

SHATTERED GLASS

Coming to Theaters November 2003
www.shatteredglassmovie.com



Dear Educator:

By the mid-1990's, a series of highly acclaimed articles in *The New Republic* had made a likeable young staff writer named Stephen Glass one of America's hottest journalists. Soon he was reeling in freelance assignments from such high-profile publications as *Harper's*, *George*, and *Rolling Stone*. But in 1998, a strange turn of events sent Glass' world crashing down around him when it became evident that many of his articles had been nothing more than figments of his own fertile imagination.

Shattered Glass, a new film from Lions Gate Films, recreates the saga of Stephen Glass and his deceptions, casting a bright spotlight on questions about the integrity of American journalism that still remain open for debate today. Written and directed by Billy Ray and starring Hayden Christensen, Peter Sarsgaard, Hank Azaria, Chloe Sevigny, Melanie Lynskey, Steve Zahn, and Rosario Dawson, *Shattered Glass* is scheduled to arrive in theaters November 2003.



To help you bring the lessons of this powerful film into your classroom, we are pleased to provide this free study guide for *Shattered Glass*, developed in cooperation with Lions Gate Films and Yahoo! Search. The guide is designed for use with college and high school students as a supplement to courses in journalism, communications, civics, social studies, and technology, offering activities that lay the groundwork for informed viewing when students see the film in theaters and for exploring critical issues through follow-up discussion in class.

We encourage you to share this study guide with other at your school. Although the materials are copyrighted, you have all components of the guide for educational purposes.

Please return the enclosed reply card to let us know your opinion of this study guide. Your comments are important to us and help ensure that our free educational programs continue to meet classroom needs.

Sincerely,

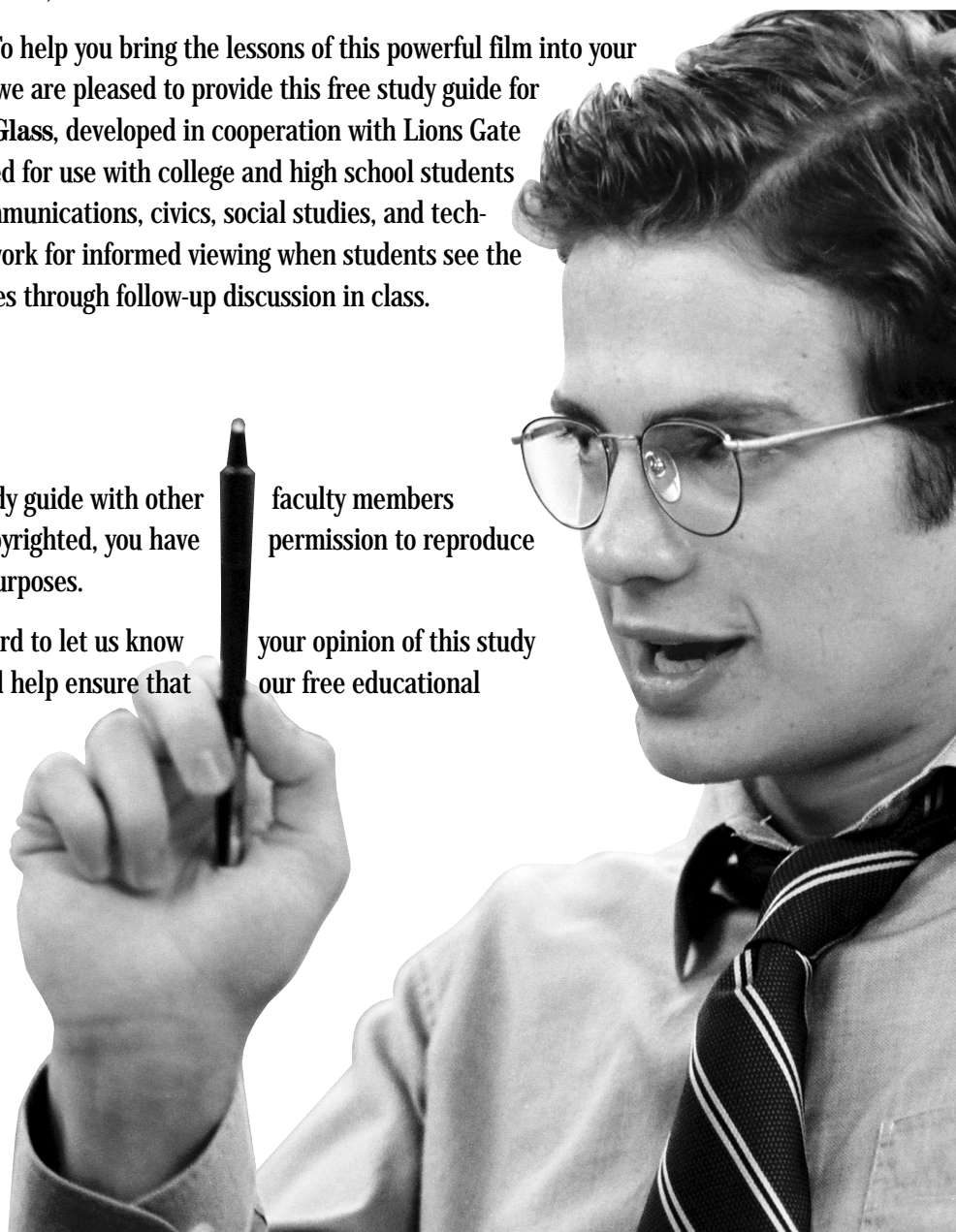
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Introduction

