



FILM: **EIGHTH GRADE**

FDG RATING: 3.6 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Bo Burnham: *director*
Elsie Fisher: *actress, Kayla*
Josh Hamilton: *actor, Mark (Kayla's dad)*
Jake Ryan: *actor, Gabe*

DATE: August 18, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **EIGHTH GRADE**

Published critics described Eighth Grade as a smart, sharp coming of age dramedy so even those of us who preferred not to be reminded of our own eighth grade experiences, looked forward to an entertaining film. Despite what some of us considered flaws in the premise and plot, we thought the young Elsie Fisher was outstanding as 13 year old Kayla, a socially inept, lonely adolescent who wants so much to be liked. She plays the character with hunched shoulders, self-conscious gait, and of course, inevitable pimples.

Being so socially shy, it surprised many of us that she put herself front and center on social media hosting a Youtube series called "Kayla's Korner" where she gives advice to an imagined audience of her peers. (In our day we kept diaries that we shared with practically no one as we wrote about our feelings, crushes, and teenage angst without much analysis about how to be more popular while envying the popular clique and dreaming about being noticed by just one of the popular guys.) We wondered if it was out of character for Kayla to be self-videoing herself, close-up, discussing topics like "Being Yourself" and "Putting Yourself Out There". But it did seem authentic as we watch her intermittently stumble over her words and frequently glance at her notes.

She has no friends which also seemed odd. We remember even the most awkward pre-teen/teen in our class had found at least one other awkward friend. She is being raised by her Dad who is her biggest fan and trying very hard to be understanding and permissive but who is also somewhat inept and awkward at dealing with this teenage phase. Kayla is frequently mortified by her Dad's actions such as when he follows her to the mall where she has been invited by her high school mentor to hang out with a few other high-schoolers. This episode also seemed unlikely to most of us. Why would an evidently popular high school girl invite an awkward, socially inept 13 year old to hang with her friends?

The swimming pool scene was our favorite embodiment of Kaya's disastrous world. Arriving late to the swimming pool birthday party of one of the most popular girls, (evidently Kala was invited by the prodding of the girl's mother who was hoping Kayla's Dad would stay for the party) we watch her done her one piece swim suit as if it was a (flimsy) suit of amour as she prepares to face her, not-quite-enemies (since they don't even know she exists even though she is entering their midst) and while the fashion plate bikini clad teens frolic gregariously in the pool with the adolescent popular dudes, she struggles to get the sliding glass door open and then self-consciously but bravely joins at the edge of the entourage. The snorkel masked head of a quirky, nerdy boy cousin pops up from the water (probably also only invited by the mother's prodding) next to Kayla and he instantly initiates a babbling friendly conversation. (Riley is my personal favorite character in the film.) At this point, Kayla's coming of age journey takes a sweet pivotal leap.

Film discussion participants noted episodes where Kayla could have, but didn't, get drawn into bad situations. It was also comforting that teens in the movie theater audience expressed empathy and relief at these dangerous precipices, even hearing the teens in hushed voices telling Kayla to get out of the car, when one of the older boys wanted to take advantage of her.

One resident reviewer said she was really drawn into Kayla's world, seeing it through her eyes. We were all relieved not to see bullying in the film and glad that she survives her coming of age unscathed.

We were treated to a glimpse of today's eighth graders with their cell phone appendage but not too much else has changed in terms of the emotional journey. For us Eighth Grade earned about a B+, with a cumulative average score of 3.6 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

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www.filmdiscussiongroup.com