

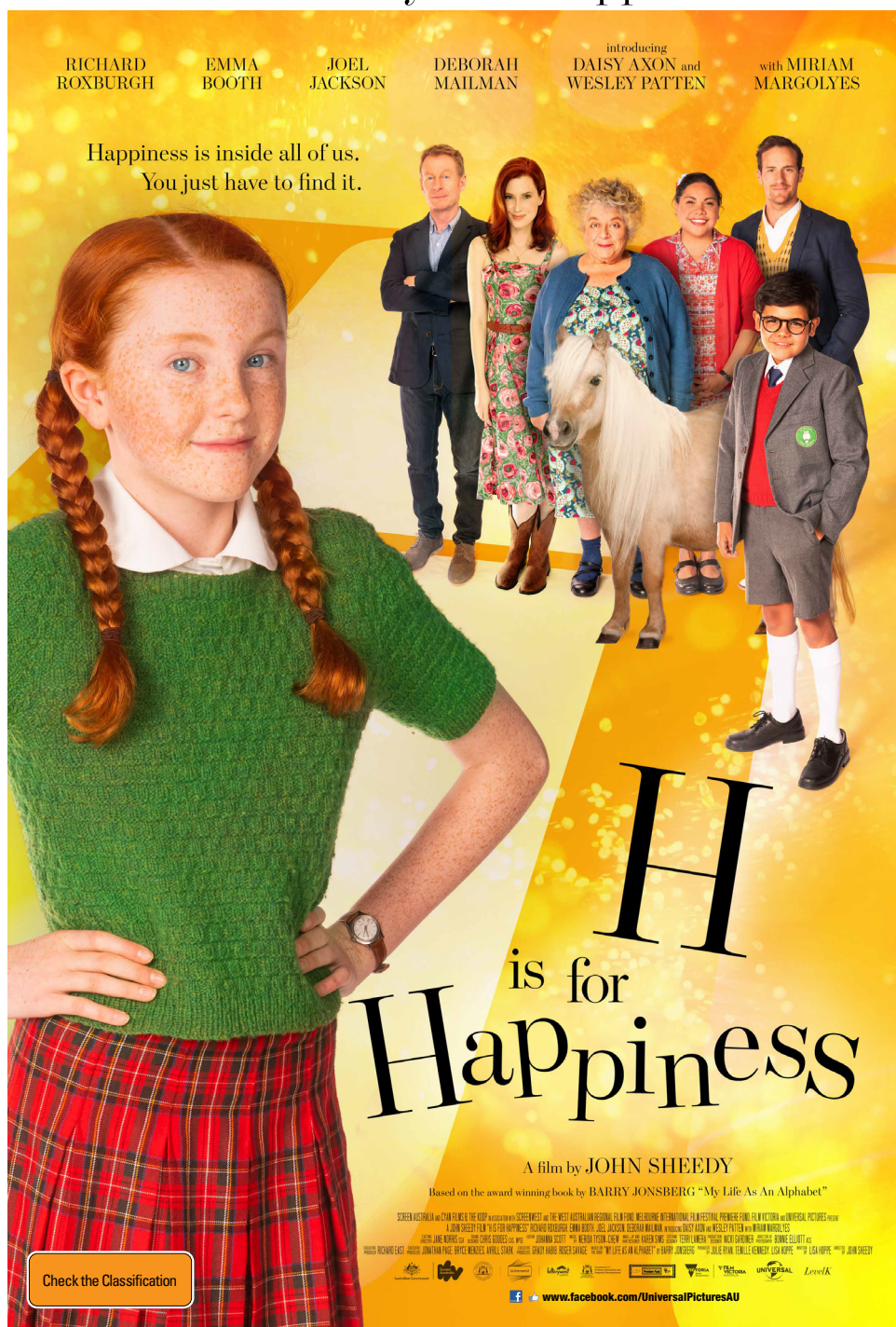
# H is for Happiness

## Film Study Guide

Directed by John Sheedy

Produced By: Julie Ryan, Tenille Kennedy and Lisa Hoppe

Written by Lisa Hoppe



by Anita Jonsberg

By Anita Jonsberg

**These notes are suitable for use with students in years seven to nine. All links are valid at the time of publication, but do check them at the time of use.**

Set in the colourful Australian coastal town of Albany, H IS FOR HAPPINESS is a classic feel-good film for all ages that will make you laugh, cry, and cheer with delight. Based on the multi award-winning book *My Life as an Alphabet* by Barry Jonsberg, it is the genuinely heart-warming and unflinchingly honest story of one twelve-year-old's determination to bring her family back from the brink and spark happiness in their lives.

Using an entirely unique approach, Candice Phee is an unforgettable heroine whose exploits will inspire and delight anyone who has faced the trials of adolescence and the heartbreak of family tragedy.

Starring newcomers Daisy Axon and Wesley Patten alongside Miriam Margolyes, Richard Roxburgh, Emma Booth, Joel Jackson, Deb Mailman and a miniature horse, H IS FOR HAPPINESS shows us a quintessentially Australian world through the eyes of a quirky outsider, and is a joyous celebration of all things a little bit different.

**Themes:**

- Loss and grief
- Family ties and challenges
- Difference
- Friendship

**Use in the Curriculum:**

The film lends itself to intertextualisation with both the novel on which it is based – *My Life as an Alphabet* by Barry Jonsberg, and with films such as *Little Miss Sunshine* (Jonathon Dayton and Valerie Faris) and *Mrs McCutcheon* (John Sheedy).

Australian Standards and the year eight subject description can be found here:

<https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/> and with the following content descriptions: (ACELA1541 - Scootle ), (ACELA1543 - Scootle), (ACELA1548 - Scootle ), (ACELT1626 - Scootle ), (ACELT1628 - Scootle ), (ACELT1630 - Scootle ) and capabilities: Literacy, Personal and Social Capability and Ethical Understanding.

**Note:** Click on pictures of YouTube links to go directly to source.

## Meet the director: John Sheedy

JOHN SHEEDY is an Australian multi-award-winning director of both film and theatre whose extensive body of work both in Australia and overseas has been praised for its visceral performances, innovative storytelling and arresting visual style.