Shattered Glass tells the story of Stephen Glass, a staff writer for the respected current events weekly, *The New Republic*, and a freelance feature writer for publications such as *Rolling Stone*, *Harper's* and *George*. By the mid-1990s, Glass' articles had turned him into one of the most sought-after young journalists in Washington, but then a bizarre chain of events suddenly stopped his career in its tracks when it was discovered that his reporting was based on fabrication. The film is a study of a very talented – and at the same time very flawed – character, and offers a look inside our culture's noblest profession, one that protects our most precious freedoms by revealing the truth, showing what happens when our trust in that profession is called into question.



Request a Screening

If you would like to request a screening of *Shattered Glass* for your class, please contact Laura Sosin at Lions Gate Films, (310) 985-4907. We will do our best to either send you a screening copy on VHS or set up a screening for you on campus.

Target Audience

This educational program is designed for use with college and high school students as a supplement to courses in journalism, communications, civics, social studies, and technology.

Educational Objectives

- To enrich student viewing of the new film *Shattered Glass* by highlighting some ethical questions raised by the career of Stephen Glass.
- To explore the relationship between good character and good journalism in the context of pressures for professional success.
- To examine the editorial process designed to safeguard against fraudulent reporting and test this process in practice.
- To consider the editor's role in maintaining journalistic integrity and weigh the editor's competing responsibilities to both support reporters and hold them to the highest standards.
- To investigate incidents of alleged journalistic misconduct similar to the one portrayed in *Shattered Glass* for insight into their impact on the credibility of American journalism.
- To gain experience in using Internet resources like Yahoo! Search as aids to research in journalism and other areas of academic study.

Using the Program Components

1. Photocopy the enclosed activity sheets to provide a complete set for each student in your class. At the same time, make a master copy of the teacher's guide and activity sheets to share with other faculty members in your school.
2. Display the enclosed wall poster in your classroom to introduce the program and generate student interest.
3. Plan to use the program both as preparation for viewing *Shattered Glass* in the theater (individually or as a class) and as a basis for follow-up discussion.
4. Note that each classroom activity includes a Yahoo! Search project designed to add context and help students connect the film drama to the people, events, and issues it portrays. Plan to have students complete these projects on their home computers, on an Internet-equipped classroom computer, or in your school media center.

