English Teacher Text Guides & Worksheets

Lasse Hallstrom’s film
What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?

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Radiant Heart Publishing
'What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’

Introduction

Gilbert Grape lives in Endora with his family. Life is a challenge for the family, especially since their father committed suicide some years earlier. As a result, Gilbert’s mother, Bonnie, has not been able to cope with life and become morbidly obese and trapped in her own home. This has placed a great deal of responsibility on Gilbert and his siblings to run the family, take care of one another and in particular their autistic brother Arnie, about to turn eighteen. Gilbert has a strong sense of responsibility ‘My dad built the house and it’s my job to keep up the repairs.’ He works at Lamson’s Grocery store which is facing competition from the big, new supermarket just opened, Foodland.

The film is set over seven days, leading up to Arnie’s eighteenth birthday party. This year there is a change to life in Endora as one of the passing campervans breaks down bringing Becky and her grandmother to town. As Gilbert develops a friendship with Becky, his life is transformed, from the inside out.

Behind the Scenes

The director, Lasse Hallstrom is Swedish and worked with cinematographer Sven Nykvist, so the film has been described as ‘feeling very European’. The film is based on a novel by Peter Hedges, who also wrote the screenplay of the film – although the film and novel are quite different. The film was released in 1993 and was nominated for many awards, including Leonardo Di Caprio for Best Supporting Actor at the 1994 Academy Awards.

Themes

The film deals with common life experiences that enable us to face our own identity and find our role in life. We see all the characters grow in some way, without having to run away. At the start of the film, the family is suffering a great burden – the unresolved issues relating to the death/suicide of the father, the mother’s emotional and social breakdown and having to care for the special needs of an autistic member of the family. Life has become a routine about survival and duty for Gilbert and it is only when he opens up a little to Becky that he learns to accept himself and his needs.

In the film death is a recurring theme; death in the Grape family of first the father and then the mother; Mr. Carver’s death and then the ongoing, slow death of Endora as it faces change and outsiders moving in. Gilbert had tried to replace his father for his family at a great cost to him and others. The death of Mrs. Grape provides a sense of hope for the future – a liberation. Even Bobby, Gilbert’s friend works as a mortician.

There is a sense of harmony and balance at the end of the film; Mrs. Carver’s selfish sexual manipulation of Gilbert is replaced by an equal and open, much healthier friendship with Becky. Through this relationship, Gilbert is offered life giving hope. Instead of blaming the circumstances of his life on others and the town and just going through the motions – he is now empowered to accept life and love.
### About the Film – Note Taking Grid as you watch the film

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film Element- Describe what you see</th>
<th>What is the effect of these choices?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visuals – sets, scenery, costumes, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes and values portrayed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Point of View</td>
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<tr>
<td>How the film positions the viewer to respond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal and non-verbal language (body language)</td>
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<tr>
<td>General comments</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Comprehension Questions 1

1. What was your initial reaction to *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*? Explain.
2. What type of film is it?
3. How would you describe the film to someone who was interested in watching it?
4. List the themes the film explores.
5. Outline the story line of the film.
6. How does Gilbert introduce his family? What does this say about his relationship with each of them?
7. Describe the members of Gilbert's family.
8. Explain Arnie's excitement about the travelers? What do we learn about Endora?
9. What is the impact of the music?
10. How does the film juxtapose sadness and feelings of helplessness / despair with moments of humor? Explain the impact of this and what it says about life.
11. Is there a pivotal member of the family?
12. How is Gilbert's mother portrayed?
13. What impact has she had on her family?
14. What role does each family member have?
15. What sort of a person is Gilbert?
16. How do you think his family has affected him?
17. Describe the family house.
19. What is the significance of Arnie always trying to climb the tower?
20. What work does Gilbert do at Lamson's?
21. How do the people in the community treat Gilbert?
22. What is Mr. Lamson worried about?
23. Explain the relationship between Gilbert and Mrs. Carver.
Comprehension Questions 2

24. Describe Mr. Carver.
25. What is our first impression of Becky?
26. How does Gilbert come down from the tower?
27. Describe the relationship between Gilbert and Arnie.