His recent short film debut, *MRS MCCUTCHEON*, was an international sensation. Selected for more than sixty festivals around the world, it collected more than 25 awards across the globe, locally winning Best Australian Short Film at both the Melbourne International Film Festival and the Melbourne Queer Film Festival, the SPAA Award for Short Film Production of the Year, the 2018 ADG Award for Best Direction of a Short Film and was also nominated for an AACTA.

From 2010 to 2015 John was the Artistic Director at renowned children's theatre company, Barking Gecko Theatre Company in Western Australia. Under his direction, the company was nominated for eleven Helpmann Awards, including Best Children's Presentation. In this role, John wrote for the stage and directed *The Amber Amulet* adapted from Craig Silvey's children's book and directed a stage adaptation of Shaun Tan's children's book *The Red Tree*, which was adapted by John with designer Gypsy Taylor.

In 2013, he directed an adaptation by Tom Holloway of Colin Thiele's *Storm Boy*, a co-production with the Sydney Theatre Company for which he received the Performing Arts WA Award for Best Director. In 2014, John directed a sold-out world premiere season of Kate Mulvany's adaptation of Craig Silvey's best-selling novel *Jasper Jones*. 2015 saw him adapt and direct *The Rabbits*, the John Marsden book illustrated by Sean Tan. Featuring Kate Miller-Heidke, *The Rabbits* was a co-production with Opera Australia and Barking Gecko Theatre Company, presented by the 2015 Perth International Arts Festival. It was hailed as 'triumphant'.

*H IS FOR HAPPINESS* is his first feature film.



## Meet the Actors

### “Candice Phee” Daisy Axon

Daisy moved from England in 2009 at the age of 3 and loves the Aussie way of life. She is very active and attended dance classes for four years before pursuing her love for acting, joining Filmbites Screen Academy in 2016.

In 2018 after a nationwide search, Daisy was cast as Scotty in JUDY AND PUNCH, which premiered at Sundance Film Festival in 2019.

Daisy had an incredible time in Melbourne filming opposite Mia Wasikowska and Damon Herriman and meeting all the wonderful cast and crew.

When the call came through to audition for H IS FOR HAPPINESS Daisy couldn't believe she would have the chance to bring her favourite character, Candice Phee from My Life as an Alphabet, to life. Her time on the set of H IS FOR HAPPINESS was a truly special experience.



#### Did you know?

The favourite literary character of Daisy Axon [Candice Phee] is...Candice Phee. She'd loved the book way before auditioning for the part in the film.



## “Douglas Benson from Another Dimension” – Wesley Patten

Wesley was the Winner of the Best Young Actor Award at the St Kilda Film Festival for his work in John Sheedy’s multi-award-winning short film MRS MCCUTCHEON. To work again with John on his first feature, H IS FOR HAPPINESS in 2018, was a great delight.

Wesley’s theatre credits include The Long Forgotten Dream and The Secret River for Sydney Theatre Company. Wesley will return to the STC in 2019 for their international tour of The Secret River to Edinburgh and London. Other acting credits include TOTAL CONTROL, TV commercials and photo shoots for various companies, including SBS and NITV.



### Did you know?

Dolly Parton personally gave permission for the use of the song Islands in the Stream in the film, after director John Sheedy sent her a ‘love letter’!



### **“Jim Phee (Dad)” - Richard Roxburgh**

An award-winning actor of stage and screen, Richard Roxburgh’s recent feature film roles include Mel Gibson’s *HACKSAW RIDGE*, the adaptation of Tim Winton’s novel *BREATH* with Simon Baker and Elizabeth Debicki and Sue Brooks’ *LOOKING FOR GRACE*. His upcoming feature films include *DANGER CLOSE* with Travis Fimmel, *ANGEL OF MINE* with Noomi Rapace and Yvonne Strahovski and *GO!* opposite Frances O’Connor and Dan Wyllie.

Additional film credits include *MOULIN ROUGE*, *DOING TIME FOR PATSY CLINE*, *MISSION IMPOSSIBLE II*, *OSCAR & LUCINDA*, *THANK GOD HE MET LIZZIE*, *CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION*, *THE TURNING (Reunion)*, *MATCHING JACK* and James Cameron’s action adventure film *SANCTUM*. Richard is also known to young audiences for his voice work in animated features *LEGEND OF THE GUARDIANS: THE OWLS OF GA’HOOLE*, *BLINKY BILL THE MOVIE* and *MAYA THE BEE: THE HONEY GAMES*.

Richard’s well-known television credits include the role of Cleaver Greene in the long-running ABC hit series *RAKE*, which he also co-created, writes and produces. His brilliant performance earned him a TV Week Silver Logie for Most Outstanding Actor and the 2012 AACTA Award for Best Actor in a Television Series. His other TV roles include Prime Minister Bob Hawke in Channel TEN’s telemovie *HAWKE*, as the notorious Roger Rogerson in the ABC mini-series *BLUE MURDER* and 2017 sequel *BLUE MURDER: KILLER*, in the two part drama *THE SILENCE* and as the lead in drama series *EAST OF EVERYTHING*. Richard can next be seen alongside Helen Mirren in the HBO/Sky UK Miniseries *CATHERINE THE GREAT*.

Richard is also an accomplished director. His debut film, *ROMULUS, MY FATHER*, starring Eric Bana drew critical acclaim when it was released in 2007.

Richard has performed on stage around the world and has shared the stage with some of Australia’s finest actors including Cate Blanchett, Hugo Weaving, Jacki Weaver and John Bell.



## “Claire Phee (Mum)” – Emma Booth

Emma started her acting career at the age of 13 in the Australian kids’ show THE ADVENTURES OF BUSH PATROL. She then went on to model internationally before getting her first film role in CLUBLAND, known as INTRODUCING THE DWIGHT’S in America. For her performance as “Jill” she won the both the AACTA Award and Film Critics Award for Best Supporting Actress, and Best Newcomer at the Filmink Awards.

Emma then shot BLOODCREEK directed by Joel Schumacher, where she starred with Henry Cavill and Michael Fassbender. After that Emma co-starred in HIPPIY HIPPIY SHAKE alongside Sienna Miller, Cillian Murphy, and Chris O’Dowd. Her next film was THE BOYS ARE BACK alongside Clive Owen, followed by PELICAN BLOOD in the UK. Emma then starred in the award-winning Australian television series UNDERBELLY: THE GOLDEN MILE, feature film SWERVE, and the award-winning Australian TV series CLOUDSTREET.

