

FINDING FORRESTER



AN INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE FOR A  
"MADE IN NY" FILM  
FOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS  
AND STUDENTS

---

***Finding Forrester*** explores the complex relationship between a high school student and his mentor. The film can generate discussion in several ways reinforcing concepts and learning from the New York City Department of Education's ***Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts***.

**Columbia Pictures' *Finding Forrester*** is also one of the many films and video productions made in New York City under the auspices of the New York City Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting, this year celebrating its 40th anniversary.

This worksheet can assist teachers in communicating how films are purveyors of stories and myths. Teachers can also describe how film can be used as a tool in communicating the multicultural experience of New York City.

## ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

- Encourage students to watch the film and form a personal opinion of the film based on the plot, characters and themes that are presented or feelings they experienced in watching the film.
- Encourage students to look for indications in the film of the jobs that are performed behind the scene. Speculate on what some of the jobs might be and how they contribute to the final film product.
- The phrase "soup question" has particular meaning in the film. As you watch the film, locate in which scenes this phrase is used. Identify what a soup question is. How does the idea of a soup question help Jamal to understand what is valuable?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM'S CONTENT

### **FINDING FORRESTER DEALS WITH ASSUMPTIONS OF BEHAVIOR THAT INDIVIDUALS MAKE ABOUT EACH OTHER.**

- Forrester says "Do you know what people are most afraid of? What they don't understand. And when we don't understand, we turn to our assumptions." What are some of the assumptions that adults make about Jamal?
- What do these assumptions reflect about biases related to race, class, intelligence and honesty? Have you ever been subject to assumptions about who you are? How does one overcome these assumptions?

### **THE PLOT OF FINDING FORRESTER EXPLORES A DEAL THAT JAMAL MAKES IN ORDER TO ATTEND A PRIVATE SCHOOL.**

- In order to attend a private school, Jamal must play on the school's basketball
-

---

team. Forrester describes this situation by saying, “You get an education. They get what they want.” Is this a fair trade? Is this really a deal where both parties gain or is Jamal being taken in? Does Jamal compromise his intelligence and integrity by accepting the deal? Would the school be interested in Jamal if he was only smart and not a great basketball player?

- By choosing to attend a private school, Jamal must leave his neighborhood and his friends behind. What are the challenges that Jamal faces in leaving the friends and neighbors with whom he is comfortable? How successful is he in fitting into a new culture and society? Does Jamal betray his roots and identity by attending a private school?

#### **FINDING FORRESTER EXPLORES TWO VERY DIFFERENT TYPES OF TEACHERS AS CHARACTERIZED BY FORRESTER AND CRAWFORD.**

- How is Forrester a different type of teacher than Crawford? How is their demeanor different? Does Jamal feel challenged by both teachers? How do Crawford and Forrester deal differently with students? Provide specific examples from the film.
- Claire describes the teaching at the Maylor school by saying that the teachers are “not all that into student participation. They’re too busy listening to themselves talk.” Is this an effective way for students to gain information? Is this an effective way for students to learn? What is the difference between learning and gaining information? Are both necessary in education? Which is more important?

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JAMAL AND FORRESTER IS KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE ACTION OF THE FILM.**

- How do you describe the relationship between Forrester and Jamal? Are they friends and equals or a teacher and his student? What evidence from the film can you provide to support your opinion?
- Who ends up being the “real” teacher in the film, Jamal or Forrester? What do they learn from each other? What do they provide to each other that they cannot get from anyone else?
- At the end of the film, Forrester leaves to start a journey. How has Jamal helped Forrester on his way?

## ART MAKING - DISCUSSION ABOUT THE TECHNIQUES OF FILM AND VIDEO PRODUCTION

### Terminology and Basic Technical Knowledge

- Forrester is the title character in the movie, yet nearly twenty-eight minutes of the
-

---

film is shown before the audience fully sees Forrester. Why would the director, Gus Van Sant, make this structural choice? What audience reaction did the director hope to achieve by delaying the visual encounter? How then is the audience engaged in finding Forrester? Who else is finding Forrester? How does Forrester find himself?

- What makes ***Finding Forrester*** a New York City story? Could the film take place in another large city? What are the New York City locations used in the film? List the locations and pinpoint on a map of the city where they are.
- The phrase “character arch” is used to describe the changes that occur to a character in a film. Describe the character arch of the two main characters – Forrester and Jamal. How do they change and what are their individual journeys? Given that ***Finding Forrester*** focuses on the lives and interaction of two main characters, would you call this a character driven movie? Why? Why not?
- Using a film glossary identify and discuss a few basic film terms such as Close Up, Medium Shot, Wide Shot, Quick cut, Fade and Pan. Provide examples of these film techniques from ***Finding Forrester***.