28. After viewing the start of the film, how would you describe Gilbert's life?
29. What is eating Gilbert Grape?
30. When the family are eating spaghetti, why does Momma ask them to "try and act like a family"?
31. Why did Gilbert allow the boy to peek in and look at his obese mother?
32. Describe the Ramp Cafe.
33. What was Tucker so excited about?
34. How did Gilbert react to seeing Becky on the bike?
35. What is Becky like? How does she react to Arnie and Gilbert? What does this say about her?
36. As the family plan for Arnie's eighteenth birthday, what is revealed about the whereabouts of their father?
37. Why is Gilbert worried about the house?
38. Discuss the significance about the scene where Momma is asleep on the sofa.
39. Describe both Amy and Ellen.
40. Why will Arnie not go into the basement?
41. Describe the irony of Arnie chanting "We're not going anywhere".
42. What is Gilbert's attitude towards his mother?
43. Why are the members of the family, especially Momma, the way they are?
44. What does Becky represent to Gilbert?
45. Explain the significance of external beauty not mattering to Becky?
Comprehension Questions 3

46. Describe the times Gilbert spent with Becky.
47. When Gilbert forgot about Arnie in the bath - how did he react?
48. Contrast Betty Carver and Becky. What are the differences?
49. Do you think Mr. Carver knows about the affair his wife is having with Gilbert? Why?
50. Describe what happened to Mr. Carver?

51. Why was Gilbert reluctant to wade into the river like Becky?
52. What is the importance of Gilbert speaking openly to Becky?
53. How does the community react to Arnie climbing the water tower again?
54. How does the family respond to Arnie not coming home?
55. Describe the significance of Momma deciding to go down to the court house in the car?
56. What was the reaction from the onlookers?
58. What were Mrs. Carver's parting wishes for Gilbert?
59. Why did Gilbert smack Arnie? What were the consequences?
60. How was Gilbert's father similar to him?
61. Describe Gilbert's reconciliation with his mother? What does Momma admit?
62. Why did Gilbert not run away?
Comprehension Questions 4

63. Was Arnie's party successful?
64. What was the significance of Gilbert bringing Becky to meet his mother?
65. Discuss the significance of Arnie turning eighteen.
66. Why do you think Momma climbed the stairs to her bedroom for the first time in a long time instead of sleeping on the sofa?
67. When Momma dies, how do the children grieve?
68. Explain the importance of burning down the house?
69. Did fire symbolize anything in this film? If so, what?
70. A year after momma's death, what has become of the family members?
71. How has life improved?
72. What does the future hold for everyone?

Extension Questions

1. Does the film have a happy ending? Why or why not?

2. How is food used in the film?

3. What is the turning point in the film? Why?

4. How does Momma's death affect the family?

5. Are the characters in the film happy? Discuss.
Comprehension Questions 5

FILM TECHNIQUES

1. Setting/ Scenery/ Location
   a) Describe the town of Endora.
   b) What was the Endora community like?
   c) What do the wide open spaces add to the film?
   d) List the locations of the films. What does each one communicate to us?
      For example: Gilbert's home, the shop where Gilbert works etc...

2. Characters
   a) List the main characters in the film and the actors who played them.
   b) How effective were the actors in realizing their characters?
      Explain your opinion.

3. Clothes and Props
   a) Describe the appearance of the main characters, focusing on their style.
   b) How do the clothes and props worn shape the film?

4. Sound
   1. Describe the opening music. What type of film does this prepare us for?
   2. What does the way the people speak to each other say about their lives?
   3. Listen to how and what the main characters say. Explain the importance of this.
Comprehension Questions 6

FILM TECHNIQUES

6. CAMERA WORK AND FRAMING

Find several different examples of camera angles and shots. What do the different types of camera angles and shots add to these scenes?

7. STORY ELEMENTS: Character Development

Choose any two characters and follow their development/changes and/or transformations throughout the film.