Emma then starred opposite Jason Statham and Jennifer Lopez in Taylor Hackford’s PARKER before returning to Australia for John Curran’s TRACKS starring opposite Mia Wasikowska and Adam Driver.

Emma’s other credits include the Lionsgate film GOD’S OF EGYPT, the AACTA and Logie Award winning NETFLIX Original series GLITCH and the 2016 feature thriller HOUNDS OF LOVE, directed by Ben Young.

HOUNDS OF LOVE premiered at the Venice Film Festival, screened at SXSW and Tribeca Film Festivals, and earned Emma seven best actress awards worldwide including at the 2017 Brussels International Film Festival and the AACTA Awards.







**“Rich Uncle Brian (RUB)” – Joel Jackson**

Award-winning Australian film and television actor Joel Jackson was born in the Western Australian town of Albany, which is also the home of H IS FOR HAPPINESS.

Working all over the country, Joel’s most recent feature film roles include Greg McLean’s highly acclaimed feature, JUNGLE, in which he starred alongside Daniel Radcliffe, and the upcoming feature film I MET A GIRL playing the role of Nick Cassidy.

Joel’s recent television performances include the lead role in the 2019 Australian TV series MS FISHER’S MODERN MURDER MYSTERIES and in the AACTA award winning Matchbox Pictures miniseries SAFE HARBOUR.

Joel has been celebrated for his portrayal of Peter Allen in the 2015 Channel Seven AACTA Award-winning miniseries PETER ALLEN: NOT THE BOY NEXT DOOR, for which he received the AACTA Award for Best Lead Actor in a Television Drama, the TV Week Logie Award for Most Outstanding Newcomer – Actor and a nomination in the Outstanding Actor category at the prestigious Festival de Television de Monte-Carlo Golden Nymph Awards.

Previously, Joel starred as Charles Bean in the award-winning 2015 Foxtel World War I miniseries DEADLINE GALLIPOLI aired to mark the 2015 Centenary of the Gallipoli landings. Starring alongside alongside Sam Worthington, Hugh Dancy and Charles Dance, the role saw Joel receive a second AACTA Award nomination for Best Lead Actor in a Television Drama and a TV Week Logie Award nomination for Best New Talent. Joel’s other TV credits include the NINE Network’s crime event series HYDE & SEEK and Playmaker Media’s TV series THE WRONG GIRL – Season 2. Joel is also an accomplished musician, singer, and stage performer, having appeared in numerous theatre productions. He also spent time growing up in North West Australia, and in 2010 he was recognised as the region’s Young Australian of the Year.

## “Penelope Benson” – Deborah Mailman

The multi-award-winning Deborah Mailman AM is one of Australia’s most highly respected actors. Garnering national acclaim in 1998 for her portrayal of Nona in the film *RADIANCE*, for which she received both the AFI and Film Critics’ Circle Award for Most Outstanding Actress, Deborah’s other film credits include *THREE SUMMERS*, *A FEW LESS MEN*, *PAPER PLANES*, *ODD-BALL*, the voice of Mrs Koala in *BLINKY BILL*, *MENTAL*, *BRAN NUE DAE*, *DEAR CLAUDIA*, *THE MONKEY’S MASK*, *RABBIT PROOF FENCE*, *THE BOOK OF REVELATION*, *LUCKY MILES* and the internationally celebrated and award-winning feature *THE SAPPHIRES*, for which she received the 2013 AACTA for Best Lead Actress.

For television Deborah has created some of Australia’s most enduring characters including her TV Week Silver Logie Award winning portrayals of Bonita Mabo in *MABO*, Kelly in *SECRET LIFE OF US* and Lorraine in *REDFERN NOW* as well as lauded roles on the series *MYSTERY ROAD* (receiving the 2018 AACTA Award for Best Supporting Actress), *OFFSPRING*, *RUSH*, *THE ALICE*, *TWO TWISTED*, *JACK IRISH*, *BLACK COMEDY*, *TOMORROW WHEN THE WAR BEGAN*, *CLEVERMAN*, *WOLF CREEK*, *PLEASE LIKE ME*, *BITE CLUB* and *GET KRACK!N* as well as voicing Big Cuz in the award winning animation *LITTLE J & BIG CUZ*.

A regular television presenter, she has hosted *PLAYSCHOOL* and *MESSAGE STICKS* for the ABC, Lonely Planet’s *GOING BUSH* for SBS and co-hosted the 2015 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Awards (AACTA) ceremony alongside Cate Blanchett for Network Ten. One of Australia’s most celebrated theatre actors, and previously a company member of the Sydney Theatre Company, Deborah’s stage performances include the Matilda Award winning performances in *Radiance* and *The Seven Stages of Grieving*, the Helpmann Award Best Supporting Actress role in the STC production of *The Lost Echo* and the Helpmann Award nominated role for Best Actress in the theatre production of *The Sapphires*.

In 2017 Deborah was honoured to receive an Order of Australia Medal for Services to the Arts and as a role model for Indigenous performers. She is currently a Trustee of the Sydney Opera House.





## “Miss Bamford” – Miriam Margolyes

Miriam Margolyes was born in Oxford and read English at Newnham College, Cambridge. She was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for Services to Drama in 2001. Miriam has had a prolific career both on screen and on stage, with hundreds of credits to her name. In 1993, she won the BAFTA Best Supporting Actress in Martin Scorsese’s THE AGE OF INNOCENCE, having in 1989 collected the Best Supporting Actress award at the LA Critics’ Circle Awards for LITTLE DORRIT.

Of her many diverse roles, Miriam Margolyes is best known to young audiences worldwide for her role as Professor Sprout in the HARRY POTTER films, and through her distinctive voice for her work in animated features including George Miller’s Oscar® winning features BABE and HAPPY FEET, as well as the Oscar® nominated adaptation of Roald Dahl’s JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH.

