

GATTACA dir. Andrew Nichols

- FILM STUDY (Paired Text 1) -

SEGMENT 1: OPENING CREDITS

1. **At the very start of the opening credits, two epigraphs are given on blank black screen, write them down. Do these statements agree with each other? Why or why not? (At the end of the movie, make sure to return to these statements at the end of the movie, and consider which viewpoint the filmmakers support?)**
 - Niccols includes the two epigraphs to highlight the ethical terrain that Gattaca deals with, and how genetic engineering can be used both to advantage society and discriminate against certain individuals.
2. **Which letters are repeated in each of the cast members' names in the opening credits? Considering the four basic nucleotides of DNA are: Guanine, Adenine, Thymine, Cytosin, - what might be the significance of these letters?**
 - In the opening credits, the letters G, A, T, and C are repeated in each of the cast members names. These letters symbolise the basic nucleotides of DNA are: Guanine, Adenine, Thymine, Cytosin - and which can in the right combination spell GATTACA.

SEGMENT 2: VINCENT/JEROME'S ROUTINE

3. **Describe Vincent/Jerome's preparations for the day at Gattaca? What is he trying to do?**

PREPERATIONS

- exfoliates to remove dead skin
- Brushes hair to remove loose hairs
- Shaves with a 'cut-throat' razor
- When he leaves the shower cubicle, he incinerates anything inside.
- Fridge full of urine/blood/hair
- Attaches fake finger prints with blood for testing on entry
- Attaches a fake urine pouch
- Contact lens to change his eye colour and make it possible for him to see
- Closely copies the picture like the real Jerome.
- Vincent/Jerome's preparations attempt to ensure that none of Vincent's invalid DNA is left at Gattaca, as only a valid like Jerome Morrow would be allowed to participate in the space program.

SEGMENT 3: GATTACA

4. **The film, Gattaca, takes place in the "not too distant future", describe the setting, lighting, costuming and style of the movie at this early stage? Consider how it appears both science-fiction modern and retro.**

SETTING:

- the world appears clean and sterile
- Ambiguous - futuristic architecture and some gadgets, , old cars charged by electricity, cops wear, space travel (but atypical for science fiction)
- The similarities to the contemporary world, highlights the connections between the film's plot and current issues in science

LIGHTING

- Mostly Yellow lighting in the flashback scenes
- Blue lighting in some of the Gattaca scenes
- Vincent/ Jerome hides in the shadows.

COSTUMING

- costuming is formal suits
- trench coats and hats

FILM NOIR & SCIENCE-FICTION

- Voice-over
- Conflicted/compromised hero
- Detectives in trench coats and hats
- Shadows

SEGMENT 4: VINCENT/JEROME'S FLASHBACKS

5. **How does the director differentiate between the current events taking place at Gattaca, and the story of Vincent/Jerome's origins? You might like to think about the colouring of these scenes, narration, editing, and camera positioning.**

FLASHBACKS

- Voice-over narration as Jerome/Vincent tells his story.
 - Shapes are non-linear and individualised compared to the repetitive linear world of Gattaca
 - Lush orchestral music
 - Lighting is very yellow
 - FADE between the flashbacks and the normal story
6. **What is the difference between a VALID and an INVALID in this world? How are INVALIDS like Vincent/Jerome discriminated against?**

INVALIDS DISCRIMINATION ('Faith births'/ 'God child'/ 'Degenerates')

- Employment – forced to work menial jobs as janitors, cleaners, labourers, street sweepers,
 - Education – Not allowed access to some facilities, due to insurance concerns
 - Forced to live in poor areas such as shanty towns, or are homeless
 - Blamed for criminal activities, due to not having the best genes
 - Not encouraged to excel in life, instead forced to work lowly jobs
7. **What is Vincent/Jerome's dream? How does his status as an INVALID prevent him from achieving this dream? What might this dream symbolise to Vincent/Jerome?**
 - Vincent/Jerome aspires to be an astronaut and go to space, but as he is an INVALID his genetic faults such as a weak heart, impaired vision, and possible violent temperament means that he will be restricted to the most menial of tasks.
 - Space and in particular this mission to Titan, represents to Vincent/ Jerome the potential to exceed society's discrimination and be free of the constraints placed on invalids.
 8. **Describe the relationship between Vincent/Jerome and Anton. What does it mean for Vincent/Jerome when he saves Anton from drowning? What does it motivate him to do?**
 - The relationship between the two brothers is tense and competitive, as Anton is encouraged by both their parents and society to see himself as superior as he is not a "faith birth".
 - Firstly their father refuses to give Vincent his name and instead gives it to his perfect child, Anton. Secondly, the scene where they record 8 year old Anton's height as being taller than 10 year old Vincent and afterwards a disappointed Vincent/Jerome removes the record of his height.

- When the boys are at the beach, and Vincent/Jerome wants to play blood brothers with Anton, and cuts his thumb on a shell, but Anton refuses to mix his brother's impure blood with his own; instead he challenges Vincent/Jerome to an ocean swimming race.
- Finally, one day Vincent/Jerome out swims his brother and has to rescue him from drowning. This symbolises to him that he can overcome his status as an INVALID and do what society has deemed impossible for him.