8. STORY ELEMENTS: Point Of View

From whose point of view is the film told? Does it change? What impact does the film’s point of view have on the film and audience?

9. STORY ELEMENTS: Opening and Closing Sequences

Describe and analyze the opening and closing of the film. What are the messages coming across to us in these scenes?
Narrative Elements – ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’ Handout

Production Elements

- **Sound** – Sound helps structure the narrative. Think about what the different sounds add to the atmosphere of the narrative. How is music used throughout the film?

- **Lighting** – Lighting can appear natural or staged. What does lighting add to the narrative? What mood does it help create, and how does it affect the overall film?

- **Acting** – Acting refers to the actors playing the roles/characters, such as Johnny Depp and Leonardo Di Caprio. Character development is achieved through acting. A focused and talented actor will portray the character realistically and the performance will be believable. Performance quality includes voice, tone, movement and so on.

- **Mise En Scene** – One frame and what has been included in the visual composition and how it affects your overall understanding of the film. Elements include:
  - **Images** – What’s in the sequence / frame and what are we looking at?
  - **Cinematography** – camera placement, camera angles, lighting, choice of lens
  - **Design Elements** – Setting, location, set design / props, costume, make-up

- **Camera Technique** - Positions and angles to capture a scene. Camera is used to create a relationship between the audience and the characters and affects our response to the film.

- **Editing** - Editing ensures that scenes appear in a particular order, to promote the themes of the film and engage the audience. Mood and tone is often created through editing.

- **Costume** – This adds to our understanding of the narrative- such as historical or about the character’s lives.

Story Elements

- **Opening and Closing Sequence** – The Opening Sequence sets up the main characters, tells us something about them, their relationship to each other and other relationships. The closing sequence ties everything together (or may not) and brings closure.

- **Storyline** – Most films have a main storyline as well as subplots or lesser storylines. This is the action or plot (what happens) in the film.

- **Point Of View** – Through whose eyes are we seeing the film? It could be one of the characters, or from various points of view.

- **Setting and Location** – This is all the different settings and locations used in a narrative. It includes outdoors and every indoors set, such as rooms. They add to our knowledge of the film, context and characters.
Essay Topics- ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’

1. As Gilbert Grape learns to accept himself, so too does he learn to accept his mother. Discuss.
2. If living in Endora is like "dancing to no music", why does Gilbert Grape stay?
3. Life could only become normal for the Grape family after the death of Gilbert's mother.
4. Even though Endora is a town 'going nowhere', it is also a warm and caring place to live. Discuss.
5. Although flawed and dysfunctional on the surface, the Grape family is really a supportive and loving family unit. Discuss.

CHARACTER STUDIES

In your book, allow one page per character. Based on the following questions, create an in-depth character study.

1. Pick a key character in the text/film.
2. Write a physical description for this character.
3. Describe the character's personality.
4. What happens to him/her in the text? (Briefly)
5. What motivate/s this character? What is his/her driving force?
6. Describe this character's attitude to life.
7. What major events and turning points are faced by this character? How are they handled?
8. Describe changes and/or transformations experienced.
9. What problems are faced by this character, and how are they handled?
10. Discuss the relationships this character has with others.
11. How does this character use language?
12. Is the character's gender important in his/her life?
13. Why is this character the way he/she is?
14. What important past experiences have shaped this character?
**Oral Presentation – ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’**

In pairs, you are to research, plan and present a three minute talk on a specific production or story element of the film. Your presentation may include visual material such as stills from the film; PowerPoint images and/or other material. No doubling up on topics.

- **Focus:**
  To show how a specific element is used in the film and the effect it has on the audience.

