

## Hero's Journey Analysis – "Dead Poets Society"

### Step 1 – The Ordinary World

Images of students in a painting  
 Boarding school  
 Children being packed off by their parents  
 Two brothers get photographed together  
 Tradition  
 A candle is lit  
 1:31

Bag pipes played

We actually see "Tradition" on a banner  
 That's what this film is going to be about – it's going  
 to challenge tradition

The Light of Knowledge is passed to a child  
 And then passed down the line

Welton College  
 Their history  
 Tradition Honour Discipline Excellence

We see the boys we are going to get to know

The best preparatory school in the United States

Mr John Keating  
 The new English master  
 The previous guy has left  
 He's been teaching in London

A change has taken place in this world  
 Meaning the lives of the boys are about the change  
 This is why we are telling this story now

6:04

Todd's parents know the headmaster, Nolan?  
 You have big shoes to fill, young man  
 Your brother was one of our finest

Todd has a terrible burden of expectation

Neil's parents  
 We expect big things of you this, year  
 He wont' disappoint us  
 I'll do my best, sir (to his father)

Neil Perry introduces himself to Todd  
 Why did you leave Ballincrest?

My brother went here  
Oh, you're that Anderson

So Todd is entering a new world

What is Neil?

He's not the traditional hero because he doesn't change very much. Before we start the story, he was already editing the School Annual. He's already a leader. He's already confident. His life is going to be changed, but not really his character. He is more of a catalyst hero. His actions are going to change Todd (he's a bit like R.P. McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest").

IT WOULD BE WORTH HAVING A CHAT ABOUT THIS

Some parents trying to mollycoddle  
They won't hear of it

Cameron says that Neil has got the "new kid"  
Looks like a stiff  
Todd overhears this.  
Don't mind Cameron

Neil went to Summer school  
My father thought I should get ahead  
Again, we see the pressure Neil is under

How was your summer, Slick

Travesty, hard?, decadence, excrement

We meet all the boys

Again we hear how great Todd's brother was  
Valedictorian  
Merit Scholar

His father comes back  
Says he should drop the school annual  
He's taken on too many extra curricular activities  
Don't you ever dispute me in public  
Says that until he's in medical school he'll do what he says  
9:11

You know how much this means to your mother  
You know me always taking on too much

Says he will do what his father says  
Boys question that but he says they are the same

Mr Future Lawyer  
Mr Future Stockbroker

Says it doesn't matter but it clearly does  
10:00

So clearly all these boys have their lives laid out for them. They are all expected to follow high paying, unfulfilling careers. Unless this story happens to them.

They invite Todd to join their study group  
He does

Birds take off

Is this a sign that things are about to change?

Other teachers are boring  
Slow down you horrible phalanx of pubescence  
Latin – boring  
Trig – precision

CALL TO ADVENTURE  
Now we get to Keating's class  
12:00

He whistles as he walks through the class.  
He is Piper  
They are going to follow him.

Well come on  
Follow

He takes them outside  
Oh, Captain, my captain?  
Where does it come from?  
By Walt Whitman about Abraham Lincoln  
They can call him Mr Keating or Captain, My Captain

He went to Helton (sic)  
But he was an intellectual weakling

Gather ye rose buds, while ye may  
Carpe Diem  
Seize the Day

Why does the writer use these words?  
Each and every one of us is going to die

Step up and peruse the faces from the past  
Just like you  
Invincible just like you

They believe they are destined for greatness  
 These boys are now fertilising daffodils  
 Listen hear the legacy  
 Carpe Diem, Seize the Day, Make your lives extraordinary  
 16:11

This is very powerful CALL TO ADVENTURE

REFUSAL OF THE CALL

Boys say that it's weird  
 But different  
 Spooky if you ask me  
 Do you think he'll test us on that stuff? – Cameron

Who's up for study group tonight?  
 Knox has to have dinner at the Danbury's or something  
 Friend's of the family  
 Probably 90 years old.

