

## The Transformation of Pleasantville

Everyone in the film undergoes a transformation, becoming coloured as a result.

**David** begins to realize that the perceived happiness in Pleasantville is not nearly as fulfilling as he hoped it would be. As a result, he slowly evolves from dreamy outcast to leader of the changes that take place in Pleasantville.

**Jennifer**, through her own personality, sparks the initial changes in the town. However, as the story continues, she begins to understand the limitations she has placed on herself in her own life. Her reading of a D. H. Lawrence novel signifies her effort to change herself, and thus, effect her own transformation. By the end of the film she decides to stay and attend college.

**George** is the stereotypical TV father. He is very change averse and when the town begins to change he does not know how to cope. He remains black and white through nearly the entire film until David makes him realise how much he loves his wife.

**Betty** starts as the typical TV mother but evolves into her emotions much more quickly than her husband. She initially tries to cover up this affliction but comes to realize she shouldn't be ashamed. Her love triangle with Bill Johnson also becomes an issue showing that taboo things did occur under the guise of utopia in 1950s culture.

**Bill** starts the film completely helpless to do anything beyond his ordered list of tasks. This changes, however, when David inadvertently teaches him a small level of autonomy. This autonomy grows and Bill evolves into the central revolutionary going so far as to paint a naked mural on one of his windows. After the town turns fully Technicolor it is revealed in the last shot that George is replaced by him sitting on the bench next to Betty.

**The TV repairman**, while shown to hate the change happening to his town, is shown with a smile on his face after David turns his aloofness into compassion of his mother.

**Big Bob** plays the town's mayor with slight Nazi undertones. He is the most reactionary in the town and decided that colours are indecent. Yet even he turns to colour as he expresses fierce anger towards David. Upon seeing his new face he flees the court room in shame leaving the town to its own devices, ultimately freeing it.

### Some trivia about the film

The Native American in the test pattern behind the TV repairman changes to angry and then sad as the movie progresses.

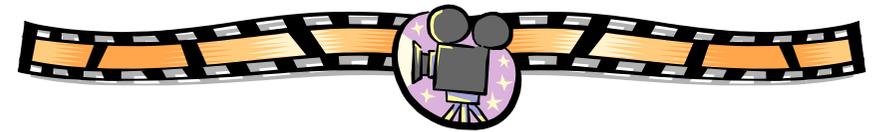
The two books that Bud (David) narrates to the teenagers of Pleasantville, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and "Catcher in the Rye," are the two most widely banned books in the US.

Mary-Sue is a term that originated in fan fiction to describe a character who comes into the character's lives and completely solves all of their problems. It is also a fan-fiction term for when the author (usually female) inserts herself (as a character) into the story.

Since every scene from the middle of the movie on had to be in some way digitally changed to have black and white characters interact with characters who are in color, technically this film had the most digital effects shots until "Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace" (1999).

The sign at the end of the movie points the way to Springfield. Springfield was the setting of '50s TV show "Father Knows Best" (1954) which "Pleasantville" (the fictional TV show) was at least partially based on. Springfield is also the home of the Simpsons.

Bud brings Mr Johnson an art book from the library titled "The World Of Art" by an author named Edward Bissell. The book is purely fictional being made just as a prop for this film.



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## Pleasantville

David, unhappy with his life, flees reality by watching Pleasantville - a 1950's black and white soap opera complete with old fashioned values, an overwhelming amount of innocence and naïveté, and where everything is just ... pleasant. His twin, Jennifer, sexually far more active than her brother, gets in a fight with him about a very strange remote control - given to them by an equally strange repair man - and they suddenly find themselves actually in Pleasantville, as Bud and Mary-Sue Parker, completely assimilated and therefore black and white, in clothes a little different and with new parents ... pleasant ones. They both want to get back home but are unsure how. David, not wishing to rock the boat, tries to blend in. Jennifer does what she likes. One event leads to another, and suddenly there is a red rose growing in Pleasantville. As self-awareness and the possibility of change becomes a reality, so more of the town becomes coloured. But this release from innocence also has a darker side.

### **Leaving the comfort zone**

Initially, everything in Pleasantville is entirely predictable. Everyone has a role, everyone knows what to do and what will happen. Dinner is always on the table when George gets home. The basketball team always wins. Everything is ... pleasant. But there is much more to life than this pre-ordained routine and it is as people leave their own "comfort zone" that they begin to come alive. Risk taking, new experiences, and the possibility of hurt and failure, are all part of what it means to grow and part of the process if we are to become the people God wants us to be.