Activity 1 The Secret of My Success

This activity explores the relationship between successful journalism and journalistic success, focusing on the part character and personality play in shaping a career.

Part 1 introduces students to Stephen Glass through a series of vignettes taken from the film *Shattered Glass*. Each shows Glass in a seemingly positive light, and students are asked to explain how his behavior in these episodes would contribute to his colleagues' opinion of him as a talented professional and trustworthy individual. Have students complete this part of the activity individually.

Part 2 asks students to take a second, more critical look at the same vignettes, this time searching for clues that Glass was not really the model journalist he appeared to be. Complete this part of the activity as a class, prompting students for evidence that Glass was not totally honest, that he was willing to compromise principles, and that he may have only posed at being a consummate professional. Follow up this discussion by having students write a short paragraph based on the vignettes in which they explain why Glass' colleagues at *The New Republic* might have felt some suspicions about him from the start.

YAHOO! search The activity concludes with a Yahoo! Search project that directs students to the true story behind *Shattered Glass*. Using the search term "Stephen Glass," students will find many articles reporting on the events portrayed in the film, as well as articles reflecting on the character of Stephen Glass and what his "success" might tell us about the nature of modern journalism. Students will also find more recent articles reacting to the novel Glass published in 2003, which offers a fictionalized version of his story, and to his appearance on the CBS news magazine, *60 Minutes*. Have students report on their findings in a class discussion that updates the Stephen Glass story – What is he doing today? – and summarizes the range of discussion he has provoked within the journalistic community.

Answers

Part 1: Reasons to admire Stephen Glass

1. *At a staff meeting, Glass entertains colleagues with a story about how he posed as a behavioral psychologist to investigate talk radio coverage of a Mike Tyson fight.*

Glass seems to be a resourceful journalist, willing to take risks to get a good story. He is also funny, friendly, and happy to let colleagues in on his secrets.

2. *On a visit to his old high school, Glass tells a class of journalism students, "A great editor defends his writers. Against anyone. He stands up and fights for you."*

Glass seems to believe in the ideal that writers and editors share an unyielding determination to report the truth despite opposition.

3. *When a colleague chides Glass for compromising his career by applying to law school, Glass explains that he has to apply to make his parents happy.*

Glass seems to be extremely open to advice from colleagues and genuine in his response, but at the same time appealingly loyal to his family and respectful of his parents.

4. Glass offers to resign when it is discovered that he misreported a minor detail in a story about a hotel room orgy at a young conservatives convention. Glass seems to have an uncompromising commitment to accuracy in reporting and a sincere willingness to put the best interests of the publication above his own.

5. After tearing apart an intern's story for poor reporting, Glass explains, "This is *The New Republic*, remember? Nothing slides here. If you don't have it cold, you don't turn it in. Ever."

Glass seems devoted to the highest principles of journalism and to protecting the esteemed reputation of his publication.

Part 2: Reasons to suspect Stephen Glass

1. If Glass is willing to use deception to get a story, he might also use deception to get what he wants from a colleague or to win approval for his work.

2. Glass makes an absolute of the editor's responsibility to fight for a writer, overlooking the editor's (and writer's) first responsibility to report the truth. He personalizes their relationship, reducing it to blind loyalty on the part of the editor with nothing demanded of the writer in return.

3. Glass does not take responsibility for his own actions in this episode, shifting the blame instead to his parents. At the same time, he deflects any doubts about his commitment to journalism by characterizing his application to law school as a harmless chore.

4. By blaming himself so extravagantly, Glass actually manipulates the situation, gaining sympathy and even admiration for himself, and thereby making the flaw in his story seem all the more insignificant.

5. When Glass strikes a pose and speaks as though he embodied the highest values of *The New Republic*, he magnifies his own importance in the intern's eyes and borrows authority for his editorial advice.

