

Novel to Film Adaptation Analysis: A New Educational Approach to Dermatology Education

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Resumen

Muchas películas son adaptaciones de novelas de éxito. La identificación de las diferencias entre las novelas originales con contenido relacionado con las enfermedades de la piel y las películas inspiradas en ellas, y la comprensión del por qué de las variaciones introducidas por los directores, ha demostrado ser una excelente estrategia para enseñar a los estudiantes de medicina cuestiones relativas a la dermatología y a los medios de comunicación. Este tipo de clase constituye una vía adicional para que los estudiantes analicen textos y películas y a su vez adquieran conocimientos sobre las enfermedades cutáneas.

Palabras clave: cine, piel, dermatología, enseñanza, educación, adaptación cinematográfica.

Summary

Many films are adaptations of successful novels. Recognizing the differences between original novels with skin disease content and the derivative films, and understanding why these changes were made by filmmakers has proven to be a successful educational strategy for teaching medical students about dermatology and media. This class provides an additional avenue for medical students to study text and film as they learn about skin diseases.

Keywords: Cinema. Skin. Dermatology. Teaching. Education. Adaptation.

The author states that this article is original and that it has not been previously published.

Introduction

Bestselling novels are regularly transformed into films, but readers of the original text often discern key differences from film versions. Changes from text that includes dermatology content into film provides additional insight about skin diseases. To highlight differences between text and film, a new class was developed for medical students at The University of Texas Medical Branch. This course offering supplements an established introductory class about skin diseases depicted in film¹, and broadens student skills in film analysis as it relates to dermatology.

Course Materials and Logistics

This course is currently offered as both a selective and as an elective each Period. Both classes meet together, and the curriculum and course requirements are identical. There is a teleconferencing option for students not able to attend class on campus. The departmental dermatology lending library maintains complete

paired sets of all of the four required novels and film DVDs used in the class that enrolled students may borrow (Table 1). During the first three weeks of this class, students read the assigned novel and view its derivative film. Students analyze both the text and the movie for differences related to skin disease content, and electronically submit a one page analysis about the differences for instructor review and feedback. In addition, tutorials are offered to participating students biweekly. During the final week of the course, students read *The English Patient* and view its derivative film. These two works are compared to another novel/film pairing of the student’s choice from the previous three paired works studied. A 10 to 15 page comparative essay on this topic is required to receive course credit.

Curriculum

As in the general film class, the course syllabus is reviewed during the first class meeting and a lecture is given about the history of dermatology and film to pro-

Table1. Weekly Assignments.









	<p>Week 1</p> <p><i>Dear John</i> (Nicholas Sparks, 2007) and film (2010)</p> <p>Melanoma background reading</p>	
	<p>Week 2</p> <p><i>The Da Vinci Code</i> (Dan Brown, 2003) and film (2006)</p> <p>Albinism background reading</p>	
	<p>Week 3</p> <p><i>The First Wives Club</i> (Olivia Goldsmith, 1992) and film (1996)</p> <p>Aging skin background reading</p>	
	<p>Week 4</p> <p><i>The English Patient</i> (Michael Ondaatje, 1992) and film (1996)</p> <p>Burn background reading</p>	

Table 2. Major Changes From Novels to Films.

Film Title	Focus Character	Difference
<i>Dear John</i> (2010)	Tim	Melanoma (text) changed to lymphoma (film)
<i>The Da Vinci Code</i> (2006)	Silas	Eyes changed from pink/red (text) to blue (film)
<i>First Wives Club</i> (1996)	Elise	Lip augmentation (filler) scene added to film
<i>The English Patient</i> (1996)	Count Laszlo de Almásy	Burn more severe in novel

vide students with a background for later class work and film analysis. Two pre-assigned articles about how to analyze media and film through deconstruction techniques are also discussed^{2,3}. Students are exempt from this class meeting if they have already completed the general film class. Study questions are provided for each assignment. Students are asked to address the two questions, "Which depiction of skin disease was more realistic?" and "Why do you think that the novel was changed in the film version in regard to the skin disease depiction?" Answering the first question requires that the student analyze the skin disease depicted in the text and in the film, and study the disease independently from outside sources in order to form a judgment about accuracy. The second question requires that the student gain understanding about the multiple artistic choices that the filmmaker encountered when making the movie.

Discussion

This new class was first offered during the 2011-2012 academic year. It was created to develop student insight about how film alters skin disease content from the original author's description. Students taking this class are often surprised about major changes between text and film (Table 2). They are intellectually challenged to understand why these changes were made by the filmmaker, and in the process develop greater insight about perceptions about skin diseases and the filmmaking process. For example, in *Dear John*, Tim suffers from melanoma in the novel, but from lymphoma in the film. Filmmakers changed Tim's diagnosis, perhaps to spare the target teenage audience from the graphic

details of current melanoma treatment found in the text. Author Dan Brown in his novel, *The Da Vinci Code* created Silas as an albino with pink irises and "dark red pupils." Medical students typically enter this class believing that people with albinism usually have pink or red eyes, possibly due to inaccurate portrayals of albinism in literature and in film. However, the reality is that most human albinos have blue eyes due to the absence of melanin. *The Da Vinci Code* film corrects Silas' eye color, but continues to unrealistically imbue him with excellent uncorrected vision, a rarity among albinos due to nystagmus and other visual problems. However, student expectation for pink or red eyed albinos is so strong that even after viewing the movie, students recall that Silas' eyes were pink or red. Only after viewing the film again, and focusing on Silas' eyes, do they accept that his eyes are blue. In the film version of *The First Wives Club*, Elise has augmentation performed on her lips in an attempt to preserve her youthful appearance; this does not occur in the novel. Count Laszlo de Almásy's burn injuries in *The English Patient* are far more severe in the book than depicted in the film. This strategic change from the text may have helped this film achieve the Best Picture Academy Award in 1996.

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