



## Movie Club

### Good Will Hunting (1997)

#### Discussion Questions

1. Class distinction is prominent in the film. We see the “Southies” actively assert themselves in the face of academic elitism. This occurs with Will and his friends, as well as between Sean and Lambeau. There is also some conflict with Skyler, although this is largely from Will’s side. How does the film portray the two different lifestyles in the film (the “towns”—the locals—and the “gowns”—those affiliated with the universities)? Does it present one as superior to or more noble than the other? How so?
2. Several characters have a stake in Will’s life and success: Lambeau feels he is jeopardizing both his gift and something special from the world, and also depriving him personally of closure relating to a difficult formula; Chuckie believes Will is betraying the other Southie’s if he fails; Skyler wants Will to accompany her to Standford, meaning he has to leave the only world he has ever known; and Sean wants Will to become more engaging as a person, more responsive and less defensive. Are all of these motives in Will’s best interests? Do any of the characters have selfish motives regarding Will? Who and how? Are any of these ‘selfish’ motives mutually beneficial?
3. The success-failure idea comes up a great deal and in particular with Sean and Lambeau and Will and Chuckie. In the former Lambeau accuses Sean of being a failure, and in the latter Chuckie threatens Will if he abandons his possible success. How do these two relationships differ in their approaches to this success-failure idea? Do they come to similar conclusions?
4. The centre the film is in its relationships, especially on the changing nature of relationships. Think about the bond between Chuckie and Will, Skyler and Will, Lambeau and Will, Sean and Will, and Sean and Lambeau. How do these relationships change? How do the people change in response to these changing relationships?
5. The screenplay was written by Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, because, they claim, they weren’t offered satisfying roles and decided to write their own. The gamble, although requiring some negotiating with different studios, payed off, and established both their careers. Does this give the film a “real life” parallel for the leads? Are there any other parallels between characters and events in the film and the real lives of those involved that you find striking?

6. Both Sean and Will have demons. Sean's are his increasing isolation due to the grief of his wife's passing, something that is enhanced due to the strong bond he shared with her, placing her above all else ("I had to go see about a girl"). His grief and loneliness are now preventing him from gaining new experiences in life. This is particularly poignant as we know the parallels with Robin Williams's real life struggles with depression (Hattori, [What Good Will Hunting Teaches Us About Men, Shame, and Suicide](#), 2014). For Will it is the abuse he suffered in early life, which makes him incapable of trusting anyone (with the possible exception of Chuckie) and prevents him from striving in his life and forming meaningful bonds. What is it that binds these two struggles? What is it about the two characters that allow them to help each other? What are the differences between these two characters?
  
7. Although the film is universally acclaimed, some of the thoughts against it are that it is "predictable" and that it is "the individual moments, not the payoff, that make it so effective" (Ebert, [Good Will Hunting \[Review\]](#), 1997). Another wrote that "while the charismatic performances of Damon and Affleck make "Good Will Hunting" a difficult entertainment to resist, doing just that is not as hard as the film would like to think" (Turan, [Good Will Hunting \[Review\]](#), 2001). Both reviews praised the film, but felt that it lacked in some ways. What is your assessment of the film? Are there flaws that you feel need to be addressed?