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What We're Watching



Greetings from The Paley Center for Media's Education Department!

Teen Transmitters Takeover!

For eight weeks, What We're Watching is being taken over by the Paley Center's Teen Transmitters internship cohort!

Each week a different pair of interns will share their thoughts on the 2023 media landscape along with personalized recommendations. This week we hear from **Aaqib Gondal**, a senior at The Bronx High School of Science, and **Katherine Lian**, a senior at Townsend Harris High School. Enjoy this unique educational opportunity to hear directly from young voices about media that impacts them!

As always, if you have any questions, thoughts, or ideas, don't hesitate to reach out to us at eduny@paleycenter.org.

Happy viewing,

Rebekah Fisk, Director of Education

Carlos Pareja, Manager of Education

Joseph Cupo, TT 2023 Summer Educator

What We're Watching: 2000s Coming-of-Age Films

The early 2000s produced some of the most memorable coming-of-age films we've ever seen. The era's aesthetic was showcased through its distinctive cinematography and recurring tropes, effectively contributing to the overall emotional impact of the movies being released. We picked out four of our favorite coming-of-age movies of the 2000s which not only defined the genre as a whole, but also expressed some very authentic interpretations of this complicated period of young adulthood.

This Week's Recommendations:



Legally Blonde (2001)

Age Recommendation: 13+

Where To Watch: Prime Video

To begin, we have *Legally Blonde*, a comedy film featuring Elle Woods, a fashionable sorority girl who set out to go to Harvard Law School. As a female character who fulfills the typical “dumb blonde” stereotype, she is often looked down on by her peers and her boyfriend. This leads to a heartbreaking breakup with him, making her commit to excelling academically and proving her worth.

In the early 2000s, it was rare to find movies that portrayed femininity in a positive light. In *Legally Blonde*, Elle Woods is encouraged by a supportive professor to explore her strengths in the male-dominated field of law. Although she follows the cliché of wanting to win back her ex-boyfriend, it is clear that she is beyond capable of accomplishing what he had looked down on her for by achieving a near-perfect LSAT score and a 4.0 GPA. The film explores valuable themes that can be relatable to young women. Although others may find it a drawback, Elle Woods embraces her femininity and is confident in everything she does. As she constantly evolves throughout the movie, she teaches us the valuable lesson that anyone can do anything they put their mind to—like go to Harvard Law School and become a lawyer—in pink.



Mean Girls (2004)

Age Recommendation: 13+

Where To Watch: Netflix/Paramount

The movie *Mean Girls* is a classic of the early 2000s. Like most teen dramas, the protagonist Cady Heron is the cliché quiet and reserved “new girl” at school. She quickly becomes friends with the school outcasts—Janis and Damian—who tell her all there is to know about their high school, including information about the Plastics: Regina, Gretchen, and Karen, the most popular girls in the junior grade. The Plastics are especially disliked by Janis, as they are considered mean girls. When they take an interest in Cady, Janis encourages her to hang out with them so she can act as their spy and sabotage their friend group. However, the more Cady spends time with them, the more she unknowingly starts to resemble them.

Mean Girls dives into the insecurities and jealous feelings of high school students. With Regina wanting to lose weight and Cady changing her personality to blend in, we see how teenage girls pressure each other and themselves to fit into their rigid cliques. At the same time, the movie reflects the early 2000s through its use of typical high school tropes.



Superbad (2007)

Age Recommendation: 16+

Where To Watch: Max

In 2007, the landscape of comedy cinema was reshaped with the release of *Superbad*, starring Jonah Hill, Michael Cera, and Christopher Mintz-Plasse. The film centers around three high school seniors who have spent the last four years of their lives as social outcasts. With college on the horizon, they only have one night to prove to their peers as well as to themselves that they have what it takes not to be complete nobodies. The film's witty humor and dialogue can be accredited to Seth Rogan, Evan Goldberg, and Greg Mottola collaborating on the screenplay. Seth Rogen and Bill Hader feature in this film in a buddy-cop subplot that progressively intersects with the coming-of-age story surrounding Hill and Cera's characters. Scenes like the "McLovin/Muhammed" sequence have held up remarkably well and have earned it status as one of the funniest and most relevant teenage comedy films of all time.

Superbad went on to inspire some of the most well-known comedy movies of the 2010s, like *The Hangover*, *21 Jump Street*, and *Booksmart*. The commonality between these movies is their manipulation of the "quirky but emotionally troubled duo/trio" dynamic propelled into theaters by the release of *Superbad*. The star trio of *Superbad* all found some incredibly strong footing in the comedy film world, which can be attributed to the overwhelmingly positive reception of their roles in this movie. Jonah Hill went on to star alongside Channing Tatum in the *Jump Street* franchise, *Michael Cera* would find great success in teenage cult classics like *Juno* and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*, and

Christopher Mintz-Plasse would later feature in the *Kick-Ass* duology. While their careers have all flourished since *Superbad*'s release sixteen years ago, they've all consistently paid homage to the coming-of-age story which not only put them on the map but also redefined what it means to be a teenage friend group on the big screen.



Scott Pilgrim vs. the World (2010)

Age Recommendation: 13+

Where To Watch: Peacock

"I'm in lesbians with you". Scott Pilgrim vs. the World is a story about young love and the tribulations of a likable but naive rockstar. Scott Pilgrim, played by Michael Cera, a 22 year-old bass player for his band Sex Bob-omb. To the dismay of his peers, Scott is dating 17-year old Knives Chau but Scott soon falls for the mysterious and troubled Ramona Flowers. With their blossoming love put on hold as rumors of their newfound connection spread to Ramona's six "evil exes," Scott must fight each of her former lovers to the death; his hardest battle coming in the form of his own infidelity and untrustful nature.

This film was inspired by a graphic novel series of the same name. The youthful and energetic art style of the original source material is carried over almost flawlessly into live action. The aesthetics of the film are emphasized via not only the colors and character design, but also the editing and intentional fast pace. The movie is meant to share certain visual characteristics with video games, such as the consistent presentation of the number of exes left for Scott to defeat as well as different pixelated forms of characters. As the film

progresses and Scott continues to “level up”, we see his rivals become increasingly formidable. Many of the people surrounding Scott Pilgrim are characterized by their love and connection to music, and so naturally the film’s soundtrack is a massive highpoint. This makes for an unconventional and notably stylized coming-of-age story which uses the cliches of its genre as building blocks to complete an ultimately original and enthralling final product.

Enjoy,

Aaqib and Katherine

Photos—*Legally Blonde*: MGM; *Mean Girls*: Paramount; *Superbad*: Columbia Pictures; *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*: Marc Platt Productions

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