Follow-Up

1. The editor who finally discovered Glass' deceptions, Charles Lane, has said that one lesson of his story is that character counts in journalism: "I really think the most important thing you can do, which *The New Republic* really didn't do when it hired Stephen Glass, is screen people very carefully when they come in for integrity. Make sure you have sort of an honest person coming in the door." (Quoted in "Ethically Challenged" by Lori Robertson, *American Journalism Review*, March 2001 [available online at www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=573].) Have students consider how they would screen candidates for integrity if they were hiring at a publication like *The New Republic*, and how they might reassure a potential employer of their own integrity if they were the one seeking a job.

2. After they have seen *Shattered Glass*, have students compare the story it tells with the story Stephen Glass presents in his novel, *The Fabulist*. How do these two dramatizations of real-life events differ in their characterization of the people affected by Glass' deceptions? To what extent does each reveal

the "truth" about Glass and why he betrayed the principles of good journalism?

Activity 2 The Editorial Process

This activity examines the editorial process, focusing on the importance of independent fact-checking to assure accuracy.

The activity first describes the editorial process at *The New Republic*, as portrayed in *Shattered Glass*, and explains how Stephen Glass managed to slip his fictitious stories through the system by providing fabricated notes to back up his facts and assertions. Students learn that Glass was only exposed when an independent fact-check by a rival journalist failed to find any evidence of the people and events Glass had described.

Part 1 of the activity invites students to test their own abilities as a fact-checker with excerpts from three articles attributed to Stephen Glass in the film. Students first underline every detail in each excerpt that a fact-checker should be able to substantiate, then explain how they would locate the evidence needed to verify the story's accuracy. Have students complete this part of the activity individually and compare their answers in a class discussion.

Part 2 of the activity asks students to repeat this process with a real article clipped from the newspaper or a news weekly. This time, students underline every detail that appears based in fact – data, descriptions, assertions, quotations, generalizations – and note which could be substantiated and which could not. Students can complete this part of the activity in small groups. Follow up with a discussion of the factual basis for real-world reporting. Ask students to find examples of "accepted" fact (information that seems plausible but that cannot be easily verified – for example, "Many students believe...") and "attributed" fact (information whose accuracy depends entirely on the source – for example, "According to Pentagon experts..."). How can a skeptical reader be sure of the accuracy of such reporting? What part does the editorial process, going on behind the scenes, play in assuring us that reported facts are true?

YAHOO! search The activity concludes with a Yahoo! Search project that challenges students to use the multi-faceted capabilities of this online research tool to identify mistaken facts in an imaginary news brief. Assign this part of the activity as homework, and remind students that some facts in the piece may require checking a map or image for verification.

Answers

Part 1.

1. One Chicago-area school for Santas featured a 144-page textbook that provided instruction on everything from going to the bathroom in a Santa suit to rules on how to touch children.

To verify the underlined facts, one would have to contact Santa schools in the Chicago area in order to find one that has a 144-page textbook with the information described.

2. Western Union now has a "Stop the Cassini" hotline, 1-888-no-cassini, which forwards anti-Cassini telegrams to the White House for \$10 a pop...and Las Vegas is even taking bets on whether the satellite will malfunction. The approximate odds before lift-off: 1 in 70.

To verify the underlined facts, one would first dial the phone number to make sure it is operating, then contact Western Union to confirm that they operate the phone line and that it functions as described. In addition, one would contact Las Vegas casinos to find one taking bets on the satellite's success and confirm the odds reported.

3. Take Joel Carni, whose family business, Four Aces, is one of the nation's largest political novelty manufacturers. This summer, stores will be hit with Carni's newest product, the Monicondom.

To verify the underlined facts, one would need to locate and contact Joel Carni for confirmation of the report, then gather information about Four Aces from independent sources to confirm the company's ownership, product line, relative size, summer distribution plans, and that it has developed the product described.

Part 2.

Answers will vary.

