*Boyhood*

[*Boyhood*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1065073/); IFC Films, 2014; Directed by Richard Linklater; Starring Ellar Coltrane, Patricia Arquette, Ethan Hawke, & Lorelei Linklater; Rated R; [Watch the trailer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0oX0xiwOv8).

Summary:

The tagline of *Boyhood* is “12 years in the making,” a fitting phrase for a project that began filming in 2002 with a six-year-old boy, which followed him for twelve years into 2013. With a skeletal script, director Richard Linklater shot scenes for several days each year for a grand total of 45 days. The finished product is a story of a boy as he grows from his first grade concerns (wasps, bicycles, and an annoying sister) to those of a college freshman (girls, identity, and girls). Not only did Linklater use the same boy as an actor for twelve years but the same actors for the boy’s father, mother, and sister. *Boyhood* is about a boy, Mason, but also family, growing up, divorce, alcoholism, parenting, dating, disappointment, and the hope of the future.

Themes, Symbols, & Motifs:

* Time. Mason paints over the doorframe where he and his sister’s heights were measured through their childhood. Time is also marked by Mason’s visibly changing body and interests as well as his mother’s revolving door of unstable men.
* Boyhood. The film is also about broader childhood and adulthood and the question of exactly when one ends and the other begins.
* Identity. Mason wrestles with questions of identity and is confronted in the dark room by his teacher, who asks, “Who do you wanna be, Mason? What do you wanna do?”
* Moments. The film shows both big and small moments: breakfast, marriage, divorce, graduation, baseball games, breaking up, college, etc. In the final scene, Mason muses with a new friend on whether or not life is made up of big moments or the small ones, whether you seize the moment or let the moment seize you. Ultimately, *Boyhood* advocates for a life lived in the present.
* Meaning. Both parents ponder the meaning of life. Mason’s father says, when asked what is the point of everything, that, “We’re all just winging it.” Mason’s mother states, regarding her life going by in a flash of milestones, “I just thought there would be more.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the film achieve by using the same actors for twelve years?
2. Is there a difference between growing up and aging?
3. *Boyhood* has no original musical score and only uses published material. What effect does this have?
4. Does the film struggle or benefit from not having a single, linear plotline?
5. Would an alternate tagline fit this film, one spoken by Mason, Sr.: “Life doesn’t give you bumpers”?
6. Does the film represent a fairly universal experience of boyhood, or is this a narrow presentation?
7. Mason develops an interest in photography. How does photography serve as a fitting metaphor for the film’s ruminations on meaning and moments?