

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What brought the group together? _____

2. How did they react to one another in the beginning of the movie? _____

3. How is this different than from the end of the movie? _____

4. How did each character change? Be specific! _____

5. Can you relate to one of the characters in the movie? Please explain. _____

Forming (pretending to get on or get along with others);

Storming (letting down the politeness barrier and trying to get down to the issues even if tempers flare up);

Norming (getting used to each other and developing trust and productivity);

Performing (working in a group towards a common goal on a highly efficient and cooperative basis);

Adjourning (mourning the end of the group)

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THE BREAKFAST CLUB: FOOD FOR THOUGHT¹

1. *All the world's a stage.*

The film opens with the quote from the David Bowie song, “Changes,” printed on the screen, in which the songwriter berates the adults intervening in the adolescents’ world and admonishes them that their children are well aware of the tasks before them.

This epigraph literally explodes and segues into a shot of the front of a typical suburban, 1970s-built high school. With this in view, the narrator speaks:

Dear Mr. Vernon,

We accept the fact that we had to sacrifice a whole Saturday in detention for whatever it was that we did wrong. What we did *was* wrong, but we think you’re crazy to make us write an essay writing about who we think we are. What do you care? You see us as you want to see us—in the simplest terms, in the most convenient definitions. You see us as a brain, an athlete, a basket case, a princess, and a criminal. Correct? That’s the way we saw each other at 7:00 this morning. We were brainwashed.

2. *Alone and in the group: the need to belong and to find something real.*

After the protagonists arrive at the school and file into the library, they meet with Vernon. Shortly after this, Bender suggests that they close the door that Vernon has instructed them to keep open. When no one joins him, Bender takes matters into his own hands and vandalizes the door so that it can no longer stay open. When Vernon discovers the door closed, he angrily asks the group, “Who closed the door?” The group responds that they didn’t know how, but that it had closed “by itself.” Bender then presses the other group members to “get real” and drop their role masks.

In this scene the adolescents draw a boundary, creating their peer group. In doing so, they separate themselves from the adult world. Bender presses for “major truths” about “who they think they are”.

3. *The lunch scene: basic trust, nurturance, security, and other safe havens.*

Next, we jump ahead to the lunch scene. This scene captures the essence of each adolescent’s relationship to their parents. Brian has a nondescript, colorless square meal; Andrew has a shopping bag filled with more food than he can eat; Allison has a can of Coke that spills all over; Claire has sushi perfectly presented in a beautiful lacquered box with matching chopsticks; and Bender has nothing.

This scene shows us each of the adolescent’s perceptions of their parents and where they are each positioned with regard to dependency, basic trust, and nurturance. As they reveal in the film, Brian feels disconnected from his parents by virtue of their humorless and deadly expectations of academic perfection; Andrew feels oppressed by his parents’ relentless pressure to “win;” Allison is an enigma who does not feel her parents can relate to her, leaving her neglected and ignored; Claire is made to feel “special” by external trappings and materialism; and Bender gets nothing from his parents. The film beautifully portrays these adolescents’ identity formation as being scaffolded on the development of hope, trust, and security.

4. *On the edge: risk-taking and self-esteem.*

A short time later, the group, led by Bender, leaves the library en masse to retrieve marijuana from his locker. The group wonders if this is a good idea. Bender responds that “Being bad feels pretty good, huh?”

5. *Toddlers with wheels and hormones: the second major separation/individuation period.*

In another notable scene, the group is discussing their relationships with their parents. In a conversation between Andrew and Allison, the latter states that her “home life is unsatisfying.” Andrew responds by saying, “Everyone’s home life is unsatisfying. Otherwise no one would leave home.”

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6. *The gap: the parallel crisis and dialectic of midlife and adolescence.*

A bit later, Vernon and Carl have a heart-to-heart. Vernon complains about the “kids these days” and is confronted by Carl, who tells him: “It’s not the kids who’ve changed, it’s you.” Carl goes on to challenge Vernon with the reality of his own shattered ideals, and when Vernon says he “shudders to think that when I get older these kids are gonna take care of me,” Carl responds with “Don’t count on it.”

7. *How low can you go? The need for sponsorship.*

In one of the most poignant scenes in the film, Andrew begins a soliloquy about how he received his detention. As he tells the story, he breaks into sobs, then angry tears as he recounts how he brutally humiliated a nerdy boy by physically overwhelming him and taping his buttocks together. When the tape was removed, the boy was in anguish as hairs and skin were removed in the process. Andrew describes how his friends “laughed and cheered me on.” But, worst of all, he recognizes he did this to gain the approval of his father, whom he experienced as relentlessly challenging his masculinity and desire to “win, win, win!” He concedes, “I wanted him to think I was cool,” then notes how he secretly wishes his knee would give out, both to remove himself from the race and to gain revenge.

8. *The future.*

As the movie comes to its conclusion, the group discusses the future. Andrew asks “Are we going to be like our parents?” Allison answers affirmatively and adds enigmatically “when you grow up your heart dries out.” Brian then asks what’s going to happen after they leave this room. Will they still be friends?

Will they even say hello in the hallways on Monday? Claire answers resignedly: “Honest? You want the truth? No.” This prompts outrage from others in the group. “You are a bitch!!” Then two other members genuinely tell their stories of why they’re in detention.

The deconstruction of their roles has begun, but will they turn back? Is it also possible to reconstruct their roles? Is true change possible? Of course, the movie ends with a resounding “Yes!” as they move beyond the confines of their role identities and connect on a deeper, more intimate level.

9. *Don’t you forget about me: the continuity of self and object relations through time.*

The film ends when all have left each other and returned to their families. A song, “Don’t You Forget About Me,” plays in the background. As the film fades out, the narrator, after repeating the beginning of his essay, finishes but what we found out is that each of us is a brain, and an athlete, a basket case, a princess, and a criminal. Does that answer your question???

Sincerely yours,
The Breakfast Club

As they leave the haven they have created and the possibilities they have imagined, the protagonists need to hold on to their new-found discoveries. The plaintive cry of the others in the group to remember each other is mirrored by a need for continuity. Not only do they need to hold on to the future, but the past, as well.

¹Kaye, D. L. & Ets-Hokin, E. (2000). *The Breakfast Club: Utilizing Popular Film to Teach Adolescent Development*. *Academic Psychiatry* 24:110-116, June 2000.