**Topics:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production Elements</th>
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<th>Production Elements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sound effects and Music</td>
<td>Language and Dialogue</td>
<td>Lighting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production Elements</td>
<td>Production Elements</td>
<td>Production Elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>Mise en Scene</td>
<td>Camera work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production Elements</td>
<td>Production Elements</td>
<td>Story Elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>Costume/ Props</td>
<td>Opening and Closing Sequences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story Elements</td>
<td>Story Elements</td>
<td>Story Elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme - Family</td>
<td>Symbols and Imagery</td>
<td>Setting and location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story Elements</td>
<td>Story Elements</td>
<td>Story Elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character development Gilbert and Becky</td>
<td>Character development Arnie and Momma</td>
<td>Point of View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Elements</td>
<td>Story Elements</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme – Being Different</td>
<td>Theme - Freedom vs. Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Theme: Being Different – Special Needs

Arnie suffers from a form of Autism and this is why he has special needs and needs more care than the average teenager.

- Describe the relationship/s Arnie has with others in the diagram

About Autism…

- Arnie suffers from autism. It affects how the brain works and how a person understands and perceives the world - often leading to altered speech and behavior.

- Autism is a brain disorder and we have known about it for about 100 years. Its frequency is that one in every thousand people will be born with it and it is more frequent in males than females. It is believed to be a result of a genetic condition.

- Children with Autism may show signs in early childhood and there are many different types of Autism. Although there is no cure for Autism there are some therapies that assist individuals suffering from Autism and improve the quality of life. One of the biggest issues with Autism is that such individuals may find relating to others challenging and they may come across as distant or unaware of other people. Communication is difficult for them as they interpret and perceive other people’s speech and body language differently. Many people with Autism find it hard to make and keep friends and the world around them can be very confusing.

- They often develop very strong associations with sound, smell and other experiences. Some people with Autism show obsessive behavior and their understanding may appear unusual.
Theme: The role of being a Carer
Autism – Continued

♦ It has been found that people with Autism do better and cope well with life when their families follow strict routines and discipline. It is believed that Asperger’s Syndrome is the most commonly occurring form of Autism and it was first named in 1944. People with Asperger’s have symptoms similar to those of Autism but can present with normal speech development. Some have very high intelligence and memory with specific outstanding skills in a particular field such as maths, art or music and are known as Savants.

♦ People with Asperger’s Syndrome have trouble with language and communication with other people, so they may miss the nuances and fail to understand jokes, sarcasm, etc. In particular they struggle with non-verbal communication or body language, and this is why personal relationships can be challenging. The behavior of those with Asperger’s Syndrome can easily be misunderstood by others as threatening and strange. When a person with Asperger’s feels threatened, they can panic, withdraw or lash out angrily.

♦ People with Asperger’s Syndrome need routine and a pace of life they can understand and cope with. Their environment must be altered to fit in with what they can cope with. Change is extremely distressing for many with Asperger’s Syndrome.

Being a Carer

♦ A recurrent theme throughout the film is the stress of coping with people such as Arnie and their special needs. It has clearly worn Gilbert’s patience out at times. Carers often need support and time out from caring, but there is very little funding and real support for such activities. In particular people with children who have disabilities are often isolated from other members of the community and may feel ostracized and alone.

♦ Looking after a child with a disability is overwhelming and a 24-hour job for many carers. It is very challenging for marriages to stay intact under such conditions. There is also a great deal of hurt and pain involved with being disabled such as being bullied and ridiculed by others including other students and from other schools. People are often very afraid of those who are different to them and re-act in fear and judgment.

♦ It is unlikely that a small town would offer support for families with a child such as Arnie.

♦ Unless carers look after their own health and needs, they will quickly burn out and be less effective carers in the long run.

♦ Being a carer also brings with it the rewards of love and intimacy with a special individual.
Themes: Exploring FAMILY

Family Positives
We need families because...

Small town effects on families

Family Negatives

When a family member is very different to others (e.g. morbidly obese)...

How a special needs member of a family impacts on a family...

