

**Dead Poet's Society**  
(Drama)(1989)

**Major Characters**

Mr. John Keating	Robin Williams
Young professor of English who is both inspiring and a bit eccentric.	
Neil Perry	Robert Sean Leonard
Student who wants to be an actor although his very strict father insists that he become a doctor.	
Todd Anderson	Ethan Hawke
Neil's very shy roommate.	
Knox Overstreet	Josh Charles
Student who falls in love with the daughter of old friends of his parents.	
Charlie	Gale Hansen
A very defiant student.	
Mr. Nolan	Norman Lloyd
The conservative and strict head of Welton Academy.	

**Plot Summary**

This is the story of students at the respected "Welton Academy," a preparatory school in Vermont. Such schools were (and often still are) very conservative institutions that serve as high schools for parents who insist on sending their children to the best universities. Welton, like many prep schools, admitted only boys. The movie takes place in 1959.

The plot centers on the influence of Mr. Keating, a young and exciting English and poetry teacher, who is determined to teach his students to live life with absolute passion. Mr. Keating, using poetry as his vehicle, teaches his students to challenge the institutions around them.

Inspired by Mr. Keating's philosophy of life, many of his students recreate the "Dead Poet's Society," a secret club which meets in a cave in order to discuss poetry, philosophy and other topics. The club, which Mr. Keating had created many years earlier when he was a student at Welton, would be completely unacceptable to the conservative school, which discourages students from "thinking for themselves." Indeed, Welton students should be in their rooms, studying only the prescribed materials that their teachers assign.

This movie is about what happens when these students decide to pursue their own desires, and to live life with the passion that Mr. Keating encouraged. Ultimately, it is about what happens when a few idealistic students find themselves confronted against conservative forces that resist all change, including the drive for personal self-determination.

### Possible Questions for Class Discussion

- 1) Was "Welton" the type of school you would want to attend? Why or why not?
- 2) What was good about the school? What was bad?
- 3) Do schools like Welton exist in your country?
- 4) If you were attending Welton, and Mr. Keating was your poetry teacher, how would you describe him to your parents?
- 5) Why did Mr. Keating tell his students to rip out the introduction of the Poetry book?
- 6) Why did the students decide to create a Dead Poet's Society?
- 7) Why was Neil's father so upset when Neil decided to try and be an actor?
- 8) Why did Neil decide to commit suicide?
- 9) Why did Mr. Nolan and the school administration force the boys to sign the paper blaming Mr. Keating for Neil's death?
- 10) Was Mr. Keating an admirable person? Was Mr. Nolan? Neil? Neil's father?