REFUSAL OF THE CALL

Todd says he's 'not going to go to the study group  
 He's got some history he wants to do

FURTHER REFUSAL

But he writes Carpe Diem, Seize the day,  
 Before screwing it up and putting it in the bin

CALL TO ADVENTURE

Knox at the door of the Danburyh's  
 But the girl who opens the door is very cute  
 Chris  
 You're the spitting image of his father  
 Just did a big case for GM  
 Know where you're heading  
 Like father like son  
 Again the pressure

Knox comes back from dinner  
 19:12

Says he met the most beautiful girl of his whole life  
 She is engaged to Chet Danbury  
 All the good ones go for jerks

These are all REFUSALS

Cameron is all about trig

They have been playing with a radio

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

Given the nature of the film, schoolboys under the influence of a charismatic teacher, there will be a lot of Meetings with the Mentor in this film.

20:07

Keating's class  
Understanding poetry  
Perfection vs importance  
Measure of greatness

Excrement

Cameron scribbles out what he's written down

Keating says to take those pages and rip them out  
Tear out the introduction

And they do.

What the hell is going on here  
Teacher comes in – Mr McAlister  
Sorry, didn't know you were here  
Thinks something strange is going on  
Keep ripping, gentleman

He is ripping up the blueprints for their lives  
Powerful metaphor

No more measuring poetry

You will learn to think for yourself  
Ideas and words can change the world  
Mr Cameron doesn't see how it applies to business school

A little secret for you  
We don't read and write poetry because it's cute  
We read it because we are members of the human race  
Because we are passionate  
Poetry, beauty, love, romance

The MENTOR repeats his CALL TO ADVENTURE  
The powerful play goes on  
And you may contribute a verse  
What will your verse be  
He looks at Todd

The MENTOR knows who the HERO truly is  
24:55

Dinner  
McAlister, the Latin teacher, asks Keating about his class

Misguided

When they find out they're not artists they'll hate you  
 Not about artists, about free thinkers  
 Quote back and forth about idealists and realists

This is the central conflict of this story  
 Idealism/romanticism vs realism

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

They find Keating's entry in the Annual  
 He was the editor  
 Soccer  
 Dead Poets Society

They ask him about Dead Poets Society  
 27.15

Doubt the present administration would look too  
 favourably upon that  
 Dead poets dedicated to sucking the marrow out of life  
 Meet at the Indian Cave  
 Romantics  
 We didn't just read poetry  
 We let it drip from our tongues  
 Women swooned

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

Neil is entranced  
 I say we go tonight

REFUSAL from several of the guys

Who's in?  
 I'm in  
 Me too  
 Come on, Knox it will help you get Chris

TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES

They look at a map

The special world is new terrain  
 Again, this has mythological undertones

Starting to sound dangerous says one of them  
 We are being reminded that this is a dangerous quest

CROSSING OF THE THRESHOLD

Todd, are you going to come  
 He's afraid of reading out loud  
 REFUSAL

What if you didn't have to read  
 Are you going to ask them?  
 Neil goes and asks them

You're in

Now Neil here is playing Mentor  
 It's Todd's meeting with Neil here that pushes him over  
 the threshold  
 31:19

Neil has Keating's poetry book  
 Like the map, this is a guide to the special world

They have flashlights

Dogs bark  
 They run out into the night

Beautiful soundtrack  
 Beautiful evocative imagery

A bird flies past

Hooded figures carrying torches  
 A mystical special world  
 32:47

Walton scares one of the guys  
 It is a scary new world

Smoke from a fire  
 Forget the fire

I hereby reconvene the dead poets society  
 Todd will keep the minutes

I went to the woods because I wanted to suck out all the  
 marrow of life – Thoreaux

They put the food down

They tell a ghost story  
 Smoke cigarettes  
 Jigsaw puzzle – saw her murder

Cameron tells a story they've all heard

35.17  
 Charlie has written a poem on the back of a picture of a  
 naked woman  
 He recites a poem  
 He surprises us

Neil recites Tennyson

Meeks recites a tribal piece

The Dead Poets Society is now a Tribe.  
This is very common in this Tests, Allies & Enemies phase

They run back to the school  
37:33

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

Why poetry?

Communicate?

No.

To woo women

Todd can't answer the question

He makes them laugh

He stands on the desk

I stand upon my desk

To remind myself we must look at things in a different  
way

The world looks different

Don't think what the author thinks

Think what you think

Most men lead lives of quiet desperation

Don't be like that

This different perspective again reminds them that they  
are in a new world – they are being disoriented.