How death affects a family

Family Brainstorm
**Theme: Small Town Life vs. Suburban or City Living**

In what ways does the place we live in influence our childhood and lives? Use your own life experiences and the information you gained from ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life in Endora</th>
<th>My Life in…</th>
<th>Life in a small town is different because…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday life</td>
<td>Everyday life</td>
<td>Everyday life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family life</td>
<td>Family life</td>
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<td>Friendships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
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<td>Positives</td>
<td>Positives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negatives</td>
<td>Negatives</td>
<td>Negatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other comments</td>
<td>Other comments</td>
<td>Other comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme: Being different in our Society

Morbid Obesity

In a society obsessed with perfection and slimness, one of the worst sins seems to be overweight or fat. The more driven the push for slimness becomes, the worse the obesity epidemic seems to be getting. More and more people are becoming overweight and more and more overweight people are becoming morbidly obese. There is now a new category, especially relevant in America – the super morbidly obese. Such a title refers to the thousands of people who weigh over 500 pounds (250 kilograms).

There are many health consequences of being overweight and obese and these are of concern to medical practitioners. Beyond the medical issues, those who are obese or fat, suffer enormous stigma and social rejection. It has been proven their lives are marred by limited opportunities, increased discrimination and a poorer quality of life. Not all obese people suffer like this and some even demand better treatment and attempt to focus society’s attention on the ways they are discriminated against.

Science has come to understand body weight issues more clearly. Some people may be predisposed to have higher body fat contents, whereas others may overeat and rarely increase weight. Furthermore, it has been discovered that there is a hormone imbalance in some individuals affecting the appestat – the part of our body that tells us we are full. Without this, an individual will keep eating and eating. Other research shows that some people are more tuned into food than others. Lifestyle changes have also greatly contributed to the amount of overweight and obese individuals in our society – less exercise and more high fat, convenience food are a lethal combination. Unfortunately, it is known that excessive weight gain in childhood creates thousands of extra fat cells- that stay for life – they can be shrunk by dieting but they will always be there ready to fatten up again. This is serious because of the concerning rise in childhood/ teenage obesity rates.

Research Task:
1. Look at some magazines, newspapers and the TV GUIDE. How important is the issue of weight and fatness/ thinness? Discuss.
2. Make a collage about this issue using images and words.
3. Statistics – Find out what the current statistics for body weight are in your country and two other countries.
4. Find out 5 medical reasons explaining the concerns about the obesity issue.
Being Different...Being Fat

• Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, llamada. ‘The Monster’ 1680 painting of 8 year old Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, who was called "The Monster" due to her obesity caused by illness. She was paraded around on fairs to crowds.

Freaks...being different.

In the not so distant past, circuses were very popular and part of the exhibits included human ‘freaks’: the fat lady; the strong man; anybody exhibiting any deformity etc. People paid money to stare and laugh at these freaks. Nowadays this practise is considered inhumane and has stopped, and even animal rights are taken seriously. (Animals were also treated cruelly)

Reflection: Why do you think those that are very different from the norm are so hard to ignore and/or accept as just another person?

In their shoes: Imagine you are morbidly obese. Write a letter or diary about your day to day life. OR Choose another way of being different.

Shame: Many people with an obese family member are ashamed and embarrassed by the attention such a person brings. Discuss in relation to Gilbert Grape.
Themes: Death and Grief

A death in the family has catastrophic effects leading to grief. Everyone responds to loss in their own way and in their own time, which may clash with others and lead to tension and frustration. In Momma’s case, she was not able to pick herself up after and continue caring for her children – forcing the children, especially Gilbert to grow up too soon, take on too many responsibilities and the role of carer for Arnie – a child with special needs. In the diagram below, fill in the effects of death on everyone.
Endora is a fictional town in the real state of IOWA, USA. It represents a typical small rural town facing challenges and changes as the small, family owned businesses are gradually being replaced by the large, multinationals.

Gilbert describes the town as ‘like dancin’ without music’. We know that ‘watching the campers is our yearly ritual. They’re doin’ the right thing...just passin’ through’.

When the new Foodland supermarket opens up, the small family owned Lamson’s store is greatly threatened. Such a small store cannot hope to compete with the purchasing power of a food chain such as Foodland.

Questions:
1. Describe Gilbert’s meetings at the Ramp Café with Bob and Tucker.

