



<http://www.AlterationsMovie.com>

ALTERATIONS

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Facilitation Guide for the Classroom

Facilitation Guide:

Encourage Participation

Your role as a facilitator is to encourage participation from students and encourage their participation. In every group, there are students who feel more comfortable and these students often dominate the conversation and speak up more than others. When these students do speak up, you can focus your attention on others in the group.

The following statements can help to diversify participation:

- Let's hear from others in the group who haven't spoken yet.
- I'm going to ask that we ask others who have already spoken today to step back, so that new people can speak.

Help Students Make a Personal Connection

Great facilitators go beyond the facts of the film. They help students build a deeper connection to the material. Encourage students to share similarities and differences with the characters and their own experiences. Guide the discussion to help the students learn about themselves and their peers as they are reviewing the film.

Ensure a Safe Space for All Participants

While we cannot control what people will say and do, it's important to set collective agreements for the group prior to your discussion to set clear expectations. Your job as a facilitator is to be able to have a sense of everyone in the room. Try your best to make sure that people feel they have the chance to be heard. Do not allow any form of hate speech, derogatory language or other insensitive language go unchecked during the discussion.

Ask a Question, When You Want to Make a Statement

As the facilitator, your goal is to build the skills of the group. Asking questions to the group is the best way to spark a dialogue amongst the participants. Instead of saying, "The relationship between the mom and daughter is difficult," say, "How would you describe the relationship between the mom and daughter?" Have faith that the students in your group are critical answers. Create space in your discussion by only speaking less than 30% of the time in comparison to other students in the group.



Middle School Discussion Questions:

- What are your initial reactions after seeing "Alterations?" How did it make you feel?
- Was there a particular moment that surprised you in the film?
- Describe your relationship with your parents. How is it similar to J and Mary Jane's relationship? How is it different?

- Has there ever been a time when you felt misunderstood by your parents? What was the misunderstanding? Did you try to get your parents to understand? Why or why not?
- Imagine your parents memory gets erased and they are able to meet you for the first time tomorrow. In the film, a medical condition makes Mary Jane forget her identity when she wakes up from her heart attack. Ironically, her condition allows Mary Jane & J to develop a friendship. What would it be like if you met your parents as friends and they did not know that they were your parents? Do you think you could be friends with them? What types of conversations would you have with them as friends that you maybe couldn't have as a parent/child? What types of activities would you do for fun?

High School Discussion Questions:

- What are your initial reactions after seeing "Alterations?" How did it make you feel? Was there a particular moment in the film that surprised you?
 - The film opens with J's father kicking J's pet turtle. How do you feel about this? Is this important to the story? Why or why not? What do you learn about the father in the movie?
 - From what you've seen in the film, can you imagine what the relationship was like between J and her mother before the film takes place? What were the challenges in their relationship?
 - What type of relationship do you have with your parents and/or guardians?
 - Sometimes it's difficult to talk to our parents and/or guardians about issues. Why is it difficult for J to reveal to her mother that she is a transwoman? What are the consequences of this reveal?
 - In the film, J says, "I wasn't allowed to have long hair." Sometimes parents & guardians make rules for us because they think it's what is best for us. But sometimes their rules hurt us. Can you relate to J in this situation? Has there ever been a time when an adult made a rule that you felt was unfair? Why was it unfair?
 - Mary Jane says that mothers are "more supportive" and that men "are tougher". Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
 - J asks Mary Jane if she feels that these gender roles are "something one learns," or whether it is "just the way it is" meaning something people are born with. What is your opinion on this? Discuss why you feel the way you do. How do other people in the room feel about this?
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Activities for the Classroom

I. CROSSING THE LINE— Our Relationships with Our Families

Directions:

Clear the room of furniture. Ask students to stand at one end of the room in a line facing the empty room, shoulder to shoulder. This is a silent activity. Ask students to refrain from asking questions and to just interpret the statements with their walking distance to the best of their ability. There are no right or wrong answers. Students will be asked to cross the room as far the statement is true for them. The more true the statement is for them, the further they will walk across to the other end of the room. The less the statement is true for them, the less they will walk forward across the room. Students can also choose to stay at their original position for any one question. At the end of each question, all students should go back to their original shoulder-to-shoulder line in the back of the room where they started.

Start with the following example:

- “I am afraid to be hit by lightning.”

Suggested statements:

- I feel like I can talk to my parents about anything.
- My parents don't understand me at all.
- Sometimes I feel like my parents want me to act more like a boy or a girl.
- Sometimes it's difficult to talk to my parents about decisions I make.
- Sometimes I worry that parents judge me based on the way that I look.
- I wish I was closer to my parents.
- I wish my parents would listen to me more.
- My parents say I don't listen to them.
- If my parents and I were the same age, we would be friends.
- It's difficult to be a parent.
- It's difficult to be a child.
- I have a member of my family that I can talk to about anything.
- I wish my parents would give me more opportunity to make decisions about my future.
- My parents only want what's best for me.

