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Review Writing
Quill And Scroll
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“Pluck the Day, Trusting as Little as Possible In the Next One”

Dead Poets Society, released in 1989, is a classic coming-of-age movie about a group of high school students at a prep school in Vermont. It was written by Tom Schulman and directed by Peter Weir, who also directed *The Truman Show*. After its release, *Dead Poets Society* was regarded highly by viewers and critics alike for its writing and cinematography. However, the most significant part of *Dead Poets Society* by far is its characters and the incredible acting performed by an all-star cast.

The main star of the movie is Robin Williams, a massively popular comedian of his time. He is remembered now largely for comedies such as *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *Patch Adams*. In fact, *Dead Poets Society* was William's break-out role as a dramatic actor. In it, he portrays an English teacher at Welton Academy by the name of John Keating. Keating uses unorthodox teaching methods in his class, which ends up catching the negative attention of the administration and other staff. However, the students in his class love him as a teacher. His methods might be unconventional, but they work. They teach his students to think outside of the box and to enjoy their lives-- and to seize the day.

The main theme of *Dead Poets Society* is ‘Carpe Diem’ or ‘Seize the Day.’ Keating teaches his new students about ‘seizing the day’ during their first class. Throughout the rest of the film, each main student takes this theme to heart and uses it to overcome their various struggles. These characters- Todd, Neil, Charlie, and Knox- each portray a very different personality type and a different problem that can be helped by Keating's idea. These contrasts in the characterizations make it so that nearly anyone can relate to at least one of these characters, which is what makes *Dead Poets Society* so brilliant. It forces the viewer to form a connection with the characters and the story, which makes the ending that much more heartbreaking.

Arguably, the most important of the four boys is Neil Perry, played by Robert Sean Leonard. Neil is a high school student at Welton Academy who is studying to be a doctor at the behest of his parents. His father, specifically, wants him to focus only on his studies and give up everything that makes him happy. In Keating's class, Neil decides that his interpretation of ‘Carpe Diem’ is leading him to try out for a local production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He achieves the role of Puck, but when his father finds out, he attempts to forbid Neil from performing and threatens to withdraw Neil from Welton. Distraught, Neil commits suicide the night after the performance. Neil Perry's storyline throughout the movie is an example of ‘Carpe Diem’ to the worst extreme. In the end, his way of seizing the day was to take his own life rather than let his father control him any longer.

Todd Anderson, played by a young Ethan Hawk, is a new student at Welton Academy. There is a lot unknown about him, mostly since he has such a shy nature. One thing that is clear is that Todd struggles with social anxiety. At the beginning of the movie, Todd shares a room with Neil and struggles to befriend him and the other boys. He also struggles in Keating's class, when he is given an assignment to write a poem and read it in front of the class. Todd takes Keating's theme of 'Carpe Diem' and uses it to work through his anxiety. He becomes close friends with the other students and learns how to stand up for himself. At the end of the movie, when Keating is fired from Welton, Todd Anderson is the first of the students to stand up in class and fight for him. His way of seizing the day was to fight for what he believed in, rather than let his mind keep him quiet.

Charlie Dalton, portrayed by Gale Hansen, is the most open example of 'Carpe Diem' in the film, but in a way that takes it too far. Charlie comes from a richer background than the other boys, so he has the privilege of starting the film very sure of himself, unlike the others. He knows what he wants to do, and he is willing to do what it takes to get it. So, obviously, Keating's motto sticks out to him immediately. He puts it into effect during a school assembly by openly campaigning that the all-boys Welton Academy should begin admitting girls to the school. The staff takes great offense to this, and Charlie ends up being physically punished and almost dragging his friends into the mess he made. Charlie is a very interesting contrast to the rest of the characters because instead of learning to seize the day, Charlie has to learn the right way to seize the day. By the end of the movie, Charlie has learned how to be himself and make a change, but in the right way, instead of hurting others and himself to get what he wants.

Knox Overstreet is played by Josh Charles. While Todd and Neil are considered the A-Plot of the film, Knox's storyline is more of a side plot. He still, however, implements Keating's teachings of seizing the day into his life, along with the other boys. The way Knox does this is through a girl, Chris Noel, who he falls in love with at first sight. At the beginning of the movie, he is very unsure of himself. Throughout the B-plot of *Dead Poets Society*, he seizes the day by attempting to woo this girl, despite her already having a boyfriend. Then, in the end of the movie, he has grown more confident in himself and his poetry. Knox is one of the characters in the film that 'Carpe Diem' works for. By the end of the movie, Chris and Knox are happily dating.

As a viewer, I relate the most to Todd Anderson. I have struggled with severe social anxiety all my life, and I have rarely seen a character that I could relate to as much as him. This is what *Dead Poets Society* does best. It draws you in, gives you a character that you can not help but find yourself in, and at the end of the movie, you find that you know yourself and how to fight your battles better than you did before. I fell in love with this movie on my first watch, and now I live my life with Carpe Diem in the back of my head. "Pluck the day, trusting as little as possible in the next one."