YAHOO! search Find the Mistaken Facts

- September 13, 2003 fell on a Saturday.
- The Taft Building is in Hollywood, not Washington, D.C.
- On September 13, there was no pending federal legislation that would impose restrictions on SUVs.
- Constitution and Independence Avenues do not intersect.
- The SUV brands named do not exist.
- Cherry trees line the Washington Tidal Basin, not the Mall.
- Note: Anacostia Wrecker Service is listed in the Washington, D.C., business phone directory.

Follow-Up

1. Have students apply their heightened fact-checking abilities to broadcast news sources: television news reports and news magazines, all-news cable channels, cable news talk shows, radio news updates, talk radio, etc. How are facts presented in these media? How can a viewer or listener verify the accuracy of broadcast facts?

2. After they have seen *Shattered Glass*, have students use Yahoo! Search to locate Adam Penenberg's original stories on Glass' fabrications in the teenage computer hackers article. How does Penenberg's view of the situation, based on still unfolding events, compare to the view presented in the film? How might Penenberg rewrite his stories today? (Penenberg's articles are accessible online at www.forbes.com/2003/05/20/cx_mn_0520glasslander.html, where *Forbes* provides links to its coverage of the Glass case as background to the very similar case of Jayson Blair, a reporter accused of fabrication at *The New York Times* in 2003).

Activity 3 Editorial Standards

This activity examines the editor's role in maintaining journalistic integrity and the inherent dilemmas of the editor/writer relationship.

Part 1 of the activity introduces students to the two editors who supervised Stephen Glass during his years at *The New Republic*, Michael Kelly and Charles Lane, and sketches his relationship to each of them as portrayed in *Shattered Glass*. Students then explore the editor's position in these relationships through four episodes from the film described briefly on the activity sheet.

In each episode, the editor confronts a situation that seems to require a choice between supporting his writer and enforcing editorial standards, and the manner in which Kelly and Lane handle these situations suggests a basic difference in their editorial philosophies, with Kelly more inclined to provide editorial support while Lane seems more inclined to uphold editorial standards. Students are asked to explain why they agree or disagree with the editor's actions in each situation, and if they disagree, to explain what they would have done in his place. Have students complete this part of the activity individually or collaboratively in small groups.

Part 2 of the activity asks students to re-evaluate their ideas about editors and writers after they have seen *Shattered Glass*. Students will discover in the film that this is a far more complex and dynamic working relationship than any single episode can fully suggest. As Charles Lane has said, looking back on the events portrayed in the film, "there was so much going on, so many moving parts, number one, and so much indeterminacy, number two." (Quoted in an interview with Gal Beckerman, *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 2003, available online at www.cjr.org/issues/2003/5/glass-beckerman.asp.) Use the film to help students gain an appreciation for the problematic nature of the editor/writer relationship, and for the way Stephen Glass manipulates this relationship to his own advantage.

YAHOO! search The activity concludes with a Yahoo! Search project that invites students to find out more about the real Michael Kelly and Charles Lane. They will learn that Kelly went on to win professional acclaim as the editor of *Atlantic Monthly* and some measure of political influence as a columnist for *The Washington Post* before volunteering to cover the Iraq War, where he sadly became the first American journalist killed in the fighting. Lane also joined *The Washington Post*, where he now covers the Supreme Court, and recently served as a consultant to the producers of *Shattered Glass*, offering advice on the film's accuracy. As a homework assignment, have students use Yahoo! Search to review articles by and about both Kelly and Lane, and then write a short profile on one of them, comparing the editorial philosophy evident in his work and career to his characterization in the film.

Follow-Up

1. Have students research the editorial standards spelled out in documents like *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* and the "Code of Ethics" of the Society of Professional Journalists. (The latter can be consulted online at www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp.) How do these standards translate principles like integrity, honesty, accuracy, and fairness into practical procedures and precautions that working journalists can apply every day?

2. The writer/director of *Shattered Glass*, Billy Ray, has said that he regards the Charles Lane character as the hero of his film. "You think you're seeing a movie about Stephen Glass, and you realize about halfway through you're seeing a movie about Chuck Lane," as he told a reporter for *The Washington Post*. After they have seen the film, have students comment on Billy Ray's assessment. At what point could one say the Charles Lane character emerges as a hero? What heroic qualities does he exhibit? What heroic actions does he perform? And by the same token, to what extent could one describe the Stephen Glass character as the villain of the story?