## ART MAKING - DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES ABOUT MUSICAL SCORING AND SCREENWRITING

- ***Finding Forrester*** makes use of a diverse and eclectic musical score including jazz, rap, classical, gospel and big band. Can you identify the particular scenes and the music that falls within these genres? (Taking time to view the entire credits along with the soundtrack listing will be helpful in this activity.) How does the filmmaker use these different types of music to comment on the setting and characters? In addition to music that you typically listen to, what music might you choose to underscore your own life? Come up with a list of ten songs to underscore a typical day in your life.
  - Are the characters' lives and experiences as depicted in the film similar or unlike your own? What are their desires and expectations? With what character do you most identify? Write and present a one-minute character monologue in the voice of one of the principal or supporting characters. For example, write a one-minute monologue in the voice of Terrell, Jamal's brother describing his work as a parking lot attendant and the dreams that he has.
  - Write a description of a scene in a movie you might make about a particular character's future. Make sure to describe the setting, the characters in the scene, the conflict and even the theme of your scene. What is the plot in the scene?
-

- Create a storyboard for your scene, sketching out the “shots” you will use and the dialogue linked to each shot. For a storyboard template, please refer to: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~ricky/etec/sboardtemplate.html>

## FILM MAKING - MAKING CONNECTIONS

### THE FIRST TEN MINUTES OF *FINDING FORRESTER* IS A MONTAGE OF NEW YORK CITY STREET SCENES.

- What is happening in these scenes? Who are the characters that we meet? What cultures and classes do we see portrayed? What does the range of characters tell us about the diversity of life in New York City?
- There is no dialogue provided in the opening montage scenes. Select one short scene from the montage and write scripted dialogue for the characters.
- Using the new dialogue as an inspiration, write a treatment (a literary summary or presentation of a film’s story) for a short film based on the same segment of the montage.

## CAREERS IN THE ARTS: FILMMAKING

### IF YOU CAREFULLY LOOK AT THE CREDITS OF *FINDING FORRESTER*, MANY PEOPLE DOING MANY DIFFERENT JOBS ARE REQUIRED TO MAKE A FILM.

- As a group, decipher the credits and list the different jobs listed in the film credits. What job would interest you in the production of a motion picture? Using the Internet, research and create short definitions of each job.
- Stage an interview with a film professional in class asking creative, thoughtful and incisive questions about their career in film. What is their job all about? How and where do you learn to do this job? How much money do you make? What are the most thrilling, satisfying or frustrating parts of the job?
- Explore the role of a film critic by reading a published review of *Finding Forrester*. Write your own review of *Finding Forrester*.



## RESOURCES

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

For information about the *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts*, arts activities for students and the "Arts and Cultural Education Services Guide"  
<http://www.nycenet.edu/projectarts/>

### THE NEW YORK CITY MAYOR'S OFFICE OF FILM, THEATRE AND BROADCASTING

Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, the Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre & Broadcasting is the one-stop shop for all entertainment needs in New York City. The agency markets New York City as a prime location, provides premiere customer service to production companies, facilitates production throughout the five boroughs and develops incentive programs for the industry. The City's "Made in NY" incentive program, which includes tax credits, free outdoor advertising, vendor discounts and a concierge service for the industry, led to a record-breaking year for production in New York City in 2005, where our production industry employs 100,000 New Yorkers and contributes \$5 billion to our local economy annually.

[www.nyc.gov/film](http://www.nyc.gov/film)

### CITY OF NEW YORK

The City's official website contains information about all City government agencies and programs.

[www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov)



### THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Joel I. Klein**  
Chancellor

**Carmen Farina**  
Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning

### OFFICE OF THE ARTS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

**Sharon Dunn**  
Senior Instructional Manager for Arts Education

**Paul King**  
Director of Theater

in collaboration with



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
MAYOR'S OFFICE  
OF FILM, THEATRE  
AND BROADCASTING

### THE CITY OF NEW YORK MAYOR'S OFFICE OF FILM, THEATRE AND BROADCASTING

**Katherine L. Oliver**  
Commissioner

FINDING FORRESTER (C)2000 COLUMBIA PICTURES INDUSTRIES, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.