9. Describe Vincent/Jerome's appearance, costuming and portrayal in this section.

- Vincent/Jerome wears glasses (obvious sign of an invalid)
- Shorter and weaker, like a typical science 'nerd'
- He presents as being hunched over, small, especially in comparison to his younger brother.
- His appearance is untidy and he has long hair, compared to his brother.
- Clothes are ill-fitting
- His brother appears taller, stronger, more muscly in comparison

SEGMENT 5: VINCENT/JEROME & EUGENE/JEROME

10. Who is Eugene/Jerome? Why is he willing to sell his identity to Vincent? How is he portrayed? Consider his position on the screen, the use of shadows and props.

- Eugene/Jerome was genetically engineered to be as close to perfect as possible, with none of the physical faults of an INVALID. However, he comes second in a major swimming race and struggles to accept that he is not perfect. Because of this, he walks in front of a car and is paralysed from the waist down.
- Eugene/Jerome is motivated to sell his identity initially for financial gain.
- Camera work: High angle, looking down at Eugene/Jerome who is often positioned in the shadows and slumped in his wheelchair. The room in which he lives is full of empty alcohol bottles.

11. Vincent/Jerome is worried that he and Eugene/Jerome don't look enough alike, but the German explains that "With this guy's DNA tucked under your arm you could go anywhere...Blood knows no nationality...He's still a walking, talking fully protected member of society?" What does he mean by this?

- The German means that in this society, no longer does a person's skills and education matter, rather its their genetic make-up and what this says about them.

12. Look at the shape of the stair case in Jerome/Eugene's apartment. Does it remind you of anything? What might it symbolise about Vincent/Jerome and Jerome/Eugene's relationship?

- The staircase in Eugene/Jerome's apartment is shaped metaphorically like the Helix of a strand of DNA. It signifies the closeness of Vincent/Jerome's and Eugene/Jerome's relationship, and how Vincent/Jerome needs Eugene/Jerome's DNA to ascend into space.

13. How has Vincent/Jerome's appearance changed from the earlier flashbacks? Make sure to comment on his new appearance, costuming and portrayal.

- Body posture: Appears taller, appears more muscly, no longer wears glasses, blue contacts instead
- Costuming: Wears a well-fitting suit, cleanly shaven, tidy hair
- Presents as being confident and capable.

SEGMENT 6: INVESTIGATING THE CRIME

14. Why does Director Josef rule out the fact that one of Gattaca's elite could have committed the murder? What is he saying about VALIDs versus INVALIDs in this world and their assumed personal characteristics?

- Director Josef argues that no one in Gattaca who is part of the space program could be responsible for the murder, as these are society's best examples of genetically engineered beings. He blames an INVALID for the murder as they are more likely to be prone to violence, due to their imperfect DNA.

15. Why doesn't Anton reveal to Detective Hugo, that the INVALID they are searching for is his brother?

- Anton doesn't reveal to Detective Hugo that the INVALID they are searching for is his brother, as he does not want to be associated with his imperfect, prone to violence, sibling.

16. How did Eugene/Jerome break his back? How is this example used to criticise genetic engineering?

- Eugene/Jerome broke his back, when he attempted to commit suicide by walking in front of a car after coming second in a major swimming race. This example highlights the problems and pressures with a society where people are expected to be perfect because of their DNA, and what happens when someone like Eugene/Jerome fails to live up to expectations.
- "I stepped right out in front of it..."

SEGMENT 7: THE CRIME IS SOLVED AND VINCENT/JEROME DEPARTS FROM EARTH

17. Why is it significant that on the day Vincent/Jerome asks Jerome/Eugene to "be himself", that Eugene/Jerome climbs the staircase and meets Anton and Irene? What does it say about how the character Eugene/Jerome has changed since meeting Vincent/Jerome?

- It is significant that Eugene/Jerome manages to climb the staircase despite his disability and meet Anton and Irene, as highlights how he has changed since meeting Vincent/Jerome. Like a swimming race, he is competing against the clock to climb the staircase and answer the door. Eugene/Jerome achieves this victory, as he is motivated by his desire to help Vincent/Jerome and shows how his character has become committed to their shared dream.

18. Vincent/Jerome lets Irene's hair fly away in the wind? Why is this symbolically important?

- Vincent/Jerome lets Irene's hair fly away in the wind, as he realises there is more to people than what their DNA says about them. It also represents his own position, where his DNA is not an accurate representation of who he really is.

19. Why does Lamar protect Vincent/Jerome and allow him to achieve his dream?

- Lamar protects Vincent/Jerome as his own son is an INVALID or "god child", and he sees in Vincent/Jerome's success in becoming an astronaut a possible future for his own child that isn't genetically determined.

20. Gattaca is a science-fiction film, but is not typical of that genre – explain why?

- *Gattaca* is a science-fiction film as it takes place in the "not too distant future" where a person's fate is determined by their genetic make-up, and focusses on a character who is obsessed with space travel; however, it ignores the typical clichés of the genre such as rockets, brightly metallic surfaces and advanced gadgets.

21. How is Vincent/Jerome's departure to space a rejection of the world of Gattaca and its values?

- When Vincent/Jerome departs for space, he says that he is "going home" as he sees that outside of earth his status as an INVALID does not matter anymore and he is free to be who he really is.

PART 2 – THINKING ABOUT KEY IDEAS

For each idea, listed below comment upon what the film has to say about it. You might like to use the provided questions to help prompt your reflections.

a) GENETICS & NATURE

- What is natural?
- Are there benefits to genetic engineering?
- What does it mean to be human?

b) DISCRIMINATION

- What kinds of discrimination appear in *Gattaca*?
- How do characters resist and overcome this system?
- How are people's bodies and names used against them?

c) SCIENCE & DREAMS

- How is science used both to encourage and oppress dreams in *Gattaca*?