

Leadership Movie: The Dead Poets Society

by Jennie Warkentine

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

Gather

- 1 DVD "Dead Poets Society"
- 2 DVD Player and TV
- 3 Oreos (1 package for every 5-7 youth)
- 4 Frosting (1 can for every 5-7 youth)
- 5 Cookie sheets and waxed paper
- 6 Table knives

Preview the movie, particularly the clips used in the activities. You may either show the clips only, or if time allows, watch the entire movie as a group.

Movie Summary: Welton Academy welcomes new English professor John Keating. Mr. Keating, a graduate of Welton, passionately teaches in unconventional ways and challenges his students to live life to the fullest and to seize the day—"Carpe Diem"! His students respond with enthusiasm but the faculty at Welton is not as receptive. Keating encourages his students and shares with them about The Dead Poets Society that he was a part of as a student. Through Keating's class and their participation in the society, the boys begin to learn to seize the day and follow their dreams. One of the students, Neil, follows his dreams of becoming an actor, but ends up committing suicide; Keating is blamed and fired. His students rise to his defense in the final scene.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS

Separate youth into groups of 5-7 and give each group a package of Oreos, one can of frosting, and a knife. Also provide a cookie sheet and a large square of waxed paper to each group to build their creation on. Give them approximately 10-15 minutes to build a sculpture. You may choose to offer a prize for the "best" sculpture based on size, number of Oreos used, how well the group worked together, etc., or you may have each group win a different category.

After all groups have finished, discuss:

- Who took the role of leader in your group when building your sculpture?
- How did they take the lead?
- In what ways did the leader help the group create the sculpture?

- Did you need a leader to accomplish this task? Why or why not?

After discussing for a few minutes, let your students eat their sculptures while viewing the clips.

CONNECT TO THE MOVIE

You can either watch the entire movie and stop to discuss the clips when you come to them, or watch just the clips and discuss each one. Be open to the discussion moving in a different direction than planned.

Clip 1: Are You In? — Chapter 3, **30:24-31:40**

The boys decide to re-form the Dead Poets Society.

- What kind of leader is Neil in this scene?
- How does he motivate the others to join the Dead Poets Society?
- What do you think about those methods of motivation?

Clip 2: No, I Want You In! — Chapter 5, **47:14-48:52**

Neil encourages Todd and tells him that he wants Todd to be part of the DPS.

- How is Neil showing leadership in this scene?
- Why did Neil continue pushing Todd when he said he wanted Neil to leave him alone?
- Is that a sign of a good leader, or a bad leader?
- Should leaders put more energy into the group as a whole that they are leading, or into the individuals in the group?

Clip 3: Oh Captain, My Captain — Chapter 10 **2:01:23-End**

Mr. Keating returns to gather his personal belongings and the members of the DPS stand on their desks in support of him.

- Who showed leadership in this scene?
- How did Neil's actions earlier in the movie (or in the previous clips) influence Todd?
- Do good leaders always stand up for what is right? Should they?

REFLECT

Discuss:

- Where are you a leader?
- Who are leaders in your life?
- Did anything in the movie challenge or affirm your view of leadership?