Debrief Instructions:

Bring the group together in a circle. Debrief the activity as a large group. Ask the students to refrain from pointing out any specific person for crossing/not crossing the room and instead to reflect on the patterns they saw and on their own actions.

- Did you notice any patterns where most everyone crossed the room?
- Were there any statements that surprised you?
- What type of experiences do we have in common?
- What did we learn about being a child based on our experiences during this activity?
- What is it like to be an adult?

Conclude the debrief by summarizing some of the common themes the students discussed. Also acknowledge that we all have different experiences. Thank everyone for participating.

II. ROLE PLAYING / SKIT EXERCISES

At the end of *Alterations* when Mary Jane and J are sitting watching the sunset, Mary Jane says to J “You, know, you remind me of my younger son. I don’t know what happened to him...” Earlier in the film, we hear J ask herself “I wonder if my mother would like me as a girl.”

Directions:

Divide the classroom into 4-5 groups and have groups put on a skit on one or several of these ideas:

- SKIT IDEA #1 Imagine that J reveals her identity as Mary Jane’s daughter. What would that scene look and sound like? Each group is assigned to write and perform a skit that finishes the story of “*Alterations*.”
- SKIT IDEA #2 Each group should pick two actors. Each actor should pick a gender identification that is not their own and act if they were a person of that gender in a short skit. [If a student identifies as a genderfluid person then they should choose either male or female.] After the skit is over, students should discuss the choices that they made in their characterization. Why did they arrive at those choices? How do other people feel about the choices that each student made in their skit? Why? Discuss.
- SKIT IDEA #3 In the film J notices that Mary Jane’s house is practically empty. Mary Jane gives J a tour of her house and explains that her house is now a studio where she only works on art projects. During the tour we discover that Mary Jane has moved up to rooftop and now chooses to live out in the elements. Each student group should enact a skit where Mary Jane and J discuss her

choice to live on the roof of her house. Is this a good choice or a poor choice?
What ideas or feelings may be driving Mary Jane to make her choice?

Debrief Instructions:

Conclude the debrief by summarizing some of the reasons that the students discussed, which drive people to their choices. Also acknowledge that we all have different experiences but we all have made good choices and bad choices. Thank everyone for participating.

Directions:

Divide the classroom into 3 writing groups.

- Imagine each group has to write “Alterations 2.” the sequel. What would it be about? Would J and Mary Jane take on a new adventure? Present your story to the group. Discuss your story choices with the class.
- Imagine your job is to create a commercial spot to promote the film. What would your spot sound and look like? Why should people watch this film?
- Put together a movie poster to advertise “Alterations”. Discuss your choices with your peers.

Debrief Instructions:

Conclude the debrief by reviewing some of the choices that the students made to summarize the most important elements of the movie in these exercises. Do the creative choices made by the students reflect any moral values? Yes or No? Why or why not?

Explain the definition of “moral value.”

Moral values are the standards of good and evil, which govern an individual's behavior and choices. Individual's **morals** may derive from society and government, religion, or self. When **moral values** derive from society and government they may change as the laws and **morals** of the society change.

Ask students to reflect on whether movie advertisements that they see on television and the web project specific moral values of our society. If so, which ones? Discuss.

Thank everyone for participating.

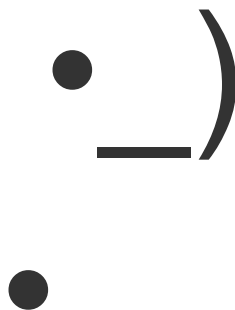
In “Alterations” The character named J is making a movie of her own. In a section of the film we hear her say the following: “No one know how lighting happens. It just does. It appears to follow a path, but in fact it doesn’t. It turns out that our brains are also nonlinear... and so is life; leaving us to make sense of it all. So maybe... we are meant to be like lightning.”

Directions:

Present a definition of “nonlinear” [e.g. *adjective*; not denoting, involving, or arranged in a straight line; random; of or denoting a digital process whereby a path is created by a series of independent choices.]

Divide the classroom into small discussion groups. Each group should discuss one of the following topics for a certain amount of time in their breakout sessions. When the time is up, each group should present their findings to the rest of the class.

- Why are J and Mary Jane each so interested in the qualities of lightning? Do they agree or disagree on this? Is lightning a metaphor in the film? Explain why or why not.
- Why is the film called “Alterations”? What things are “different” or “alternative” about this film? Why do you think the filmmaker made those choices?
- J and Mary Jane both have fears. What are they each afraid of? How are their fears similar? How are their fears different?
- Even though Mary Jane is the mother in the film and J is the daughter, it appears that Mary Jane is acting like a child and J is acting like an adult. How does this make you feel? Do we need to act a certain way according to our age? Why or why not? Are adults allowed to make mistakes? Are children allowed to make their own decisions? What makes a decision a good one? What makes a poor decision?



