

Admission (2013)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V-5 ; L-4 ; S/N-1 . Running time: 1 hour 57 min.

*For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—
let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,
to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
Proverbs 1:2-6*

Hard working Princeton University admissions officer Portia at New Quest School is introduced by Paul to Portia Nathan (Tina Fey) has student Jeremiah. just one rival for the coveted post of Chief Admissions Officer when her current boss retires at the end of this school year. But then a former classmate John Pressman (Paul Rudd) invites her to the campus of his alternative high school to meet the gifted but academically underachieving Jeremiah (Nat Wolff), whom he believes could come into his own at Princeton. He also believes that Jeremiah might be the son she had out of wedlock and had given up for adoption.

2013 Focus Features

The development of the two—Portia from career-obsessed, child

avoiding workaholic, and of John, carefree and constantly traveling to engage in anti-poverty projects despite the desire of his young adopted son to stay in one place for more than a year—make this romantic comedy a delight to watch, and proves that Tina Fey is as appealing on the big screen as she is on the tube.

The scenes in which Portia reads the highly inflated resumes of some of the over 20,000 applicants are funny in that we see the image of the student standing to one side. When, as she has to in the majority of cases, rejects the application, the student falls through a trap door in the floor, and is quickly replaced by another hopeful.

Even funnier, however, are the scenes in which she makes her first pitch at New Quest School and all the ones involving Lily Tomlin as her ultra feminist mother Susannah. In the first case, when Portia gives her usual sales pitch at New Quest, she discovers that the students, indoctrinated by Paul's anti-establishment teaching, challenge her, charging that Princeton's role is that of a "corporation" devoted to the status quo. Then there is the scene-stealing Lily Tomlin's Susannah, a mother who has dropped out of the status quo and argues with her daughter over about every thing the younger woman is trying to achieve.

Although some parts of the plot seem contrived, over all the film is so much better than most romantic comedies that it is a pleasure to watch.

For Reflection & Discussion Spoilers near the end.

1. What kind of person is Portia when we first meet her? What are her goals? What seems to be her way of relating to other people? What do you think she lacks?

2. What kind of a person is John? From his relationship with his adopted son, what do you think of his "do-goodism" ? Does it have to do more with himself or with the people whom he

aspires to help? What has he failed to see in his son?

3. What kind of a person is Susannah? What does she and her daughter each have that the other needs to become well-rounded persons? Do you think that she uses her feminism as a weapon? What do you see that supports either answer to this?

4. What do you think of the way in which all parties—parents, students, and admission officers—are portrayed? If you are any of the above, what do you think of the admissions system? Why do so many want to get into a prestigious university such as Princeton, as compared to a local community college? Is it for the love of earning or for the financial and social rewards that a degree from such a college confers.

5. What do you think of Jeremiah? What students have you known that do not fit into the system used to screen applicants? What is his chief attribute as a student that might make him an ideal student?

6. What do you think of the ethics of Portia in getting Jeremiah accepted? How is it important that there be provisions made for such students as Jeremiah—and yet, given the enormous number of applicants, do you think that this can be done?

7. The author of the Book of Proverbs, often called Qoheleth or The Preacher, writes about wisdom: what do you see is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Does a university degree from a prestigious university imply that a student will have gained more wisdom than one graduating from a community college? What do you think determines this? Do you think any of the persons in this film have gained wisdom by the end?