After repertory in Edinburgh & Leicester, she has worked in theatre in London’s West End, throughout Australia & played Madame Morrible in Wicked on Broadway. For Melbourne Theatre Company, Miriam starred in John Logan’s solo show I’ll eat you last. In 2010, she won the Theatregoers Choice Best Supporting Actress Ward for Nell in Endgame.

Her one-woman show, Dickens’ Women was nominated for an Olivier Award & toured Australia in 2012 as part of a triumphant World Tour for Dickens Bi-Centenary.





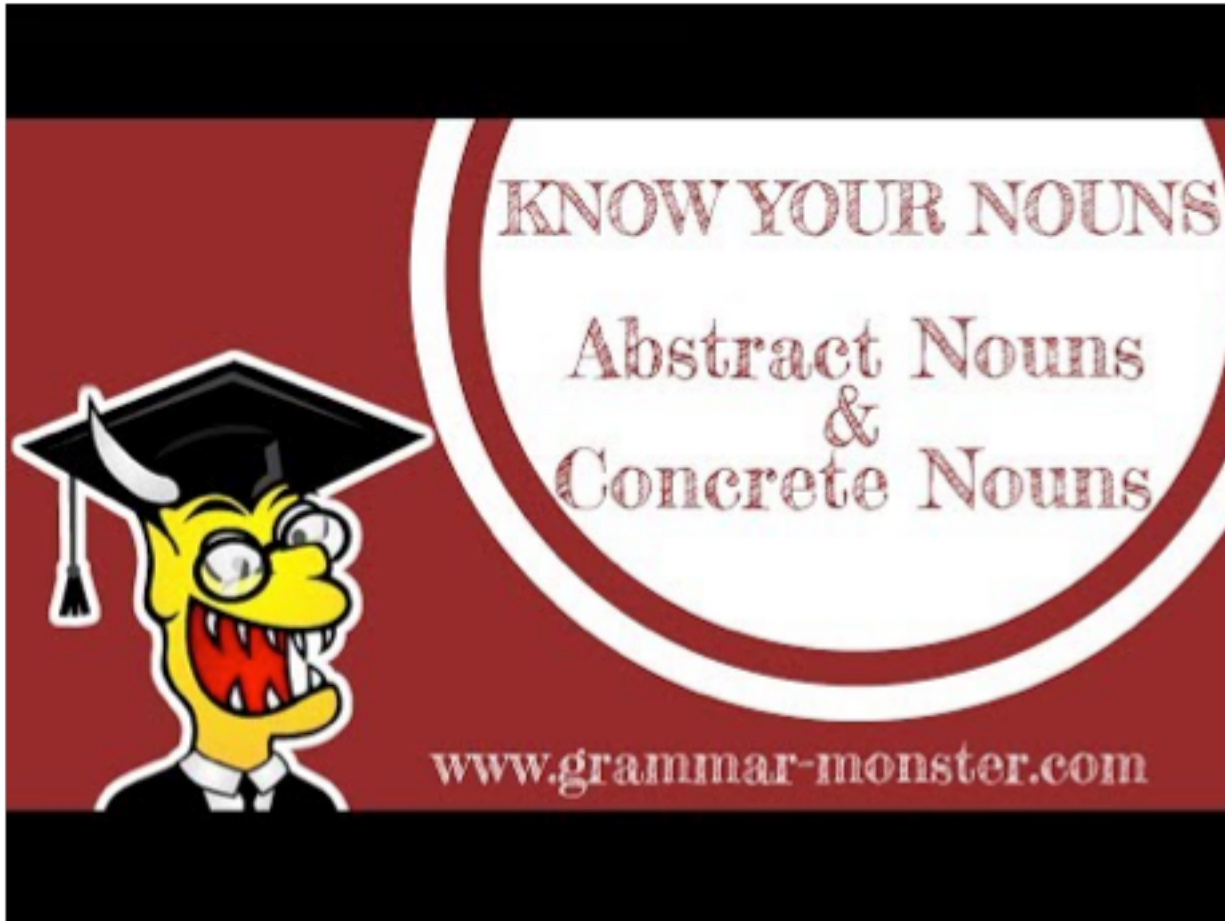
## Before viewing:

As one of the themes of H is for Happiness is loss and grief, be mindful of any student who may have recently experienced this. A general discussion of the themes before in-class viewing can help to pre-empt and divert any later discomfort for your students.

1. 'Happiness' is an abstract noun. Discuss these types of nouns with students. Why do we sometimes interpret them differently? Some resources regarding abstract nouns can be found here – watch one or both: (Short 2.30 min musical video describing the difference between concrete and abstract nouns)



(Short 3.27 min video from Grammar Monster – for the more mature cohort.)



Have students think about what ‘happiness’ means to them individually. Then have students share in pairs or threes before feeding back to the whole group. Explore any discrepancies in generating absolute meanings for abstract nouns.

With a fairly confident group, you can show and discuss denotation/connotation(s) with some abstract nouns and think about how individual and collective contexts affect common understandings (and misunderstandings!). ‘Rich’ may be another word you may wish to explore in terms of ‘Rich Uncle Brian’.



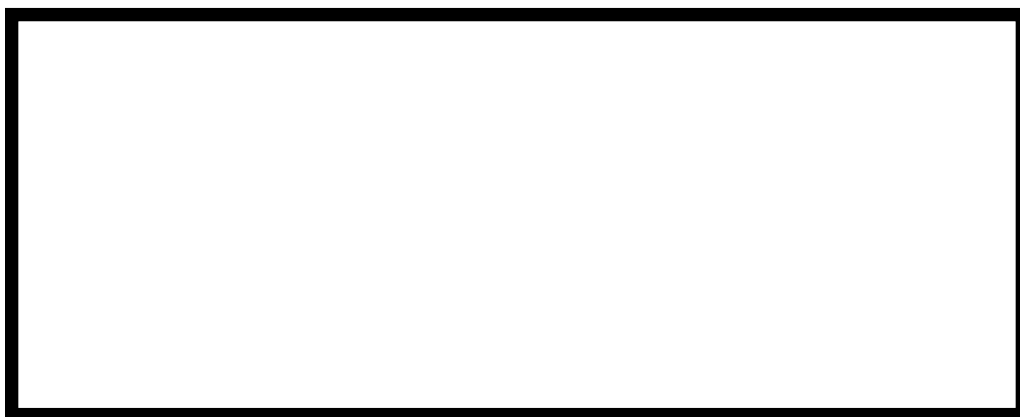
**Did you know?**

The crew and cast booked almost three thousand nights of accommodation in Albany during the shooting of the film and spent a million dollars.