Dare to strike out and find new ground

He says that they must deliver a poem they have written  
Out loud

Todd is the last one up onto the desk

Keating says he knows the assignment scares the hell out  
of him. Again, the Mentor has marked out the hero to us.

This sets up our Resurrection scene at the end

APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE

This is a bit of light relief prior to the dramas ahead

Meeks and Pitts get the radio to work

Dance

Todd writes his poem

Neil says he's going to try out for Midsummer Nights'  
Dream

For the first time in my life I know what I'm going to do



What are you going to tell you father?  
 Jesus, Todd, whose side are you on?

Todd is being a realist here  
 It is very dangerous what Neil is embarking on.

I haven't even got the part yet  
 Can't I enjoy the idea for a little while?

Coming to the meeting?  
 I don't know  
 Being in means you've got to do something  
 I'm not like you  
 Don't you think you could be  
 43:30

Butt out  
 I can take care of myself just fine  
 No  
 He takes his poem  
 Runs around the room

Neil is running around the room  
 Someone plays the fiddle  
 Beats the drum  
 44:33

Knox rides over to the girls school  
 Down the hill  
 Scatters the birds

Romantic interlude very common in the Approach phase

He arrives at a football game  
 Sees Chris doing her cheerleading thing  
 But Chet is there

On the bus, boys

Reconnaissance – common in the approach

46:30  
 Keating takes them to play soccer  
 He gets them to read something  
 And then kick the ball

He puts music on  
 Handel?

Neil got the part  
 He's going to play Puck

48:00

Neil types a letter of permission from his father  
 You're crazy  
 This is great he says but we know it's going to be bad

A piper down by the water  
 49:05

A lot of this is preparation before battle  
 It's a phase where you set up the later dramas

THE ORDEAL

Todd screws up his poem

Knox has written a poem about Chris  
 Not stupid  
 Charlie pats him on the back

Mr Hopkins you were laughing  
 You're up  
 The cat sat on the mat  
 First poem in history to get a negative on the Pritchard  
 scale

Who's next?  
 Mr Anderson  
 Put you out of your misery  
 Step up  
 I didn't do a poem  
 (he actually did but threw it away)

Mr Anderson thinks everything inside him is worthless and  
 embarrassing. I think you're wrong.

I sound my barbaric yawp from the rooftops of the world  
 Walt Whitman

Todd give us a barbaric yawp  
 51:56  
 A sweaty tooth madman  
 What do you see

Blanket will never cover you  
 Everyone claps  
 Don't you forget this

Todd is changed  
 Old Todd is dead  
 A new Todd has been reborn

## REWARD

Music soaring  
Soccer  
Colour – haven't seen that before

They rejoice at having scored a goal

Keating is raised up on their shoulders  
Triumphant

In the cave, they smoke  
My parents collect pipes  
55:01

Neil arrives last  
With the God of the cave  
Charlie blasts his sax to start the meeting

Got to do more  
Got to be more

Beautiful, soulful  
The boys are captivated  
He plays it in front of Knox  
His parents made him take the clarinet  
He hated it  
The sax is more sonorous

Knox says if he can't have Chris he is going to kill  
himself

## APPROACH

He calls her  
Hangs up  
They'll hate me  
My parents will hate me  
Would he like to come to a party?  
Friday night at the Danbury's

She is going to be mine  
Carpe, carpe

## MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

58:52  
They stroll around the square  
Everyone started out in their own pace  
But in time they conformed  
You must hold firm to their beliefs

Swim against the stream  
Latin teacher looks on

1:01:23

REWARD

Today is Todd's birthday  
 Desk set  
 The same as last year  
 Maybe they thought you needed another one  
 Maybe they weren't thinking about much at all

Underestimating a desk set as wonderful as this one  
 This deskset wants to fly  
 The world's first unmanned flying deskset  
 A liberating moment

1:02:47

We've had a revelation here – common of the phase  
 And it's a release for Todd  
 He is being liberated from the life his parents planned  
 for him.

