

Never Let Me Go Study Notes



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Directed by: Mark Romanek
Certificate: 12A
Running time: 103 mins
Release date: 11 February 2011

Synopsis:

Kathy, Tommy and Ruth live in a world and a time that feel familiar to us, but are not quite like anything we know. They spend their childhood at Hailsham, a seemingly idyllic English boarding school. When they leave the shelter of the school and the terrible truth of their fate is revealed to them, they must also confront the deep feelings of love, jealousy and betrayal that threaten to pull them apart.

These Study Notes are designed to support work in English, Media and Film Studies and related subjects at GCSE, A Level and equivalent.

Before viewing

Never Let Me Go is adapted from a novel by author Kazuo Ishiguro. The text below, taken from the film's official website <http://www.foxsearchlight.com/neverletmego/>, refers to the key aspects of the novel the film draws on:

In his highly acclaimed novel 'Never Let Me Go', Kazuo Ishiguro (The Remains of the Day) created a remarkable story of love, loss and hidden truths. In it he posed the fundamental question: What makes us human? Director Mark Romanek, writer Alex Garland and DNA Films bring Ishiguro's hauntingly poignant and emotional story to the screen.

- From this information and the other synopsis details at the start of these Study Notes, what expectations do you have about this film?

Trailers play a crucial part in the marketing of movies. Watch the trailer for *Never Let Me Go* as part of your preparation for seeing the film: <http://www.foxsearchlight.com/neverletmego/>

- What does this trailer suggest about the film's mood, dramatic conflicts and overall narrative?
- Although the film certainly contains science-fiction elements, on the basis of this trailer what other genres do you think it might cross into and what 'headline' themes do you think it contains?

After viewing

Fiction and Reality: The Premise

The film opens with some bald statements setting up the 'context' for the film. Apparently, these explanations were added because the US audiences for early screenings were convinced *Never Let Me Go* was describing real events in the UK. Laughable perhaps, but the film is very effective at creating a highly believable and consistent setting in which much is entirely recognisable and familiar.

- What, in your view, contributes most to making the film and the world it depicts seem highly plausible?
- The film slowly reveals that things are far from ordinary for the children at Hailsham. Make a record of how that strangeness is gradually explored and revealed in the film. Your notes should include both what happens to the children as a part of their routine and also the way characters respond to them.
- In what ways are the lives of the donors and our own similar? Before answering this question consider the following comment by the film's director Mark Romanek: *'The film is about the urgency of embracing the people you love in the moment because time is so short.'* (from the film's production notes).

Creating Mood

The film is extremely melancholic and it is interesting to see what contributes to that downbeat mood.

- Consider the contribution that the setting and the mise en scène (what's put in the scene – furniture, key props etc.); certain motifs (a ball in grass, plastic hanging to barbed-wire etc.) or music play in fixing that mood.

The director Mark Romanek explained *'I wanted to make an unashamedly beautiful and un-ironic film... It was especially important to me that the film should be romantic, because the truth this film explores is a bittersweet one.'* (from the film's production notes).

- 'Beautiful', 'un-ironic', and 'romantic': how present were these elements in the film, and if so, what contributed to them?
- How far would you agree that the ideas the film explores are 'bittersweet'?
- Why do you think the characters in *Never Let Me Go* don't try to escape their fate?

Critical Responses

- How did you respond to each of the lead actors in the film? Search online for reviews of the film that comment on the performances of Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightly and Andrew Garfield. What points do they make? Do you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with the reviewers' responses to the actors' performances?

Critics have singled out a number of key questions raised by the novel and the film-version of *Never Let Me Go*. What answers do you feel the film has, if any, to the following questions:

- Are we in control of our destiny?
- Do we live for ourselves or other people?
- What makes us human beings?
- Do you think such things as art or our capacity for loving one another reveal our 'souls'?
- *Never Let Me Go* is far from being a conventional 'entertainment' but does that matter, and does it in fact contain quite a lot that is 'entertaining'?

Extension

It is now increasingly common place for people to live beyond 100, but can you think of advantages and disadvantages in humanity greatly extending its average life-time – even if that could be achieved in ways less cruel and exploitative than those shown in *Never Let Me Go*?

Written by Jerome Monahan