

Film Worksheet 2.11

Atonement

Knowledge base

1. Review your knowledge of the novel.
 - a. Read the brief summary of the storyline.
 - b. Say what Briony accuses Robbie of, how Robbie and Cecilia's story seems to reach a happy ending and what the unexpected twist in the tale is.

Summary

Thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis accuses Robbie of raping her cousin, Lola. Robbie is the son of a servant who works for the Tallis family, the latter have been financing his education through university. Briony has no certainty it was Robbie but finds her accusation returns stability to her world which had been thrown into turmoil after she had witnessed moments of passion between Robbie and her sister. She casts Robbie in the role of sex maniac but then spends the rest of her life trying to atone for her false accusation and for ruining Cecilia and Robbie's happiness.

During the war Briony and Cecilia both work as nurses while Robbie is allowed to leave prison to serve his country. He nearly dies of infection but manages to return to England. The novel seems to end happily with Robbie and Cecilia reunited. Briony visits them to admit to her crime.

Then, in an unexpected twist in the final part of the novel, London 1999, Briony herself tells us that she had written a false ending to the story — Cecilia and Robbie actually both died during the war, she never went to them to confess and she is fated never to be able to atone for her sin.

2. The clip you will watch concerns the moment when Briony admits to her crime. Which characters will be present?

First impressions

3. Read the dialogue in your book (pages 404-405).
 - a. How does Robbie feel?
 - b. How will the actor playing Robbie deliver his speeches, do you think?



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(see film clip on the Class Video DVD)

4. Watch the clip for the first time.
 - a. Did the film version match your expectations in terms of the delivery?
 - b. Did the film dialogue differ very much from the original in the novel?

In more detail

Montage

5. Watch the clip again.
 - a. In this sequence, it is not always the case that the camera is focused on the person who is speaking. Why, do you think?
 - b. Analyse the composition in the frame when Robbie is in close up. Who is in the background? To what effect?
 - c. When Cecilia calms Robbie with a kiss, how is continuity created with the next shot of Briony alone? What does Briony's facial expression tell you?

Conclusions

6. Read the information about the film adapted from *Wikipedia* and answer the questions.
 - a. What were the film's director and Keira Knightly in two minds about?
 - b. Where was the production filmed?
 - c. What was special about the 64th Venice Film Festival?
 - d. What did critics see as the particular strengths of the film?



Atonement is a film adaptation of Ian McEwan's novel of the same name, directed by Joe Wright, based on a screenplay by Christopher Hampton, and starring James McAvoy, Keira Knightley, and Saoirse Ronan. It was released in 2007. Initially both the director and Knightley were unable to agree over

which character the actress should play, Briony or Cecilia. Filming took place in Redcar, London, Seven Sisters and Grimsby in North Lincolnshire.

Atonement opened the 64th Venice International Film Festival, making Wright, at the age of 35, the youngest director ever to open the event. The film won an Oscar for the Best Original Score at the 80th Academy Awards, and was nominated for six others, including Best Picture, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Supporting Actress (Saoirse Ronan). At the 61st British Academy Film Awards, it won the Best Film of the Year, and the Production Design award.

A general consensus among critics was that "*Atonement* features strong performances, brilliant cinematography, and a unique score" and is "an adept adaptation of the novel".

The film has grossed \$129,266,061 worldwide.