

SEARCHING FOR BOBBY FISCHER
Film discussion "chapter by chapter"

The notes are here only to guide your discussion at the end of each movie "chapter." Choose from the following notes which items to discuss. Don't feel that you must cover everything. Keep the pace such that students maintain their interest and enthusiasm. Go on to the next chapter of the film while the discussion is still at a peak.

The goal is to take students to a new level of sophistication while watching this film. Students will begin applying what they have learned thus far in the course, and their involvement in these discussions will increase as you move through the movie... In fact, they will come up with ideas that are not even listed in the notes. *ALL* inferences are accurate as long as they can offer support for their views.

Expect students to hesitate at first and feel there must be a correct answer. As they see that you are impressed with their inferences, more and more students will speak up. Some might get so excited about what they are able to infer that they might yell out and ask you to stop the movie so they can express their views.

Remember to turn the topics into general questions such as:

Did you infer what Josh was doing when he...?

Did you notice a reversal?

Did you learn more about a character's traits?

How did the music add emotion in this scene?

Is there anything else you noticed that you'd like to share?

SEARCHING FOR BOBBY FISCHER
Film Discussion by DVD chapters

Chapter 1

Inferencing...Establishing story...

What is it about? Chess! Voiceover (V.O.) and video gives background knowledge

Who is the main character? V.O. a child's voice

The first close up in color...a child (Josh)

Where does it take place? Outside...a park...his 7th birthday party

Reversal/Hook...

The found chess piece vs the ball...

Which does Josh have? We don't see if a trade was made.

Character...

Rain does not keep chess players from playing nor Josh from watching.

Josh's father is into baseball

Josh is more interested in chess and keeps his feelings from his father.

He is secretive. He uses the flashlight in bed at night.

Vinny is on a bench in the rain tossing the ball.

He is curious re: A kid who keeps the chess piece over a baseball?

Music/sound...

Hero trumpeting music when chess is played.

Sequence...

Lots of jumps in time

Chapter 2

Inferencing...

Josh sets up his Legos like a chess board...We infer how much he is thinking of chess.

Reversal/Hook...

The mother is surprised by her son's abilities in this area.

Character...

Conflict within the mom about her son being with the men in the park.
"C'mon, Josh."

Music/sound...

The music swells with chess...trumpets

Sequence...

There is a time jump for a "parallel" scene when the mom again takes Josh to the park...Compare the two scenes. This is the scene that students were asked to interpret for filming (except theirs was an interior scene). Expect students to all turn their heads and look at you with a smile! Discuss how the filmmaker's scene compares to those of the class.

Chapter 3

Inferencing...

Bright colors and light in the home infers a good feeling.

Parallel scene: The second time the father and son play chess, the phone book is taken away... This symbolizes his taking away any support...His feet are firmly on the ground... He's on his own for this game.

Reversal/Hook...

When Josh is in his room, we are led to think that the chess game is over, but we see that he is just filling time while his father plans his next move.

Character...

Father hesitates and is uncomfortable after taking the pawn..."Should I let him win?"

Music/sound...

Voiceover (V.O.) gives information about Bobby Fischer.

Sequence...

Time jumps for the very long game between father and son. Notice change in lighting to show time lapses.

Chapter 4

Inferencing...

Notice the shadows when Josh meets Bruce, the chess teacher.

Foreshadowing... "Beware?"

Notice the light on the word "Chess" on the wall and on the chess pieces and chess players... The director is giving a message: Chess is Important.

By Josh's comfort level at the park, we infer that he has played chess with Vinny before this time.

Most colors are muted at the chess club... ominous feeling?

Character...

When the opponent stares at Josh, we infer that he feels he is in the presence of greatness.

Discuss why the author had Josh give his opponent candy. What does this tell you about Josh's character?

When Josh offers to house Vinny "in my top bunk," what does this tell the viewer about Josh?

Discuss how the inference that the father makes about the chess teacher causes conflict.

Chapter 5

Inferencing...

Josh watches his father pay Bruce for the time he spent with him.
What might Josh be thinking?

Josh does not easily give back the certificate...We infer he really wants this.

The softball game lets us infer that chess is not taking over his life.

Reversal/Hook...

We think Bruce and Josh are playing chess, but they are playing Clue.
Ominous game to win his friendship.

Bruce wants Josh to stop playing chess in the park. We, as viewers, know conflict is ahead with this issue and want to see how it's played out, especially when the parents disagree.

Character...

Bruce reveals his patience in getting to know Josh.
Parents act nervous and hesitant about bringing Bruce into Josh's life.

Notice the father's insecure behavior when Bruce tells him that chess did not even come up in conversation during the first lesson.

Bruce throws chess pieces off the board...unpredictable behavior...Adds tension to his future scenes, because we don't know what to expect.

At the baseball game, the mother acts quite differently with Bruce compared to earlier scene regarding her comfort level...Her comment "You're overdressed" shows she is comfortable enough to kid around with him.

When Josh stops to watch the losing team, what does this reveal about his character?

"Then your job's harder." This reveals that the mother looks out for her son over all else.

Music/sound...

Soft and gentle music to make the audience know that Bruce's being in Josh's room is a safe thing and that a relationship is at its beginnings.

Sequence...

Mother and daughter come in from shopping...shows a bit of time has passed and the lesson has been quite long.

Bruce mentions Pac Man for next visit, so when next they are involved in chess, it lets us know there has been a bit of time between the two scenes.

The book with the stickers is not on its first page and Josh does not ask questions about it, so we infer Josh has been receiving stickers at preceding classes and that a time jump has occurred.