2. Explore the concept of other dimensions and multiverses – Douglas Benson believes he comes from another dimension – one useful resource is from the Economist:



Douglas explains how a new universe unfolds ...





Scene	Linguistic	Symbolic	Technical
Briefly describe the scene you are referring to.	Script and any other spoken/written elements	Costume, lighting, setting, weather and landscape (pathetic fallacy) colours	Lighting, sound (diegetic and non-diegetic), camera movements, shots and angles

Familiarise students with filmic codes and have them draw a table similar to this in their books – use two pages landscape to give students enough room for notes. Explain that all elements may overlap – lighting may be symbolic as well as technical, and so on:

View ‘Lisa’s Study Guide’ regarding filmic techniques you need to know – this is a clear and simple guide for students and prepares them for understanding some of the main techniques:



THEN: Have students view the film all the way through without interruption, simply for enjoyment and understanding – they will use the table during the second viewing with particular focus on certain scenes.

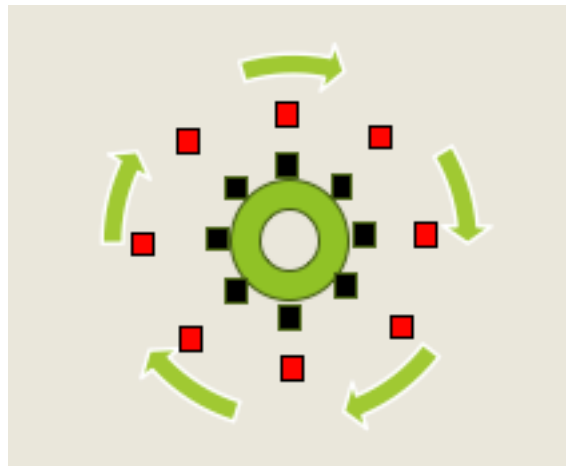
After the initial viewing, have students reflect on the following:

1. Who are the main characters in the film?
2. Describe your impressions of each one.
3. Which is your favourite character and why?
4. How would you describe the genre of the film? [for a brief explanation of film genre, students may look [here](#)]
5. Collate students' findings on the board

Review the opening scene- it sets the tone for the rest of the film.

1. Have students think about, and then discuss with a partner, what kind of mood does the opening scene set? How is this created?
2. Arrange students into groups and allocate one of the following elements to each group: camera shots/angles, lighting, colours and sounds/music. Ask each group to make detailed notes on the opening of the film up to where the bell sounds.
3. What types of people are featured? What can we tell about them from their clothing, actions and speech?
4. Then have students review Candice's journey home. Discuss the community she lives in. What do students notice about the people in Candice's community? What type of community do we think it is and what techniques convey this?
5. Discuss students' responses, collate on the board and have them begin to fill in the 'filmic codes' table with their observations.

If you prefer, after exercise 2 above, use the [circle game](#) to get students to share and collate ideas: Clear a large area of the classroom and place chairs in a circle, facing outwards. Place a corresponding set of chairs in a larger circle, so each chair is facing the chair in the inner circle.



Students [or pairs of students] sit in the chairs facing each other. They share their ideas, making notes, for four or five minutes. After that time the outer circle only moves one place clockwise and the exercise is repeated until every student [or pair] has shared ideas with everyone else. This promotes collaboration, good communication [and the students find it fun].

**PLEASE NOTE:** The following discussion points/questions take a chronological path through the film. If teachers wish, they can select from the following 1-26 discussion points or re-arrange them into themes according to the needs of the cohort and/or the curriculum being followed. The points have been thematically identified as follows:

Theme-based questions and activities: (Loss and grief [L & G], family ties and challenges [FT & C], difference [D] and friendship [F]):

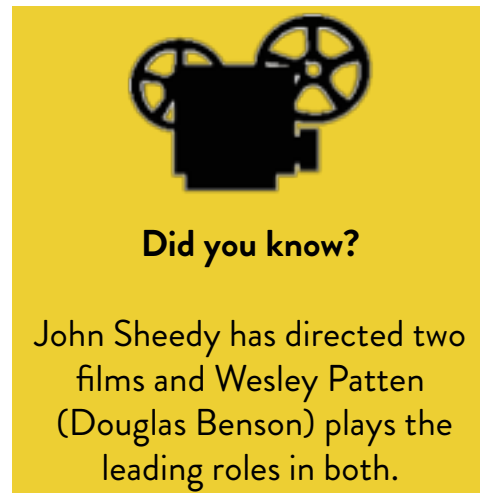
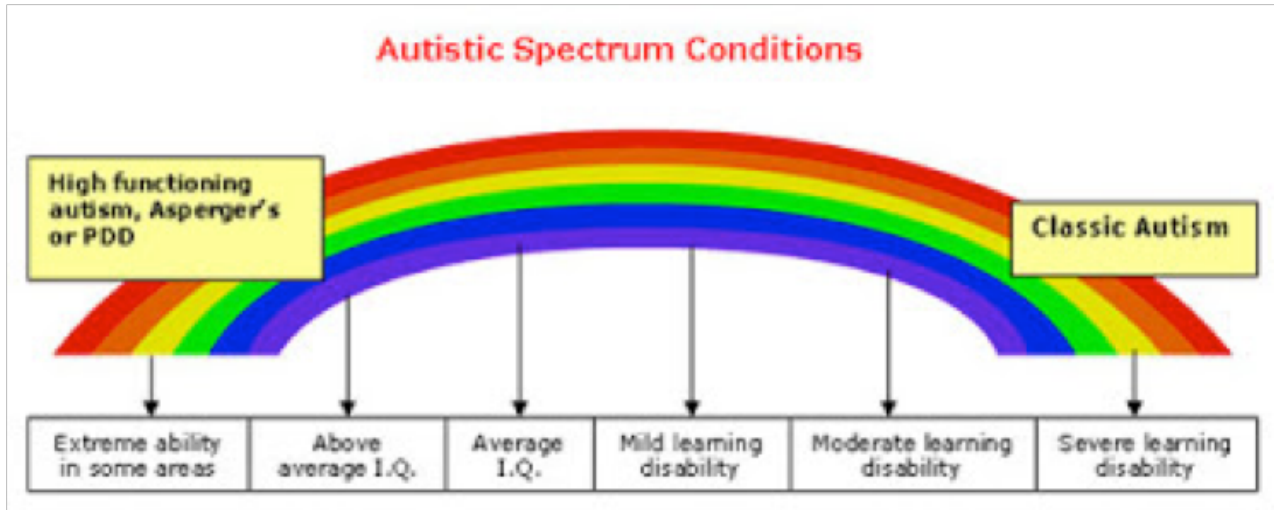
On a few occasions, teaching and learning strategies have been suggested but individual teachers will know best what works for their own students.

