**Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**English 12/McMane**

**Film Study: *Stand by Me***

**Based on *The Body* by Stephen King**



Directed by Rob Reiner, 1986

CAST

Gordie Lachance (boy) Wil Wheaton

Gordie Lachance (man) Richard Dreyfuss

Chris Chambers River Phoenix

Teddy Duchamp Corey Feldman

Vern Tessio Jerry O’Connell

Ace Merrill Kiefer Sutherland

**Chapter 1-2: Audiobook in class**

The most important things are the hardest things to say. They are the things you get ashamed of, because words diminish them--words shrink things that seemed limitless when they were in your head to no more than living size when they're brought out. But it's more than that, isn't it? The most important things lie too close to wherever your secret heart is buried, like landmarks to a treasure your enemies would love to steal away. And you may make revelations that cost you dearly only to have people look at you in a funny way, not understanding what you've said at all, or why you thought it was so important that you almost cried while you were saying it. That's the worst, I think. When the secret stays locked within not for want of a teller but for want of an understanding ear.

I was twelve going on thirteen when I first saw a dead human being. It happened in 1960, a long time ago... although sometimes it doesn't seem that long to me. Especially on the nights I wake up from those dreams where the hail fell into his open eyes.

1. What does Stephen King mean by “the most important things are the hardest things to say”?
2. How does Stephen King get the reader’s attention in this opening passage?

The Body/Stand By Me Character Chart

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Teddy | Chris | Vern | Gordie |
| emotional character traits |  |  |  |  |
| intellectual character traits |  |  |  |  |
| moral character traits |  |  |  |  |
| physical character traits |  |  |  |  |
| family life |  |  |  |  |

**Chapters 3-4:** Read the chapters and answer the questions in complete sentences, using quotes from the text to earn full homework credit!

**Chapter 3:**

1. What is the Ray Brower story?

**Chapter 4:**

1. Why was Vern under the porch?

2. What does Vern overhear Billy Tessio and Charlie Hogan discussing?

**Chapter 5:**

1. What do the boys decide to do? Why? (What is their motivation?)

2. Describe Chris’ family.

**Chapter 6:**

1. How does Gordie’s father feel about his son’s friends?

2. What is Gordie’s relationship with his parents like?

3. What was Gordie’s relationship with his brother like?

4. How did Gordon feel about Dennis’ death?

**Film: Day 1 (Flashback, The Tree House, The Dump, The Store )**

1. How is the relationship between Gordie and Denny portrayed differently in the film?

2. Why do you suppose the screenwriter and director made this change?

3. What is the purpose of the scene with the store owner? What does it establish about Gordie’s internal conflicts?

**Chapter 12:** Read the following passage from chapter 12 which was left out of the film, and answer the questions below.

“I know you. You're Denny Lachance's brother. Ain’t you?” The toothpick journeyed from one corner of his mouth to the other, as if on ball bearings. He reached behind the cash register, picked up a bottle of S'OK cream soda, and chugged it.

“Yes, sir. But Denny, he –”

“Yeah, I know. That's a sad thing, kid. The Bible says: ‘In the midst of life, we are in death.’ Did you know that... Yuh. I lost a brother in Korea. You look just like Denny, people ever tell you that? Yuh. Spitting image.”

“Yes, sir, sometimes,” I said glumly.

“I remember the year he was All Conference. Halfback, he played. Yuh. Could he run? Father God and Sonny Jesus! You're probably too young to remember.” He was looking over my head, out through the screen door and into the blasting heat, as if he were having a beautiful vision of my brother.

“I remember. Uh, Mr. Dusset?”

“What, kid?” His eyes were still misty with memory; the toothpick trembled a little between his lips.

“Your thumb is on that scales.”

“What?” He looked down, astounded, to where the ball of his thumb was pressed firmly on the white enamel. If I hadn't moved away from him a little bit when he started talking about Dennis, the ground meat would have hidden it. “Why, so it is. Yuh. I guess I just got thinkin' about your brother, God love him.” George Dusset signed a cross on himself.

When he took his thumb off the scales, the needle sprang back six ounces. He patted a little more meat on top and then did the package up with white butcher's paper.