How To Be An Ally

From TRANS@MIT ALLIES TOOLKIT

- **Listen to trans voices.**

The best way to be an ally is to listen with an open mind to trans people themselves. They are the experts on their own lives! Talk to trans people in your community. Consult the reading and film lists in AlterationsMovie.com to find out where to learn more about trans lives.

- **Know your own limits as an ally.**

Don't be afraid to admit you don't know everything! When dealing with a trans person who may have sought you out for support or guidance, be sure to point that person to appropriate resources when you've reached the limit of your knowledge or ability to handle the situation. It is better to admit you don't know something than to provide information that may be incorrect or hurtful.

- **Don't assume you can tell if someone is transgender.**

Transgender and transsexual people don't all look a certain way or come from the same background, and many may not appear "visibly trans." Indeed, many trans people live most of their lives with very few people knowing their trans status.

- **Don't ask a trans person what their "real name" is.**

For some trans people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is simply a part of their life they wish to leave behind. Respect the name a trans person is currently using.

- **Don't make assumptions about a trans person's sexual orientation.**

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about who we're attracted to. Gender identity is about how we know our own gender. Trans people can identify as gay, straight, bisexual, or asexual.

- **Be sensitive about confidentiality, disclosure, and "outing."**

Some trans people feel comfortable disclosing their trans status to others, and some do not. Knowing a trans person's status is personal information and it is up to them to share it with others. Do not casually share this information, or "gossip" about a person you know or think is trans. Not only is this an invasion of privacy, it also can have negative consequences in a world that is very intolerant of gender difference—trans

people can lose jobs, housing, friends, and sadly have even been killed upon revelation of their trans status.

Understand the differences between “coming out” as lesbian, bisexual, or gay (LGB) and “coming out” as trans. Unlike “coming out” in a LGB context, where the act of disclosing one’s sexuality reveals a “truth” about that person’s sexual orientation, disclosing one’s trans status often has the opposite effect. That is, when a person “comes out” as trans, the listener often assumes the “truth” about the trans person is that they are somehow more fundamentally a member of their birth sex, rather than the gender/sex they have chosen to live in. In other words, sometimes “coming out” makes it more difficult for a trans person to be fully recognized as the sex/gender they are living in.

- **Do not tolerate anti-trans remarks or humor in public spaces.**

Consider strategies to best confront anti-trans remarks or jokes in your classroom, lab, office, living group, or organization. Seek out other allies who will support you in this effort.

- **If you don’t know what pronouns to use, ask.**

Be polite and respectful when you ask a person which pronoun they prefer. Then use that pronoun and encourage others to do so.

- **Be patient with a person who is questioning their gender identity.**

A person who is questioning their gender identity might shift back and forth as they find out what identity and/or gender presentation is best for them. They might, for example, choose a new name or pronoun, and then decide at a later time to change the name or pronoun again. Do your best to be respectful and use the name and/or pronoun requested.

- **Don’t try to tell a person what “category” or “identity” they fit into.**

Do not apply labels or identities to a person that they have not chosen for themselves. If a person is not sure of which identity or path fits them best, give them the time and space to decide for themselves.

- **Don’t assume what path a trans person is on regarding surgery or hormones, and don’t privilege one path over another.**

Affirm the many ways all of us can and do transcend gender boundaries, including the choices some of us make to use medical technology to change our bodies. Some trans people wish to be recognized as their gender of choice without surgery or hormones;

some need support and advocacy to get respectful medical care, hormones, and/or surgery.

- **Don't ask about a trans person's genitals or surgical status.**

Think about it—it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about the appearance or status of their genitalia, so it isn't appropriate to ask a trans person that question either. Likewise, don't ask if a trans person has had "the surgery." If a trans person wants to talk to you about such matters, let them bring it up. Don't ask a trans person how they have sex.

Similar to the questions above about genitalia and surgery—it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about how they have sex, so the same courtesy should be extended to trans people.

- **Don't police public restrooms.**

Recognize that gender variant people may not match the little signs on the restroom door—or your expectations! Encourage schools, businesses and agencies to have unisex bathroom options, and offer to accompany a trans person to the bathroom, in a "buddy system," so they are less vulnerable.

- **Don't just add the "T" without doing work.**

"LBGT" is now a commonplace acronym that joins lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender under the same umbrella. To be an ally to trans people, gays, lesbians and bisexuals need to examine their own gender stereotypes, their own prejudices and fears about trans people, and be willing to defend and celebrate trans lives.