- L & G, D:** How does the director first convey Claire Phee's depression to the audience? (approx. 5.10). Look carefully at the lighting in this scene and Claire Phee's description of Candice's birth and contrast it with Rich Uncle Brian's slightly later account.
- FT & C:** What important things do we learn about family ties and challenges in these scenes?
- L & G:** Later (approx. 12.40), Candice remembers the night when Sky died. Lighting and sound are both instrumental in communicating the horror of what happened. Listen carefully to the sound effects and try to identify each element in the scene. Look at how this scene in Candice's room is juxtaposed with the present. What filmic codes create a clear contrast?
- FT & C:** What has caused the rift between Jim Phee and Rich Uncle Brian? (Also explained by Rich Uncle Brian (26.00).
- D:** Douglas is introduced to the class (approx. 7.40) and a POV shot shows students staring at him. Students can find a simple explanation of POV shots [here](#). Discuss the difficulties of being the new student (or new teacher) where everyone knows each other. Freeze at approx. 8.00, (Douglas' POV) and have students comment on the expressions on students' faces. Have them also look closely at the students' desks – what props can they see? What items do students have in common? Lastly – why do they think there are apples all over Miss Bamford's classroom?
- D:** What does Douglas (and the audience) notice about Candice as she packs away at the end of this class? Why might it seem unusual?
- D:** Jen Marshall and her 'posse' bully Candice. How do viewers get a sense of their personalities and attitudes? What elements in the film convey these?



8. **D & F:** Candice visits Douglas' home (approx. 18.40) The reaction of his mother, Penelope Benson, suggests that she has listened to Douglas and has labelled Candice. Have students discuss what the label might be and why Penelope assumes it applies to Candice. After examining some of the resources on the site below, have students consider whether Penelope is right to make assumptions.

Some useful resources for talking about the autism spectrum can be found at this useful site [here](#):



Discuss the image above– what is it saying?  
Are labels ever useful? Should we use them?

What behaviours do students have that others may consider 'odd'? Have them think about this and share only if they want to. Ensure this is a 'safe' activity by discussing rules that exclude students accusing each other of certain behaviours. Explain the necessity for each student to own their own space and decision whether to share or not.

9. **F:** Douglas and Candice go to a forest – this is a somewhat magical scene in which a tiny horse features. This insertion of magic can be termed ‘magic realism’ and gives a sense of fairy tale to this scene especially, and to the film overall. Have students think about the previous reference to a horse in the film (Sky’s death – 3 above). Have them think about why the horse might be there and why viewers learn that Candice is afraid of them. The sound of the trees in this scene adds to the ethereal effect and the sense of magic. Later in the film lens flare adds to the magical feeling – note the colours of the flares (approx. 30.20 until end of scene and at 37.00)

10. **FT & C:** Candice needs a bicycle to ensure she can save Douglas Benson from injuring himself. Viewers see Candice arriving home with her father in an old car and so can infer a lack of money. Rich Uncle Brian delivers a brand-new bicycle (approx. 25.00). Given the obviously strained relationship between her father and uncle, is this a good idea?

Have students compare their own thoughts with Rich Uncle Brian’s childlike delight in being able to help Candice. What does this show about him? Think about the other scenes he features in: the lobster and pineapple floating devices; the green juice and burgers early in the film with Candice. R.U.B. is certainly rich, but discuss whether his life can be considered ideal. Link back to the abstract nouns talked about earlier – what things do students think make an ‘ideal’ life?

11. **L & G, FT & C:** Look at the scene just after Candice is dropped at home by R.U.B. (approx. 28.30). How is the camera used to show the state of the relationship between Jim and Claire Phee?

12. **L & G, FT & C:** There is a flashback of happier times with Candice and her mother (approx. 32.50). How does the director visually convey this as a memory? How is humour created in this scene?

13. **L & G, FT & C:** Look at the family meal scene ( approx. 37.0), how are comedy and tragedy juxtaposed here? Look also at how the audience is positioned to react to Candice’s cooking – what shots show its truly awful nature? Have students think about how the meal begins the healing process for the Phees.

14. **L & G:** Look at the scene where Claire and Candice are discussing Candice’s birthday (approx. 40.00). Look at how tension is built with camera work and sound. How is the audience positioned to feel empathy with both characters in this scene?

15. **F & G:** look at Candice’s reaction to her lack of breasts just before the graveyard scene and then review the birthday scene where she receives gifts from Douglas Benson (approx. 45.00) Look at how friendship is changing to love and how this is shown.