Activity 4 Credibility and Consequences

This final activity looks beyond the incidents portrayed in *Shattered Glass* to a range of episodes that have raised similar questions about the credibility of American journalism and the appropriate measures for dealing with those who place that credibility in jeopardy.

Part 1 of the activity is a research project. Working in small groups, students use Yahoo! Search and the Yahoo! Search IMVironment* (with which they can view the same search results in real time while instant messaging) to investigate six journalists listed on the activity sheet who have all been accused of fabricating stories like Stephen Glass. These cases cover more than 20 years and involve various degrees of alleged fabrication, from manufacturing straight news stories to inventing characters and situations for a column. The cases differ also in the amount of controversy they stirred up, with the most recent case, that of Jayson Blair at *The New York Times*, prompting perhaps the most widespread discussion. Together, however, these cases provide a useful context for probing the ethical questions raised by *Shattered Glass*, helping students realize that Stephen Glass was not a unique exception in the world of journalism but only one among many who have been caught.

When they complete their research, have each student group present its case study to the class and comment on its relevance to the story of Stephen Glass. Follow up these presentations with a discussion about the significance of the evidence students have gathered. Are these cases the "tip of the iceberg," a symptom of some persistent flaw in American journalism, or do they demonstrate that journalists are vigilant in defense of their professional integrity and forthcoming in the way they deal

with those who betray it? Is there, as some have speculated, a bias at work within journalism that makes some writers more susceptible to ethical misjudgments or more likely to be caught? Is there a tendency to overlook misjudgments by established journalists once the episode is past but turn those of inexperienced journalists into lasting examples? Finally, have students consider this observation by Charles Lane (taken from the *Columbia Journalism Review* interview cited above):

My own personal view is that journalism has a lot of problems, but being a magnet for frauds in a way that no other profession is I don't think is one of them. There are frauds and con men all over the place, we just don't tend to hear about them. But when it happens ... in the middle of the media, the media get interested in it and so you hear about it. I think that's kind of what's going on.

By implication, Lane seems to be suggesting that cases like that of Stephen Glass have a greater impact on journalists than on those who depend on journalists for accurate reporting. Based on their research, would your students agree?

Part 2 of the activity provides a starting point for discussing the view of journalism presented in *Shattered Glass*. Writer/director Billy Ray calls his film "a cautionary tale" that offers a different perspective on the profession, one that highlights the personal element within journalistic institutions. Have students cite examples of this personal element – personal judgment, personal values, personal relationships – in the film's portrayal of working journalists. Then prompt debate on the extent to which this personal element represents both a strength and a weakness within the profession.

YAHOO! search The activity concludes with a Yahoo! Search project that links the ethical questions raised by *Shattered Glass* to similar questions surrounding the alarming increase in student plagiarism. Have students use Yahoo! Search to gather evidence about the true extent of this problem nationwide and to sample public opinion about its significance. If appropriate, organize a class fact-finding survey to gauge the severity of the problem at your school. Then have students draw on this research to write individual essays expressing their views about student plagiarism in light of the lessons they have taken from *Shattered Glass*.

Follow-Up

1. Invite a local reporter to speak with your class about the realities of journalism. What kinds of ethical questions really arise in the everyday routine of reporting the news? What kinds of fact-checking and editorial oversight do real journalists expect? Have students prepare questions like these in advance of your guest's visit, and encourage them to take this opportunity to explore a real journalist's opinions about those, like Stephen Glass, who have violated the standards of the profession.

2. Have students apply their insight into the editorial process to the problem of student plagiarism by outlining principles and procedures that could help correct misconceptions about plagiarism and prevent its occurrence. Organize your students' recommendations into a handbook for distribution in your school.