Chapter 6

Inferencing...

The children clap when the parents are locked up, so we infer that they have behaved in ways the children don't like before this.

Discuss why the director might include the bearded man saying, "It's only a game." There are differing life views about the game of chess.

Reversal/Hook...

"Conduct yourselves like ladies and gentlemen"...We assume he is talking to the children, but we then see it's the parents.

"UNR" on the chart shows us that not only does Josh not have a "1500" rating, he is "unrated" and has no rating at all. (see below under "character")

Character...

The phone call presents more conflict between the father and Bruce.

The father does not want to admit his insecurities when asked about his son's rating. He says "15" and it is inferred by the questioner that he means "1500" which makes sense in the world of chess. Then a later reversal is shown (see above).

Chapter 7

Inferencing...

We don't know who won. Rain infers gloom and the dad looks sad ...We assume Josh lost.

Reversal/Hook...

We've been set up by the director to infer the wrong thing... Josh won!

Character...

The father cradles the trophy on the train ride home...What does this say about how he values this win?

Music/sound...

The music allows for a "montage" and multiple time jumps where we see more and larger trophies.

Sequence...

Time jumps occur with a montage. The change in number and size of the trophies lets us know Josh has been involved in many tournaments, which have been more and more prestigious.

Chapter 8

Inferencing...

The father is reading FRANKENSTEIN to Josh... This book was selected carefully... Is a "monster" being created in this movie?

When Josh loses to his opponent in 7 moves, we infer he lost on purpose.

When Josh's father stands away from him and the colors are dark, we infer that the joy in chess is now gone.

Reversal/Hook...

We want to know more about the conflict presented with the other tutor and his young student.

Character...

Compare Josh's character with this young chess player.

Josh says, "Maybe we shouldn't go to the state finals... If I win... If I lose... Maybe it's not better to be the best. Then you can lose and it's okay."
PROFOUND... THIS IS THE QUESTION THAT THE MOVIE POSES... THE ONE THAT IS EXPLORED THROUGHOUT... THE THEME OF THE FILM.

Note when the opponent gulps... It shows his fear.

Bruce tells Josh he is the chess king... Discuss what this means.

"Reminds me of you, but he never gives up." What does this infer about Bruce's past?

Music/sound...

The music gives an "uh-oh" feeling to the introduction of this new boy.

Sequence...

Josh's comfortable with Vinny. We can tell they've formed a relationship.

Chapter 9

Inferencing...

Dark...ominous

The chess pieces are shown with dialogue that becomes a verbal battle.

Josh is seen writing chess moves.. We infer how chess is a part of him now.

Reversal/Hook...

Father says, "It's just a game. Josh says, "No, it isn't."

Character...

Bruce's character and its effect on Josh...

He now takes points away. "You can't..."

Bruce tells Josh to "hate his opponent." "Hate them... They hate you."

"Treat them with contempt."

Bruce has a tantrum. "The certificates mean nothing."

Discuss the effect when Josh says, "I'm not him (Bobby Fischer)."

The mother stays true to her protectiveness..."Get out of my house."

Chapter 10

Inferencing...

The trophies are now in Josh's room, not on the family mantle...What does this tell us about the father and what he has come to realize?

Character...

In the park..."Put it out. Josh is playing." What does this reveal about character and the relationship at this point in time?

"You have no idea what a fall like this can do to you." What does this reveal about Bruce?

Music/sound...

The music as Josh plays chess with Vinny indicates that the joy is back.

Chapter 11

Reversal/Hook...

Vinny appears last from the car...He has gone with them to the championship.

Music/sound...

The anticipatory music.

The music during the montage.

Music of a championship.

Sequence...

Time jump...

The other boy watches as Josh is in different chairs...playing against different opponents.

Chapter 12

Inferencing...

Note in the teacher's heart-to-heart with Josh how little dialogue there is.
SO MUCH is inferred..feelings, traits, motivations

Character...

Discuss the different motivations in this section.

Sequence...

"Round 7"

Chapter 13

Inferencing...

Vinny says, "There it is!" What do we infer? (That Vinny taught him this strategy.)

The flashback to the thrown chess pieces infers that Josh also learned from Bruce. Both teachers contributed to his victory.

The parents watch Josh at the end...We infer that they now share the same point of view regarding Josh.

Character...

Notice the point of view shot as Josh walks to the front table (Compare to Akeelah walking to the microphone.).

The conflict is created by the differing views of the two teachers.

Josh puts his hand out to his opponent..."Draw." It shows that Josh respects his abilities and will share the championship with him. Compare this to the reaction of his opponent.

"I tried to give him a way out." What does this say about Josh's character? His dad hugs Josh, showing he LOVES Josh's decency of character. (He has come around to the mother's viewpoint.).

Josh at the end with friend Morgan says, "You're a much stronger player than I was at your age." What does this say about Josh's character?

Music/sound...

Music swells as Vinny and Bruce watch the final moments.

Sequence...

Note how long the camera stays on the queen. "Is it over?"

Note the flashback to the thrown chess pieces.

There is a time jump...The room is empty of all kids, but Josh and his opponent.

Chapter 14

Stop the DVD to read all end notes.

Watch ALL credits. This shows respect to the filmmakers and allows students to learn more about what was involved in the film's production. (Also...They will be adding credits to their own productions, so they should note how the credits are presented.)

How many people did it take to make this film?

Where did they shoot the film? (Toronto, New York)

Note the children's tutoring company "On Location Education."

Note that Katya Waitzkin, Josh's real sister, plays the "82nd girl."
And the real Josh Waitzkin plays one of the chess players.