Our boys separate here and each is going through a  
 different phase

ROAD HOME

Girls arrives at the cave with Charlie  
 With Gloria and Tina

He's giving up the name Charles Dalton  
 From now on, Nawanda  
 He marks his face

Knox is about to face an ORDEAL

Knox arrives at the party  
 1:04:09

Everyone is kissing  
 Chris is dancing with Chet

Two of the football guys fill him full of drink

This is not uncommon in the leadup to an ordeal  
 (Loretta in Moonstruck)

Girls don't know whether they want to join  
 Join?  
 Nawanda recites some poetry for the girls  
 Claiming it as his own  
 Girls impressed

ORDEAL

Knox is pissed

1:06:44

Chris is asleep on the couch  
 He looks at her face  
 Carpe Diem  
 He strokes her hair  
 Kisses her forehead

But his drinking buddy  
 Says Knox is hitting on his girl  
 Punches the shit out of him

Next time I see you, you die

ROAD HOME

The girls ask if they miss women

Charlie announces that he has written a letter in the  
 name of the Dead Poets asking for women to be admitted to  
 Welton.

This spins the story in a much more dramatic direction –  
 classic Road Home.

ORDEAL

The shit hits the fan

All the boys are called together

Who wrote the “profane” article?

So we had an Ordeal at around the 50 minute mark  
 And now another at the 70 minute mark  
 One in the middle of the second act  
 And one at the end of the second act

1:10:26

Your only chance to avoid expulsion

Phone rings  
 Charlie  
 It's for you  
 It's God  
 He says we should have girls at Welton

1:11:04

Wipe that smirk off your face  
 Assume the position  
 Whacks his arse

What is this Dead Poets society  
 I want names  
 He walks back with a very sore arse

Not kicked out  
 He's to turn everyone in  
 And all will be forgiven  
 Damn it, Neil, the name is Nawanda

So he wouldn't turn everyone in  
 A close call  
 That raises Nawanda in our eyes.

1:12:50  
 Nolan takes Keating aside  
 His first class room  
 Also an English teacher

Unorthodox teaching methods  
 Very impressionable  
 Your reprimand created quite an impression

They argue over what they are preparing them for  
 This is a repeat of the earlier debate  
 But Keating doesn't win this one  
 1:14:07

He is on notice  
 This is a reminder that Keating is on the edge  
 One more transgression and he's gone

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR  
 Keating comes in  
 Says it was a lame stunt  
 Sucking the marrow doesn't mean you choke on the bone  
 A time for daring and a time for caution  
 You being expelled is not daring, it's stupid

A bell tolls

THE ROAD HOME

Neil arrives at rehearsals

His father is waiting in his room  
 1:16:00

Very pissed off  
 Made a liar out of me, Neil

Tomorrow you go to them and you tell them that you are  
 quitting

No, I am the main player

I made a great many sacrifices to get you here, Neil and you will not let me down.

So, just when Neil thought things were going well  
He's reminded that he's embarked on a dangerous quest

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

Keating writes in front of a photo of a woman

Neil asks to speak with him

His girlfriend is in London  
He loves teaching  
He doesn't want to be anywhere else

His father is making him quit the play  
Have you ever told your father?  
I can't talk to him this way  
You have to talk to him  
You are not an indentured servant  
The play is tomorrow night  
You have to talk to him before tomorrow night  
I'm trapped  
No you're not

For Knox, an ORDEAL

Bicycles trapped in snow  
Knox rides off to Chris's school  
He brings her flowers to apologise  
He has brought a poem  
She can't accept them

He goes into her class  
He reads out his poem

He pretty much dies  
It does not go well

He goes through the kitchen to get some breakfast  
They want to know what happened  
She didn't say anything  
But I did it.  
That is what matters

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

1:22:05

Did you talk to your father?  
Didn't change a thing

But he has let me stay in the play  
 Think he'll let me stay with it  
 Keeps saying he won't be at the play because he's away

He hasn't talked to his father  
 He's taking the chance that he can be in it and he won't  
 find out

1:22:50

Get red  
 Red lightning rod on Charlie's chest

These are tribal markings before they enter the final  
 battle

#### REFUSAL

Chris arrives at the school  
 He says he loves her  
 She says he doesn't know

#### CALL TO ADVENTURE

Go with him tonight to play  
 Chet won't be there  
 Promise that this will be the end of it  
 Dead Poets word  
 You are so infuriating

#### CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

He goes with her

(This is quite like Loretta agreeing to go to the opera)

#### RESURRECTION

Midsummer Night's Dream  
 Neil as Puck  
 The Dead Poets watch  
 He's good  
 Thumbs up from Keating

1:27:19

Neil sees his father arrive  
 Fear

Knox sits with Chris

#### REWARD

He takes her hand

1:28:40

The finale of the play



If we shadows have offended  
If you will pardon, we will mend

1:29:39

REWARD

Everyone kisses Neil  
Standing ovation  
But father unmoved

ORDEAL coming

Neil is met by his father

1:31:42

They want to congratulate him  
Keating comes up to him  
You have the gift  
Keating you stay away from my son

Neil is driven away  
It's snowing

Keating looks worried

At Neil's home

1:33:36

We're trying very hard to understand why you persist in  
defying us. They are pulling him out of Welton. Into  
military school. He's going to Harvard, he's going to be  
a doctor.

A lifetime

You have opportunities I never dreamed of

You can forget about acting  
Nothing.  
Neil is resigned.

I was good, I was really good.

Parents go to bed  
Mother crying

Neil looks at his very ordered bed

There is the crown of thorns from the play  
Chris reference – he's going on the cross

He opens the windows  
He's bare-chested like Jesus

Puts on the crown of thorns

1:37:51

He opens a door  
Bare footed

Down stairs  
(Crown now off)

Father in bed

Neil has a key  
Opens a drawer  
He pulls out something that's wrapped  
Don't' actually see the gun

Father stirs from his sleep  
What was that sound?

Neil is not in his room  
Windows open

Heads down stairs  
Increasing pace

A smoking gun  
Smell in the air

Gun on the floor  
Slow motion  
Oh, Neil  
Oh, my God  
He's all right, he's all right  
1:41:37

Knox wakes Todd  
They are all at the door  
Tear  
Neil's dead

"REWARD"  
Snow covered lake

Todd says it's so beautiful  
Then throws up  
Sobs  
Todd runs off across the snow  
1:43:30

Keating sits alone in his class

Goes to Neil's desk

Gets out the Five Centuries of Verse  
 Sees the inscription  
 Keating cries

Mass at the funeral  
 1:46:18

#### THE ROAD HOME

Death of Neil Perry a tragedy  
 At the request of Neil's family  
 A thorough inquiry into this matter  
 Your complete co-operation is expected

#### RESURRECTION

Charles says they need a scapegoat  
 Cameron comes in  
 You finked didn't you, Cameron  
 Charles wants to punch him  
 If you guys are smart you will do exactly what I did  
 They're after Keating  
 Todd takes a stand  
 Let Keating fry  
 Charlie punches him

You just signed your expulsion papers, Nawanda

Perhaps, but he has also proven himself a hero

You can't save Keating  
 But you can save yourselves  
 1:50:10

Meeks is led back  
 Knox is called out  
 Gives the thumbs up to Todd

Todd goes to Meeks' room  
 Nawanda expelled  
 What did you tell them  
 Nothing they didn't already know

Todd is led in  
 His parents are there

Admits to being part of Dead Poets Society  
 Says that Mr Keating encouraged the DPS  
 And Neil's pursuit of acting  
 Led directly to Neil Perry's death  
 Everyone else has signed it

What will happen to Mr Keating?

Sign Todd!

The latin teacher takes his class out  
SHARING THE ELIXIR  
Keating looks on

1:54:17

RESURRECTION

Final class

Nolan takes it

Who will tell me where you are in the Pritchard text  
books?

Skipped the realists

We will start over

What is poetry

Keating is there to collect his personals

Turn to page 21 of the Introduction

That page has been ripped out

They're all ripped out

Keating looks at Todd and smiles

Todd wants to say something

Can't

Todd says they made us sign it

Leave Mr Keating

RESURRECTION

As Keating leaves

Todd climbs onto the desk

Captain, my Captain

SHARING THE ELIXIR

Knox does the same

Pitts stands

Meeks

The whole class defies Nolan

Except Cameron

Even Hopkins stands

Thank you, boys

Many standing, some remain sitting

Last frame is Todd – our hero