“Okay,” he said past the toothpick. “Let's see what we got here. Three pounds of hamburg, that's a dollar forty-four. Hamburg rolls, that's twenty-seven. Four tonics, forty cents. One churchkey, two pence. Come to...” He added it up on the bag he was going to put the stuff in. “Two-twenty-nine.”

“Thirteen,” I said.

He looked up at me very slowly, frowning. “Huh?”

“Two-thirteen. You added it wrong.”

“Kid, are you–”

“You added it wrong,” I said. “First you put your thumb on the scales and then you overcharged on the groceries, Mr Dusset. I was gonna throw some Hostess Twinkies on top of that order but now I guess

won't.” I spanged two dollars and thirteen cents down on the Schlitz placemat in front of him. He looked at the money, then at me. The frown was now tremendous, the lines on his face as deep as fissures. “What are you, kid?” He said in a low voice that was ominously confidential. “Are you some kind of smartass?”

“No, sir,” I said. “But you ain't gonna jap me and get away with it. What would your mother say if she knew you was japping little kids?”

He thrust our stuff into the paper bag with quick stiff movements, making the Coke bottles clink together. He thrust the bag at me roughly, not caring if I dropped it and broke the tonics or not. His swarthy face was flushed and dull, the frown now frozen in place. “Okay, kid. Here you go. Now what you do is you get the Christ out of my store. I see you in here again and I going to throw you out, me. Yuh. Smartass little sonofawhore.”

“I won't come in again,” I said, walking over to the screen door and pushing it open. The hot afternoon buzzed somnolently along its appointed course outside, sounding green and brown and full of silent light. “Neither will none of my friends. I guess I got fifty or so.”

“Your brother wasn't no smartass!” George Dusset yelled.

“Fuck you!” I yelled, and ran like hell down the road.

I heard the screen door bang open like a gunshot and his bull roar came after me: “If you ever come in here again I'll fat your lip for you, you little punk!” I ran until I was over the first hill, scared and laughing to myself, my heart beating out a triphammer pulse in my chest. Then I slowed to a fast walk, looking back over my shoulder every now and then to make sure he wasn't going to take after me in his car, or anything.

1. What is the purpose of this passage?
2. How does it portray Gordie?
3. How does it portray Mr. Dusset?
4. How have adults been portrayed in the book thus far?

**Film: Day 2 (Chopper, Gordie & Chris)**

1. What does the scene with Chopper the dog illustrate about myth and reality?
2. Describe the friendship between Gordie and Chris. How is it different than the friendships between the other boys?

**Chapter 16:** Read the chapter and answer the the questions in complete sentences, using quotes from the text to earn full homework credit!

1. What is the point of the story of Lard Ass Hogan? In other words, what does Gordie wish the reader to get from the story?
2. How do you interpret the end of the story?

**Chapter 17:** Read the chapter and answer the questions in complete sentences, using quotes from the text to earn full homework credit!

1. What is the complaint that Vern and Teddy have about Gordie’s story?
2. How does Chris say about Gordie’s stories and Vern and Teddy’s reaction to them?
3. What does Chris say will happen when the boys enter junior high?
4. Describe the talk that Chris and Gordie have about Gordie’s parents and Gordie’s future.
5. What does Chris reveal about the stolen milk money?
6. What is Stephen King’s purpose in telling the milk money story? In other words, what is he saying about Chris and the town in which he lives?
7. What does Chris state about having friends? Do you agree?

**Film: Day 3 (Train, Lard Ass, Camping, Lunch Money)**

1. How does the scene around the campfire characterize the boys. [Note their discussions about Goofy and Annette Funicello from *The Mickey Mouse Club*.]
2. How does the story about Chris and the lunch money further characterize adults in the story?

**Chapter 19:** Read the following passage from Chapter 19, which was left out of the film, and answer the questions below. The passage describes a dream Gordie has while camping that night with his friends.

At last I slipped into something I knew was a dream. Chris and I were swimming at White's Beach, a gravel-pit in Brunswick that had been turned into a miniature lake when the gravel-diggers struck water. It was where Teddy had seen the kid hit his head and almost drown.

