

Movies today deliver images and themes that present assumptions or stereotypes of school to a wide variety of audiences. They try to invoke past or present emotions of school settings to engage the audience in the action. The concern is that misconceptions are developed and fostered through this popular medium, which in turn distorts the ultimate goals of educators. The movie *Sky High* focuses on a high school for super heroes and a group of students trying to adjust to their first year. Although the setting is fictional, the images created by the storyline reverberate in today's society and students.

The *Sky High* freshmen begin their first day in a huddled mass in the gymnasium, nervous about what is to follow. They are then subjected to a public induction where they are sorted arbitrarily by ability based on individual interpretation of their value. For many real high schools, this is the mechanism for introducing students to their new setting. The students are invited to the auditorium, welcomed by the principal and then disbursed to their respective classes based on placements from others. They are often frightened and concerned about the future. The stereotype does little to offer opportunities to overcome this scenario aside from saving the school from total destruction, which happens at the end of the movie.

The movie proceeds through the beginning weeks of school where Will, the main character, is presented with a choice between friends, who represent the underprivileged, and the popular students, who have the most power. One particular scene takes place in the lunchroom where he is sitting with the popular students. The new group ostracizes his friends when they arrive. Like reality, students are forced to choose between friends and popularity or education and popularity. Frequently, students under perform to avoid a negative social impact presumed from social experiences or educational success.

In both of these scenarios, the student is portrayed with a real conflict between social success and personal success. Today's typical student faces a litany of choices that pit home, school, and friends against each other. The formal research and my action research collaborate the role of social pressures on student achievement. I have witnessed students outperform their peers, be ridiculed or made to feel bad, and later under perform to regain favor with their peers. The personal dilemma for myself is how to intervene in a way that benefits the students. Movies interject simple lines of dialogue and the problems resolve according to the script. In high school settings, environmental factors combine with social factors to produce complex interrelationships that require individualized approaches. Even though *Sky High* has a fictitious setting, the core themes are relevant and representative of student issues today. (*Sky High*. dir. Mike Mitchell. Walt Disney Pictures. Gunn Films Production. c2005 Disney Enterprises, Inc.)

*Assignment requirements:*

*View a movie in which a school, students, a teacher, or a principal is/are the major focus of the movie (e.g., Mr. Holland's Opus, Teachers, Dead Poet's Society, etc.). Identify 2-3 images or themes about schools, students, teachers, and/or administrators that are portrayed in the movie. In a one page paper (double spaced), describe those images and discuss your reaction to and/or reflection on those images based on your experiences. Do they seem to be accurate? What do they convey to the public? Can you refute or support them based on what you know, from the research This is pretty open-ended, the main point is for you to focus on what information about schools, students, etc. is being conveyed in this mass media forum.*