### **Discovering freewill**

To begin with, people don't even realise they can do things differently. When Mr Johnson discovers he can, it is a truly liberating experience. Yet there are consequences, not only for those making the choices but for others, too. Mr Johnson's relationship with Betty will inevitably affect George. With freewill also becomes responsibility. How do we balance the two?

### **Coping with difference**

People fear change not only in themselves but in others. It is so much easier when people are "like us" and keep within the parameters we understand. How do we cope with those who are different to us, particularly when their attitudes challenge the whole basis of our way of life? How does this relate to the gospel in a secular world?

### **Longing for the past—looking to the future**

We often idealise the past and long to go back to a time when things seemed simple and so much less complicated. However, such utopian pasts are a myth. Life has always been messy—that is part of what life is all about, and what produces the rich technicolor of existence. Yet still we look back. Even the Bible does it—for example, Jeremiah idealising the wandering in the wilderness (Jer 2:2) or Hosea likewise (Hos 2:14—15). And there is much imagery extolling the perfection of Eden. By the time we reach Revelation, things are coming full circle, looking forward to that "new heaven and new earth" where there will be "no more pain". Eden again? Paradise? But is that the paradise you really want? Is it possible to truly **live** in a perfect world? What is your image of paradise?

### **The bible and the rain**

Watch out for references to the temptation of Eve, the burning bush, floods and rainbows and a brief glimpse of Bud as "Christ crucified". Note, too, how rain often heralds moments of change—the TV repairman arrives in a thunderstorm, George realizes Betty is not at home during a storm, the same one that the teenagers in Lovers' Lane experience first with fright and then amazement. As such, the rain comes to symbolize events beyond one's control that can be both disturbing and destructive but also necessary for growth—the growth of vegetation in the natural world and the growth of ourselves.

## Memorable quotes

**George Parker:** Honey! I'm home.

**Jennifer:** And I still don't see why we're doing this!  
**David:** Because we're supposed to be in school.  
**Jennifer:** We're supposed to be at home, David. We're supposed to be in colour!  
**David:** Okay, okay, okay.  
**Jennifer:** God!

**Miss Peters:** Mary Sue!  
**Jennifer:** Yeah. What's outside of Pleasantville?  
**Miss Peters:** I don't understand.  
**Jennifer:** Outside of Pleasantville? Like, what's at the end of Main Street?  
**Miss Peters:** [chuckles] Mary Sue. You should know the answer to that! The end of Main Street is just the beginning again.

**Betty Parker:** Mary Sue?  
**Jennifer:** Yeah?  
**Betty Parker:** What goes on up at Lover's Lane?  
**Jennifer:** What do you mean?  
**Betty Parker:** Well, you hear these things lately... kids spending so much time up there. Uh, is it holding hands? That kind of thing?

**Jennifer:** Yeah! That and...  
**Betty Parker:** What?  
**Jennifer:** It doesn't matter.  
**Betty Parker:** No, I wanna know.  
**Jennifer:** Well, sex.  
**Betty Parker:** Oh. What's sex?

**Mr Johnson:** I didn't know what to do. I always wipe down the counter and then you set out the napkins and glasses and then I make the French fries. But you didn't come, so I kept on wiping.

**David:** You know, if this ever happens again, you can make the fries even if I haven't put out the napkins yet.

**TV repairman:** You don't deserve to live in this paradise!

**Mr Johnson:** You know how we close up, I close the register, then you lower the blinds, then I turn out the lights, then we both lock the doors. Well you weren't around this time so I did the whole thing by myself. Not only that, I didn't even do it in the same order. First, I lowered the blinds, then I closed the register.

**George Parker:** What happened? One minute, everything's fine... What went wrong?  
**David:** Nothing went wrong. People change.  
**George Parker:** People change?  
**David:** Yeah, people change.  
**George Parker:** Can they change back?  
**David:** [grins] I don't know. I think it's harder.

**David's Mum:** When your father was here, I used to think, "This was it. This is the way it was always going to be. I had the right house. I had the right car. I had the right life."  
**David:** There is no right house. There is no right car.  
**David's Mum:** I'm 40 years old. I mean, it's not supposed to be like this.  
**David:** It's not supposed to be anything.  
**David's Mum:** How'd you get so smart all of a sudden?  
**David:** [long slow smile] I had a good day.