

Jonathan Livingston Seagull

(This was "the novella to read" in the 70s—can you discover why?)

~What do we know about the late 60s and 70s?

~What do we know about turning books into movies?

~What do we know about devices movie makers use to heighten effects?

~What do we know about seagulls?

We will see the 99 minute film version of the book in order to develop our media literacy and to discern the allegory, metaphor, parable...that's going on. After the movie, I'll share some key passages from the book so you can compare/contrast the written version and the visual version.

As I previewed the movie, I made these notes for you.

Let them guide your viewing and our discussion.

1. Long ocean views and gulls fighting for food...What is the message here? How do you feel in the midst of each scene? This film will seem to move slowly? Why might this be?
2. Song with Jonathan focus...contrast with the previous garbage scene.
Why? Why can't I? 62 mph
3. How did they get the bird to do the dives? (it's 1973)
4. JLS is a Prometheus type character.
5. What do his parents say? What is their argument?
6. What does Jonathan want?
7. Why place the noisy group garbage scavenging scene right after this?
8. Jonathan looks so white against the blue sky,,,contrast
9. Then he's hurt (pretend hurt? I hope no gulls were harmed) Asks if his life ends here. Says no, then heads back home. Song reprise...stop thinking; fly in dark toward light. Seems as if this symbolized death...but he's not dead; he discovers to use his wing tips only. Symbolizes?
10. A couple of birds watch as Jonathan "hot dogs." The flock scatters. The elders speak his condemnation and ostracize him. How does this make you feel?
11. Song...Lonely Sky...misty look to film. So sad. He sleeps alone, walks slowly, then flies. Black bird challenges him and attacks him in an awful fight. (Close your eyes. Is this in the book...I don't recall reading it.) What does washing by the waterfall symbolize?
12. I will know all there is to know of this life. More flying scenes...sees whales, otter, pelicans, seals...symbolism? Then he's alone on rocks. (many cuts seem to be reused—saves money, I guess) Sees horses that shelter him from rain...more symbolism. (so 70s!)
13. Yellow tinted desert scene. Big gull silhouetted by sun. Note shadows, hopes. Gull in tree in rain, music is melodic; gull looks questioningly around, then white snow background. He's in snow drifts. Eats only snow. Lonely feeling. "Dear father, we dream" song. Jonathan is freezing

"while we wait" Sun through clouds scene, sorta floaty flying, orange sunrise/set. Note the color imagery...bright white birds...OK, you know what all this has to mean!

14. Right! New flock, higher place, black/orange...like edge of world...sorta heavenly sounding singing "Am I an outcast here too?" Then it turns bright blue/white. Maureen explains the levels and number of lives (sorta the Eastern philosophy) toward perfection. Another new flock, bright white (this must be another level onward)
15. Meets Chaing who says Heaven is perfection. Jonathan wants to go fast "What is fast enough?" "What is perfect speed?" (Ahhhh a Socratic teacher) "All these have limits." Perfect speed is Being There," Chaing says, and disappears...sorta like time travel.
16. "Begin by knowing you've already arrived. Where your thought is, your body will be." (this reminds me of Jedi and Yoda—wasn't Star Wars begun in the 70s too?) "Just think giving and love. Keep working on love," Chaing says, and Jonathan ends up with his old flock. He understands that he must return to teach others.
17. Now I feel more peace for JLS...he's beyond hurt. Flock looks sparkly as Jonathan approaches. Violin music. Water sparkles; sky sparkles.
18. Suddenly we hear squawking and see a young gull being ostracized as JLS had been before. His name is Fletcher. How is he a bit different from how Jonathan was earlier? Jonathan teaches Fletcher forgiveness and flight. Think big. Song—happy---songbird. Big waves throughout...what might that symbolize? Sun sets and bright skies...passage of time, perhaps.
19. We can soar, but often we don't want to. The gift is to find and teach those who long for more. We are all gifted. Gifted equals understanding and practice.
20. A little gull emerges from garbage...gray, broken wing. His name is Kurt. Jonathan frees him. Now the story seems to have a miraculous feel to it. The flock sees Kurt fly. Others are discussing things now. Fletcher shows them. Who crashes? Is it Fletcher? Mother? Baby? Oh, Fletcher dies by crashing into a rock to save the baby bird.
21. Fletcher decides to return to the flock and Jonathan raises him up from the rocks. JLS is the "son of the great god" It's becoming a Christ story. Elders say he is the devil. They say to kill him. Flock rises up. JLS and Fletcher look on them and then "time travel" away. Jonathan tells Fletcher to go to other flocks to find others who want to learn. "Look within; find what you know." Song...

("May the force be with you.")