nerd at school?
2. On the other hand, Max is portrayed as "the cool kid." What makes Max cool?
3. Despite their differences, both Max and Nelly are "outsiders" at school. How are they similar?

Post-screening Activity:

As a class talk about the above questions and attempt to define the term "nerd". Under the following headings, list the attributes of what one may

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use to describe a stereotypical nerd. Record the results on the blackboard or on chart paper.

- **Physical appearance**
- **What are they good at?**
- **What are they not so good at?**
- **How do they get treated by their peers?**
- **Why do they get treated this way?**
- **What do they become when they finish school?**

As a class, discuss how this image of a “nerd” evolved. It is largely a “pop culture” phenomenon and an image projected through the media, reinforced through repetition. It is often a way to identify someone who is different than you. The idea of this lesson is to highlight how we form stereotypes and also to consider those who are perceived as a “nerd” aren’t very different than everyone else. The contrast of Max and Nelly’s characters from the film demonstrate this fact. They are both insecure, they both have family problems, they are both trying to find their way in the world, trying to figure out who they are and both developing romantic feelings for the opposite sex.

As a final component, a discussion, or even a quick research project, could look at some of the famous “nerds” in history. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Mark Cuban, Donald Trump, were once considered “different” or called a “nerd”. Now, among the most powerful people in the world these examples serve as an inspiration to students who may also feel “different” or like a “nerd.”

Conclusion/Wrap Up: This is a smart and humorous film that enters the mind of a thirteen-year-old girl. The storyline affirms that it’s okay to question, challenge and contemplate one’s personal belief system. In addition, it depicts the awkwardness of learning about love with a great sense of humour and shows a positive relationship between the main character of Nelly and her family, who don’t always agree with her but are always there to support her. Discuss- do these characters find empowerment? What are some tools they use to build their self-esteem in a world in which they don’t quite fit?

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

A great complementary media piece would be the TV show *Freaks and Geeks* which portrays the challenges faced by "outcast" in high school.

Have students identify nerds from pop culture history. (E.g. Steve Urkel from *Family Matters*, Arnold from *The Magic School Bus*, Screech from *Saved by the Bell*, Carlton from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, Milhouse and Lisa from *The Simpsons*, Taylor from *High School Musical*, TJ from *Smart Guy*, Bill Nye from *Bill Nye The Science Guy*, Olive from *Little Miss Sunshine*, etc).