In my dream we were out over our heads, stroking lazily along, with a hot July sun blazing down. From behind us, on the float, came cries and shouts and yells of laughter as kids climbed and dived or climbed and were pushed. I could hear the empty kerosene drums that held the float up clanging and booming together--a sound not unlike that of churchbells, which are so solemn and emptily profound. On the sand-and-gravel beach, oiled bodies lay face down on blankets, little kids with buckets squatted on the verge of the water or sat happily flipping muck into their hair with plastic shovels, and teenagers clustered in grinning groups, watching the young girls promenade endlessly back and forth in pairs and trios, never alone, the secret places of their bodies wrapped in Jantzen tank suits. People walked up the hot sand on the balls of their feet, wincing, to the snackbar. They came back with chips, Devil Dogs, Red Ball Popsicles.

Mrs. Cote drifted past us on an inflatable rubber raft. She was lying on her back, dressed in her typical September-to-June school uniform: a grey two-piece suit with a thick sweater instead of a blouse under the jacket, a flower pinned over one almost nonexistent breast, thick support hose the color of Canada Mints on her legs. Her black old lady's high-heeled shoes were trailing in the water, making small Vs. Her hair was blue-rinsed, like my mother's, and done up in those tight, medicinal smelling clockspring curls. Her glasses flashed brutally in the sun.

“Watch your steps, boys,” she said. “Watch your steps or I'll hit you hard enough to strike you blind. I can do that; I have been given that power by the school board. Now, Mr. Chambers, ‘Mending Wall,’ if you please. By rote.”

“I tried to give the money back,” Chris said. “Old lady Simons said okay, but she took it! Do you hear me? She took it! Now what are you going to do about it? Are you going to whack her blind?”

“‘Mending Wall,’ Mr. Chambers, if you please. By rote.”

Chris threw me a despairing glance, as if to say *Didn't I tell you it would be this way?,* and then began to tread water. He began. “‘Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that sends the frozen groundswell under it—’” And then his head went under, his reciting mouth filling with water.

He popped back up, crying: “Help me, Gordie! Help me!”

Then he was dragged under again. Looking into the clear water I could see two bloated, naked corpses holding his ankles. One was Vern and the other was Teddy, and their open eyes were as blank and pupilless as the eyes of Greek statues. Their small pre-pubescent penises floated limply up from their distended bellies like albino strands of kelp. Chris's head broke water again. He held one hand up limply to me and voiced a screaming, womanish cry that rose and rose, ululating in the hot sunny summer air. I looked wildly towards the beach but nobody had heard. The lifeguard, his bronzed, athletic body lolling attractively on the seat at the top of his whitewashed cruciform wooden tower, just went on smiling down at a girl in a red bathing suit. Chris's scream turned into a bubbling waterchoked gurgle as the corpses pulled him under again. And as they dragged him down to black water I could see his rippling, distorted eyes turned up to me in pleading agony; I could see his white starfish hands held helplessly up to the sun-burnished roof of the water. But instead of diving down and trying to save him, I stroked madly for the shore, or at least to a place where the water would not be over my head. Before I could get there--before I could even get close— I felt a soft, rotted, implacable hand wrap itself around my calf and begin to pull. A scream built up in my chest... but before I could utter it, the dream washed away into a grainy facsimile of reality. It was Teddy with his hand on my leg. He was shaking me awake.

1. The great psychologist Sigmund Freud once said that every dream contains a wish and a fear. How would you interpret Gordie’s dream? What is the wish and what is the fear?
2. What great self-realization does Gordie make in his dream?

**Chapter 20:** Read the following passage from Chapter 20 and answer the questions below.

Morning came on apace. The noise of the crickets began to drop, and the shadows under the trees and bushes evaporated like puddles after a shower. The air had that peculiar lack of taste that presages the latest hot day in a famous series of hot days. Birds that had maybe cowered all night just as we had done now began to twitter self-importantly. A wren landed on top of the deadfall from which we had taken our firewood, preened itself, and then flew off.

