

500 Days of Summer (2009)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 1; L-2 ; S/N-5. Running Time: 1 hour 35 min.

I loathe my life;

I will give free utterance to my complaint;

I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

Job 10:1

Although the situation of TomTom and Summer in one of their Hansen (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) ishappier moments.

not nearly as serious or tragic as that of the biblical Job, Tom²⁰⁰⁹ Fox Searchlight Pictures is indeed filled with bitterness, and even a touch of loathing, as we see in the opening words written across the screen. And we are warned up front by the narrator that this "is not a love story." It certainly is not, director Marc Webb and screenwriters Scott Neustadter and Michael H. Weber gifting us with a smart and funny tale that subverts the usual Hollywood romantic comedy. This is the film for all those who gag over the greeting card sentiments of the usual Mother's Day or wedding anniversary card. Indeed, our disappointed hero Tom works at a greeting card company where he is expected to manufacture artificial sentiments on a daily basis.

He is smitten when he first sees Summer Finn (the glorious Zooey Deschanel), newly hired as his boss's assistant. She firmly tells him that she is not interested in a lasting relationship, but as she succumbs to Tom's advances, his hopes rise. The film jumps around all over the "500 days" of their relationship, inter-cutting between warm, romantic scenes, and those of bickering and misunderstanding.

The director makes considerable use of the split-screen technique, the best of which shows Tom, after a long period of non-communication with her, accepting Summer's invitation to a party. On the left side of the screen is Tom's expectation—a meaningful kiss and many happy moments spent with Summer; and on the other is reality, with Summer welcoming him, but nothing romantic, his spending much of the time alone, and then, when she displays an engagement ring, leaving in sorrow. There are also some delightful riffs on musicals and Italian Neo-realism films that movie buffs will enjoy. There is a lot of fun in this cut above the usual summer film, and also some insights worth sharing with a group of young adults who want more than just escapist entertainment from their film fare.

For reflection/Discussion Many spoilers below.

1. How does the film live up to what the Narrator says, "This is a boy meets girl story. It is not a love story" ?
2. What do you think Summer finds missing in their relationship?
3. What does the following exchange at a party reveal about Tom?

A partygoer asks him what he does, and he replies that he writes greeting cards. Summer adds, "Tom could be a really great architect if he wanted to be," and the guest responds, "That's unusual, I mean, what made you go from one to the other?" Tom's reply, "I guess I just figured, why make something disposable like a building when you can make

something last forever, like a greeting card.” 4. How does the film capture the joy of falling in love? (Note that it is Tom who is the one who expresses this.) And the pain of finding one’s hopes and dreams dashed?

5. Do you think that Tom learns from his experience with Summer? How are we shown this by what he does after he realizes their relationship is over, and by his last act in the film? (By contrast, how had he earlier misunderstood the ending of *The Graduate*?)

6. Do you agree with his *Forest Gump*-like philosophy, or do you believe that there is some guiding force or power out there?