Team: *Stand By Me*

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Essay for Remake Project: *Stand By Me* (1986)

*Stand By Me*, directed by Rob Reiner, is a cinematic masterpiece that has been celebrated for its poignant portrayal of adolescence, friendship, and loss. Based on Steven King's novella, The Body, the film follows four young boys on a journey to discover the truth behind the mysterious death of Ray Brower, a local boy who went missing. Set against the backdrop of a small town during Labor Day weekend in 1959, the film is a timeless coming-of-age story that delves deep into the complexities of human emotions, and the challenges of growing up. Through its honest and heartfelt depiction of the struggles faced by its young protagonists, the film manages to capture the essence of youth, and the nostalgia that often accompanies it. At its core, *Stand By Me* is a film about the loss of innocence, and the journey towards adulthood, as the characters learn valuable lessons about life, love, and friendship, while coming to terms with their own inner demons. By combining humor, drama, and tragedy, the film manages to strike a delicate balance between light and dark, creating an unforgettable cinematic experience that has left an indelible mark on American pop culture.

The film begins in the “present” with Gordie, who serves as the film’s narrator, as he recalls an adventure that he and his friends embarked on when they were all pre-teenagers in 1959. The boys begin their journey when Vern, the slightly overweight butt-of-all-jokes friend, informs his friends that Ray Brower’s body had allegedly been found near the train tracks outside of town by one of Vern’s brother’s friends. Vern informs the boys about the body and they immediately set off to go and find it so they can inform the police and become local heroes/celebrities. On the road to the body the boys encounter many obstacles both “real” and imaginary” which routinely serve to test their resolve and maturity. Among other things they escape chopper and Milo’s junkyard (although chopper is a somewhat misleading name for the dog), outrun a train during the famous bridge sequence, and deal with Ace and his gang of older boys when they both get to the body. Throughout their journey the audience witnesses the boyish camaraderie that the four share as they constantly nag and tease one another into feats of daring or mockery as one would expect from prepubescent boys with access to porn magazines and cigarettes. Rob Reiner’s directorial choices to portray the boys in this way is what makes the main characters so endearing: their actions and mannerisms are a reminder of simpler times in life. But despite this the film has an overall dark connotation of the loss of the boyish innocence that is seen; during their adventure, present-Gordie often narrates the goings-on of each of the boy’s lives as they are happening. For example, early on it is revealed that Gordie’s parents were still grieving the loss of their eldest son and had emotionally distanced themselves from Gordie. Later, it is revealed that Teddy’s father suffers from extreme PTSD and is seen as a “loony” by townsfolk like Milo Pressman. Teddy sticks up for his father and the comments clearly hurt him as an individual. They face problems well beyond their own years and as a result mature to the point that the boys at the end of the film are no longer the same jovial and light hearted kids who embarked to find the body only a mere day before. The last scene of the film with present Gordie finishing the memoir of this adventure as an adult ends with the line: “I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. Jesus, does anyone?” as Gordie fondly recalls the adventure and what it meant to him to experience it with his friends in the purest sense.

*Stand By Me* is set in the summer of 1959, a time when America was undergoing significant social and cultural changes. The post-World War II economic boom had led to a rise in consumerism and the growth of suburban communities. This period, commonly known as the "Eisenhower Era," was characterized by a sense of optimism and prosperity, as well as a strict adherence to traditional gender roles and societal norms. However, beneath the surface, tensions were simmering, as the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, and a countercultural revolution began to take shape. Against this backdrop, the film's themes of friendship, loyalty, and loss of innocence take on added significance, as the characters navigate a world that is rapidly changing around them. The film also offers a glimpse into the rural working-class communities of the time, where life was marked by hardship, poverty, and a strong sense of community. Overall, *Stand By Me* offers a rich portrait of an era that was both optimistic and uncertain, and captures the essence of a time and a place that has become a distant memory.

The film is shot in a nostalgic and dreamlike manner, with warm colors and a soft focus that create a sense of longing and wistfulness. The use of voice-over narration, delivered by the adult version of Gordie, adds an additional layer of depth to the film, allowing the audience to see events through the lens of hindsight and reflection. The pacing of the film is deliberate and measured, allowing the characters' emotions and motivations to unfold naturally, without ever feeling rushed or forced. The soundtrack is also a notable aspect of the film's style, with a mix of classic rock and roll and melancholic ballads that perfectly capture the mood and atmosphere of the era. The use of iconic 1950s and 60s songs, such as "Lollipop" by The Chordettes and "Great Balls of Fire" by Jerry Lee Lewis, creates a sense of nostalgia for a time long gone, and adds to the film's overall sense of longing and nostalgia. In addition to these stylistic choices, *Stand By Me* also employs a number of clever visual techniques, such as flashbacks and dream sequences, that add to the film's dreamlike quality and enhance its emotional impact.

As you can see, *Stand By Me* is a timeless masterpiece that has captured the hearts of audiences for generations. Through its compelling narrative and remarkable performances, the film has managed to transcend time and culture, becoming a beloved classic that continues to resonate with viewers today. It offers a poignant exploration of the complexities of adolescence, friendship, and loss, reminding us of the bittersweet nature of growing up. The film's ability to blend humor, drama, and tragedy has earned it a well-deserved place in the canon of American cinema, and its legacy continues to inspire new generations of filmmakers and audiences. Ultimately, *Stand By Me* is a powerful reminder of the importance of cherishing our youth and the relationships that shape us, and it stands as a testament to the enduring power of cinema to touch the hearts and minds of people across the world. Its message is universal, and its impact is undeniable, making it a true masterpiece that will continue to be cherished for years to come.