I don't know how long I sat there on that rail, watching the purple steal out of the sky as noiselessly as it had stolen in the evening before. Long enough for my butt to start complaining, anyway. I was about to get up when I looked to my right and saw a deer standing in the railroad bed not ten yards from me. My heart went up into my throat so high that I think I could have put my hand in my mouth and touched it. My stomach and genitals filled with a hot, dry excitement. I didn't move. I couldn't have moved if I wanted to. Her eyes weren't brown but a dark, dusty black--the kind of velvet you see backgrounding jewelry displays. Her small ears were scuffed suede. She looked serenely at me, head slightly lowered in what I took for curiosity, seeing a kid with his hair in a sleep-scarecrow of whirls and many-tined cowlicks, wearing jeans with cuffs and a brown khaki shirt with the elbows mended and the collar turned up in the hoody tradition of the day. What I was seeing was some sort of gift, something given with a carelessness that was appalling.

We looked at each other for a long time... I think it was a long time. Then she turned and walked off to the other side of the tracks, white bobtail flipping insouciantly. She found grass and began to crop. I couldn't believe it. She had begun to crop. She didn't look back at me and didn't need to; I was frozen solid. Then the rail started to thrum under my ass and bare seconds later the doe's head came up, cocked back towards Castle Rock. She stood there, her branch-black nose working on the air, coaxing it a little. Then she was gone in three gangling leaps, vanishing into the woods with no sound but one rotted branch, which broke with a sound like a track ref's starter-gun.

I sat there, looking mesmerized at the spot where she had been, until the actual sound of the freight came up through the stillness. Then I skidded back down the bank to where the others were sleeping.

The freight's slow, loud passage woke them up, yawning and scratching. There was some funny, nervous talk about 'the case of the screaming ghost', as Chris called it, but not as much as you might imagine. In daylight it seemed more foolish than interesting--almost embarrassing. Best forgotten.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell them about the deer, but I ended up not doing it. That was one thing I kept to myself. I've never spoken or written of it until just now, today. And I have to tell you that it seems a lesser thing written down, damn near inconsequential. But for me it was the best part of that trip, the cleanest part, and it was a moment I found myself returning to, almost helplessly, when there was trouble in my life--my first day in the bush in Viet Nam, and this fellow walked into the clearing where we were with his hand over his nose and when he took his hand away there was no nose there because it had been shot off; the time the doctor told us our youngest son might be hydrocephalic (he turned out just to have an oversized head, thank God); the long, crazy weeks before my mother died. I would find my thoughts turning back to that morning, the scuffed suede of her ears, the white flash of her tail. But five hundred million Red Chinese don't give a shit, right? The most important things are the hardest to say, because words diminish them. It's hard to make strangers care about the good things in your life.

1. What does the deer represent to Gordie?
2. Why can’t he tell the other boys about the deer?
3. Later in his life, he recalls the deer. At what points in his life?
4. Why does he remember this moment at these particular times?

**Film: Day 4 (Deer, Leeches, The Body)**

1. What is the significance of the scene with the leeches?
2. Why does Gordie get so upset upon finding the body of boy he doesn’t even know?
3. How is Chris characterized in the scene in which they find the body?
4. In the novella, Chris – not Gordie – fires the gun. Why do you suppose they made the change for the film? What does it suggest about Gordie’s character?

**Chapter 25:** The climax of both the film and the novella comes when the boys finally find the body they have been searching for. Read the following passage from Chapter 25 describing their reaction to the dead body. Then answer the questions below.

