

Big Fish

Directed by Tim Burton

Preparing for the Film

1. What type of relationship would you expect to develop between a father who is often away on business trips and his son who grew up without really knowing him?
2. What are various reactions family members may have when they continually hear a relative tell the same stories, especially if the tales seem exaggerated or fabricated?
3. If you have read the novel *Big Fish*, what are some challenges the director may have adapting the text to the screen?

Reflecting on the Film

1. What is the story that Edward Bloom tells about the day his son William was born? How does Will react to it and why? What is the actual story that Dr. Bennet reveals about Will's birth at the end of the film and what is Dr. Bennet's view of it?
2. What special feature does the Witch have and how does it help to frame Edward Bloom's life story from early childhood through his death.
3. As Edward is leaving Ashton, the Witch whispers to him, "The biggest fish in the river gets that way by never being caught." What thematic influence does that wisdom have for Edward Bloom? For his son Will?
4. What does the word "Spectre" mean? What is the thematic significance of the town's name?
5. When William returns to visit his very ill father, he asks him, "show me who you are." His father replies, "Your failing, not mine if you can't see who I am." Whose perception does the director seem to support and how can we be sure?
6. What does Will learn from Jennifer Hill's narration to help him better understand his father?
7. At the end of Edward's life, he and his son create the story of their escape from the hospital to go the river where his father intends to fulfill the prophecy of the glass eye's image of his death. What are the details that William fabricates with his father's help? What is the significance of his telling the tale with his father?
8. What are the amazing details of Edward Bloom's funeral?
9. How does the use of multiple narrators provide a more rounded view of Edward Bloom's life? Give examples from the various narrators to show what each perspective helps viewers see about Edward.
10. How many expressions or idioms do you know that include the word "fish"? Explain how particular expressions relate to the film and its themes.

Writing about the Film

1. Write a character analysis of Edward Bloom that works from inferences about his character and that analyzes elements from the film for support. Your thesis should focus on inferences, not facts, and go beyond stating plot details in writing this character analysis.
2. Will's relationship with his father changes in the course of the film. How does this happen? Write an analysis that demonstrates Will's perception of his father at the beginning of the film and how it changes by the end.
3. Focusing on the multiple meanings of the title *Big Fish*, write a paper analyzing the significance of the fish imagery in key scenes throughout the film.
4. The town of Spectre seems more imaginary than real when we first encounter it. Write a descriptive analysis of the town that interprets its thematic significance.

Works Cited

Big Fish. Screenplay by John August. Dir. Tim Burton. Perf. Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Billy Crudup, Jessica Lange, Alison Lohman, Helena Bonham-Carter, Steve Buscemi, and Danny DeVito. Columbia Pictures, 2003. DVD.

Wallace, Daniel. *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. Print.

Select Film Reviews and Critical Analyses

<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/big-fish-2003>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/10/movies/10FISH.html>

<http://articles.latimes.com/2003/dec/10/entertainment/et-dargis10>