16. **FT & C:** Review the marina scene – how is the script here seminal to the creation of humour during what is an extremely dangerous happening. Look at slapstick humour if you like and compare this scene with the likes of Norman Wisdom, Jerry Lee Lewis and Mr Bean.
17. **D:** The relief teacher Miss Cowie is not at all like Miss Bamford and frightens even Jen Marshall- have students look at costume, hair and makeup and how these work together to produce an imposing character! Play the scene again on mute, but with a different sound track – one that is bright and upbeat [just play the sound track, but there are also some clever and amusing SFX in here that students would find fun later]. How does sound therefore create atmosphere in the original?
18. **L & G:** Claire Phee is rejoining family life. Her early attempt to cook shows how distant she has been (approx. 1.00.40).
19. **F:** Jen and Candice pair up for an assignment. Look at the library scene (approx. 1.01.30) and discuss how Candice befriends Jen. What do these two characters have in common?
20. **FT& C:** How does Douglas Benson ignite new passion and vigour into Jim Phee? Look at the change in tone that occurs as he explains a possible new program to Candice. How is this change in tone communicated? (Approx. 1.06.00)
21. **FT & C:** Look at the dinner scene on Claire’s birthday (approx. 1.08.00). What do you notice about the restaurant setting in terms of colour, mood and realism? What is the theme of the restaurant and how does it link with the film as a whole? How does the director communicate that though Claire Phee seems well, she is still healing? Have students describe exactly how this scene, which begins so well, descends into chaos and sadness. Was Jim right to do what he did as a present? How has Candice, with the best of intentions, also got things so wrong?
22. **FT & C:** The café scene with Jim, Candice and Rich Uncle Brian marks a turning point in the film [approx. 1.16.00]. What is it that makes this scene both tense and funny? What adds humour? What does R.U.B. do differently here that help his relationship with Jim?
23. **F:** As Candice rides to try and stop Douglas hurting himself, the addition of a coat connotes as a cape – why is this significant and how does the cutting between Candice and Douglas affect viewers?



**Did you know?**

Barry Jonsberg, the author of *My Life As An Alphabet*, makes a cameo appearance in *H is for Happiness*.

**24. L&G:** As Douglas is taken away in an ambulance [approx. 1.20.50], we realise that she risks losing someone she loves for a second time. How does the lighting here show this and what other scenes does it link with? The use of negative space makes Candice seem very alone. The small horse is her only comfort and the audience is positioned to feel sympathy for her and fear for Douglas. Have students storyboard this scene [free storyboard templates are available [here](#)]. How would they convey the fear in this scene? Is there anything they would add or take away? Music is crucial here. Building on 17 above, if students could choose modern music, what would they use in this scene? If you have access to YouTube, have some students play their chosen tracks alongside the (muted) scene. Assess which are effective and why and conversely, which don't work as well.

**25. FT & C, L&G:** When Candice returns home, it's clear that her mother intends to leave. How does Douglas Benson's hospitalisation actually help Claire to let go of some of her grief? Also, examine how the director shows that time is passing in this and the hospital scene.

**26. FT & C, F:** The climactic scene of the film [approx. 1.28.30], 'Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers' works not only because of the action onstage. What role does Miss Bamford play and how do we know what she is thinking? Viewers' feelings are mirrored onscreen in the audience 'in the hall' – how is this effective in creating a joyous mood? Look at POV shots here and how they are used.

Students may wish to look at the following clip of Kenny and Dolly performing Islands In The Stream. How has make-up and costume transformed Candice and Douglas in the film and what effect does humour play in their performance?





## Intertextualisation:

*H is for Happiness* can be intertextualised with many texts, but for the purpose of this guide, the assumption is it will be compared to the novel *My Life As An Alphabet*, by Barry Jonsberg. Teachers' notes for the book can be found [here](#).

The screenplay was written by Lisa Hoppe and adapted from the novel. The storyline had to be altered to fit a different medium. Here are some of the main changes:

Gone from the Novel:	Brought into the Screenplay:
1. Earth-Pig Fish, Candice's pet goldfish [and with it, her attempt to turn it into an atheist]	A miniature horse
2. Douglas Benson From Another Dimension's father [the experimental musician]	Gavin, the owner of Calpurnia Costume Shop
3. Candice's American pen-pal [who never writes back]	No substitute
4. The location just outside Brisbane	A seaside town - Albany, WA
5. The ravine that Douglas thinks of throwing himself off	A very tall tree in a forest
6. References to New Orleans as Mum's wished-for destination	Nashville
7. Classroom oral presentation	A school hall presentation to parents

Divide students into 7 groups and assign each group one of the items above [a 'gone from' and its corresponding 'brought into']. Each group is to brainstorm reasons why the change was made [fifteen to twenty minutes is probably plenty of time to do this]. Students should be encouraged to think about the different demands of different media – what might work in a novel but wouldn't in a film and vice versa. Some preparatory work on the idea of function might be appropriate [and, depending upon the class, a hint that 6 and 7 are linked – i.e. that in the film *Candice's Mum loves country music*, which leads directly to the Dolly/Kenny duet at the film's climax]. A spokesperson from each group would then summarise the group's findings on the board for the rest of the class to consider. A whole class discussion might follow each group's presentation.



### **Did you know?**

An early draft of Lisa Hoppe's screenplay for *H is for Happiness* came fourth out of a thousand entries in an international screenwriting competition in the United States.

Here is a section of the novel compared to the screenplay:

This:

'One of his machines has a clear plastic case with lights that flash on and off and I fix on that. The colours are red, blue, orange and green and they make patterns that don't repeat. They are beautiful and much better than television.

Dad looked at me. His headphones hung around his neck like strange jewellery.

'Your Uncle Brian...,' he said. If I was going to be particularly literary, then I suppose I should write "he spat." But I couldn't see any phlegm, so I think I will err on the side of caution. Dad took a deep breath and started again. 'Your uncle is not the most reliable person in the world.' Dad never refers to Rich Uncle Brian as his brother, or Brian or even Rich. It's always "your uncle." They have a history.

'Yes, but what's your view, Dad?' I asked.

His eyes flicked to the side and his foot tapped even harder.

'I wasn't there when you were born, Candice,' he said finally. 'I was too late.'

Then he put his headphones back on and returned to his typing. I thought I heard him mutter the story of my life under his breath but I might have been mistaken. I am sometimes.

Dad is something of a mystery to me, but at least he doesn't call me any kind of vegetable or fruit, which is a welcome change.

Becomes this:

8 INT PHEE HOUSE/BASEMENT OFFICE - TWILIGHT 8

Candice's finger gingerly spins the propeller on Dad's beloved remote control plane - it sits on a shelf next to his desk.

Dad's office, in an area under the house, is cosy even though every surface is littered with machine bits. There is a bar fridge in a corner - and empty beer bottles sitting on top.

Candice hovers by Dad's side as he works. She closely observes the tight muscles in his face; his sad, resigned eyes.