Chris jumped over the side of the washout, his hair already soaked and clinging to his head. I followed. Vern and Teddy came close behind, but Chris and I were first to reach the body of Ray Brower. He was face down. Chris looked into my eyes, his face set and stern--an adult's face. I nodded slightly, as if he had spoken aloud. I think he was down here and relatively intact instead of up there between the rails and completely mangled because he was trying to get out of the way when the train hit him, knocking him head over heels. He had landed with his head pointed towards the tracks, arms over his head like a diver about to execute. He had landed in this boggy cup of land that was becoming a small swamp. His hair was a dark reddish color. The moisture in the air had made it curl slightly at the ends. There was blood in it, but not a great deal, not a gross-out amount. The ants were grosser. He was wearing a solid color dark green tee-shirt and bluejeans. His feet were bare, and a few feet behind him, caught in the blackberry brambles, I saw a pairof filthy low-topped Keds. For a moment I was puzzled--why was he here and his tennies there? Then I realized, and the realization was like a dirty punch below the belt. My wife, my kids, my friends--they all think that having an imagination like mine must be quite nice; aside from making all this dough, I can have a little mind-movie whenever things get dull. Mostly they're right. But every now and then it turns around and bites the shit out of you with these long teeth, teeth that have been filed to points like the teeth of a cannibal. You see things you'd just as soon not see, things that keep you awake until first light. I saw one of those things now, saw it with absolute clarity and certainty. He had been knocked spang out of his Keds. The train had knocked him out of his Keds just as it had knocked the life out of his body.

That finally rammed it all the way home for me. The kid was dead. The kid wasn't sick, the kid wasn't sleeping. The kid wasn't going to get up in the morning anymore or get the runs from eating too many apples or catch poison ivy or wear out the eraser on the end of his Ticonderoga No. 2 during a hard math test. The kid was dead; stone dead. The kid was never going to go out bottling with his friends in the spring, gunnysack over his shoulder to pick up the returnables the retreating snow uncovered. The kid wasn't going to wake up at two o'clock a. m. on the morning of 1 November this year, run to the bathroom, and vomit up a big glurt of cheap Halloween candy. The kid wasn't going to pull a single girl's braid in home room. The kid wasn't going to give a bloody nose, or get one. The kid was can't, don't, won't, never, shouldn't, wouldn't, couldn't. He was the side of the battery where the terminal says NEG. The fuse you have to put a penny in. The wastebasket by the teacher's desk, which always smells of wood-shavings from the sharpener and dead orange-peels from lunch. The haunted house outside of town where the windows are crashed out, the NO TRESPASSING signs whipped away across the fields, the attic full of bats, the cellar full of worms. The kid was dead, mister, ma'am, young sir, little miss. I could go on all day and never get it right about the distance between his bare feet on the ground and his dirty Keds hanging in the bushes. It was thirty-plus inches, it was a googol of light-years. The kid was disconnected from his Keds beyond all hope of reconciliation. He was dead.

1. Compare the writing of this scene to the film version of the scene. What is different? What is the same?
2. Which has more impact in your opinion? Why?
3. Consider King’s style in the second paragraph. What literary elements does he rely on to make his point? Underline or highlight these in the passage.

**Chapters 32-34:** Read the end of the novella in your book and answer the following questions. Remember: complete sentences and quotes for full credit!

1. What does Gordie mean at the end of chapter 32when he says that “some people drown”?
2. What is the fate of Vern Tessio?
3. What happens to Teddy?
4. How is Chris’ fate ironic?
5. Describe the adult life of Ace Merrill, the toughest hood in Castle Rock. How is this ironic?
6. Why does the story end with the river? What does the river symbolize?

**Film: Day 5 (Goodbyes, Flashforward)**

1. How are the fates of the various characters changed in the film? Why do you suppose they did this?
2. What is the purpose of including Gordie’s son at the end of the film?
3. What does the film say about childhood friendships?
4. The movie studio changed the title of the film from “The Body” to *Stand By Me*, appropriately incorporating the famous song by Ben E. King. Why do you suppose they changed the title?
5. Consider the lyrics of the song below. How does the song encompass the overall theme of the text?

Stand by Me

by Ben E. King

When the night has come
And the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we see
No, I won't be afraid
Oh, I won't be afraid
Just as long as you stand
Stand by me, so

\* Darling, darling stand by me
Oh, stand by me
Oh stand, stand by me, stand by me
If the sky that we look upon
Should tumble and fall
Or the mountain
Should crumble to the sea
I won't cry, I won't cry
No, I won't shed a tear
Just as long as you stand
Stand by me, and
(Repeat \* 2 times)

Whenever you're in trouble
Won't you stand by me, oh stand by me