2. Why were people excited about the Foodland truck carrying live lobsters?

3. How do the townspeople treat and deal with Gilbert? Provide two examples.

4. What issues are challenging the town of Endora?

5. Create a map or poster showing the landmarks of Endora as seen in the film.
**Significant Quotes Worksheet**

- What is the significance of the following quotes from the film?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Significance / Comments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Where’s your head lately, Gilbert?’ (Momma)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘I’m a worldly kind of girl’ (Becky to Gilbert)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘You’re my knight in shimmering armour.’ (Momma to Gilbert)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘What do you want for you, just for you?’ (Becky to Gilbert)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘I’m just playing. Don’t you want to play, Gilbert?’ (Betty Carver to Gilbert)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Some days you want him to live. Some days…you don’t’ (Gilbert about Arnie)</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘I want to be a good person’ (Gilbert)</td>
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</table>
Imagery – ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’

- What do the following represent?
- Add your own at the end of the list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Represents?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foodland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burger Barn</td>
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<tr>
<td>The water tower</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grape house</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lamson's Grocery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ramp Cafe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gilbert's Apron</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New highway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky’s camper</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Roads</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert’s truck</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>House basement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momma sitting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others…</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

[Image of a truck]
Creative Tasks: ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’

Choose TWO of the following:

1. Compose a series of poems based on the text.
2. Revise a section of the text and turn it into a short story.
3. Invent a game or create a quiz based on the text.
4. Rewrite the ending of the text so that the outcome is different.
5. Plan and create a picture book of the story.
6. Present a talk on an aspect of the text to the class.
7. Who was the author? Research and report a biography of the author.
8. Write a newspaper article based on aspects of the text.
9. Compose and/or find some music that represents key moments in the text. Play them to the class and explain to the class your reason for choosing these pieces of music.
10. Choreograph a movement inspired by one or more key scenes in the text. Present a live performance to an audience or have someone video tape it.
11. Using any art medium (painting, sculpture, inks, pencil etc.), create one or more visual representations of the text.
12. Choose an aspect of the background of the text that interests you and create a PowerPoint/research report for the class. (I.e. the times; the fashions; key conflicts etc.)
Character Attributes: ‘What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?’

- In pairs, create an ‘attributes mind map’ or use the one below - for the main characters in the film.
Gilbert Grape – Transitions and Turning Points

1. Based on the film – create a visual representation of Gilbert’s steps in the journey of his life.

At the start of the film:

What does the future hold?
### Themes: Families in the film

#### THE GRAPE FAMILY
The family is presented as trapped by their burdens from the past and present. Gilbert’s frustration is shared by the rest of the family. The family is static and stuck as presented by Momma, who just sits there, having no impact on life. There is a sense of hopelessness and it is based around the unresolved grief over the death of Albert Grape, the father. There is also much that is unspoken of – leaving everybody feeling frustrated and more trapped. Mealtimes are particularly lacking in harmony, and there seems to be very little real intimacy between the characters. Arnie adds further pressure and stress on the family, even though they all love him. Gilbert in particular carries this load most of the time. Only through taking action are the individuals empowered – such as Momma going upstairs to bed, and leaving the house to collect Arnie from the police station. By the end of the film we see a new sense of freedom for the family, and the decision to burn the house is a unanimous one.

#### THE CARVER FAMILY
Mr. Carver is clearly living a life that is totally disconnected from others and is leading a life of misery. Ken Carver even finds it impossible to get his sons to play with him happily, and drowns in the shallow pool-highlighting how out of depth he feels in his life. Betty Carver channels her frustration into illicit sexual encounters with Gilbert Grape that are quite desperate and demanding. She is unable to tackle basic domestic chores. With the death of her husband she is free to leave Endora and start a new life.

#### BECKY AND HER GRANDMOTHER
Although not a typical family, there is no doubt that real intimacy and love joins Becky and her grandmother. They are both happy in themselves and their lives and are free to be who they are. As such, Becky is able to be supportive of Gilbert and others she meets. She opens up Gilbert to the possibility that life can offer and encourages him to think about himself for a change.