CANDICE

Rich Uncle Brian says my birth was  
peaceful-

Dad practically spits at this.

DAD

Your Uncle Brian...

He thinks better of whatever it was he was going to say, takes a deep breath and starts again.

DAD (cont'd)

Your uncle is not the most reliable  
person in the world.

CANDICE

Yes, but what's your view, Dad?  
His eyes flicked to the side and his foot taps.

DAD

I wasn't there when you were born,  
Candice. I was too late.

Then he puts the headphones on and begins to type.

DAD (cont'd)

(mutters) The story of my life.

Candice spots a framed photograph on a shelf. It's facing the wall. She reaches for it - it's Dad and Rub in happier days. Arms around each other, brimming with love.

Candice spots a framed photograph on a shelf. It's facing the wall. She reaches for it - it's Dad and Rub in happier days. Arms around each other, brimming with love.

CANDICE (V.O.)

A few years ago, Dad and Uncle Brian were in business together. They wrote software and impressive things for computers. But they had a big falling out...

She glances over at Dad, hunched over. Harried.

CANDICE (V.O.)

'C' is for court case where nasty, unforgivable things were said. Dad and RUB's business was sold to pay for legal costs.

Discuss the possible reasons for the changes from novel to film and ask students how the novel is referenced in the film (poster on the Phees' fridge).



### **Did you know?**

It's possible to tell the length of a film by the number of pages in the screenplay. Each page should approximate to a minute's screen time, so a ninety-page script should make a film that runs for an hour and a half.



## Suggestions for assignments:

### CREATIVE:

1. Douglas claims that he returns to his own dimension towards the end of the film. Write a short screenplay of his time there [a free screenplay program is available [here](#)] and/or storyboard it [free storyboard templates are available [here](#)].
2. Use the My Life As An Alphabet assignment that Miss Bamford gives her class. This could be an individual assignment whereby each student writes one paragraph for each letter of the alphabet, or students can be divided into groups and assigned a letter. Groups or individuals could then give an in-class presentation or, for those who are ambitious, an open day presentation to staff, students and parents [a miniature horse and a Dolly and Kenny duet might be a bridge too far!]
3. Choose two or three techniques that Sheedy uses and compose your own short film on iPhone or Android phone [or other devices available at school]. There are many free film-making apps available and students are normally very proficient in their use. A theme could be suggested – school life, for example.

### ANALYTICAL:

1. How does the director of H is for Happiness use filmic codes to convey meaning? Refer to two or three scenes in detail.
2. John Sheedy, the director, said, “Even though Happiness is unashamedly a feel-good film, you can’t feel good the whole way through. The audience has to believe that they’ve earned it.” Discuss the emotional highs and lows the audience experiences and how they were created through the use of filmic codes.

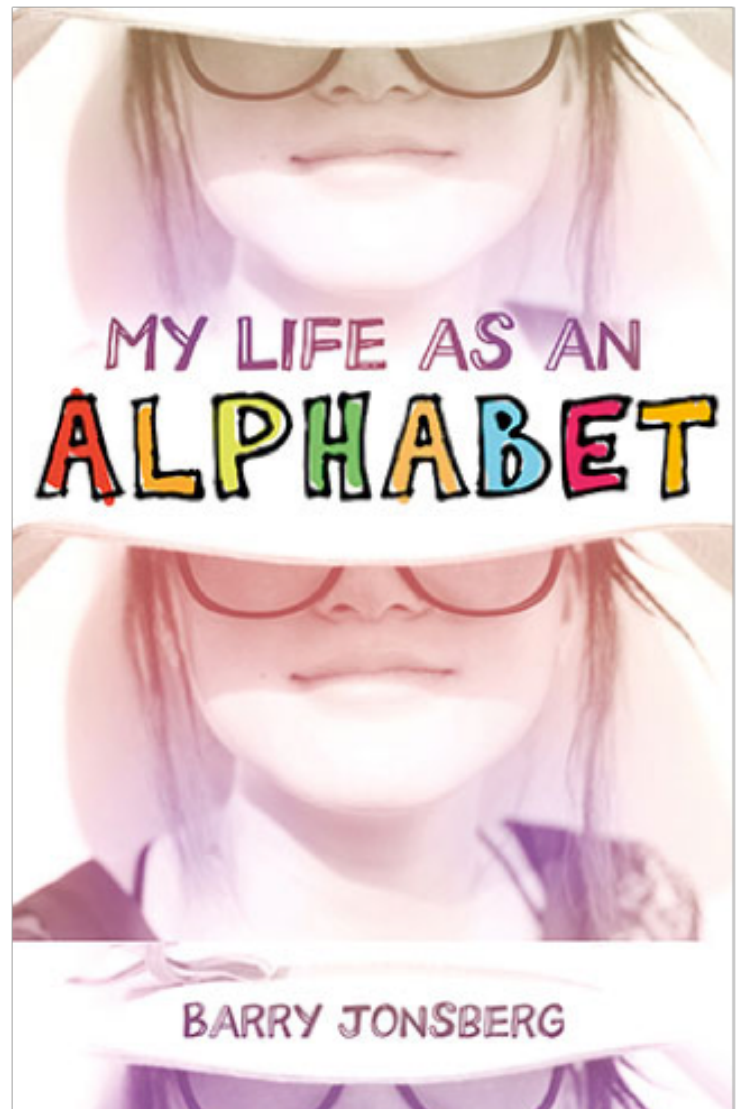
[the full Q&A session with John Sheedy can be found [here](#)]

3. How does the opening of H is for Happiness prepare the audience for what is to come?

## COMPARATIVE:

[assuming the linked text is My Life As An Alphabet, though obviously other texts can be used]

1. Write a short chapter, G is for Gavin, for inclusion in the novel My Life As An Alphabet. Use your understanding of Gavin's character from the film, but make sure you show Candice's quirky view of the world through your writing style.
2. Compare the use of humour in H is for Happiness and My Life As An Alphabet.
3. Students should create their own poster for the movie and/or a new book cover for the novel [a film tie-in edition. A few examples of film tie-in covers can be found [here](#)]. The poster for the film and the novel's original cover are shown below:



Remember a tagline [examples [here](#)] for the movie poster and promotion of the film in the book cover!



