

Mona lisa smile review



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In *Mona Lisa Smile*, Julia Roberts leads an all-star cast of prominent young actresses including Kirsten Dunst, Julia Stiles, Maggie Gyllenhaal and newcomer Ginnifer Goodwin, in a story of women struggling to define themselves in a world that has already defined them. Katherine Watson (Roberts) travels from California to the New England campus of Wellesley College, in the fall of 1953, to teach art history. In the post-war era, Katherine expects that her students, the best and the brightest in the arrival, however, Katherine discovers that the environment at the prestigious institution is steeped in conformity.

According to their poise and elocution, teacher Nancy Abbey (Marcia Gay Harden), an engagement ring on a young woman's finger is considered a bigger prize than a well-rounded education. When Katherine encourages her students to think independently, she runs afoul of the more conservative faculty and alumni, including one of her students, the upper crust Betty Warren (Dunst). The recently married, Betty becomes a formidable adversary when Katherine persuades her best friend, Joan Brandwyn (Stiles), to apply to Yale Law School - even as Joan is awaiting a proposal of marriage from her boyfriend.

For the smart and provocative Giselle Levy (Gyllenhaal), Katherine becomes a much-needed role model and mentor. The sweet and shy Connie Baker (Goodwin) also draws courage from Katherine's example and gains the confidence to break through her insecurities. In a world that told them how to live, Katherine teaches them how to think for themselves. Through her students' trials to find their own way, Katherine learns to chart a different course for herself as well.

Review Of The Movie World War II had been the first time in history when women were told they could do a man's job. They took off their corsets and took over the factories. Then, after the war, they were re-corseted with clear roles as housewives who supported their husbands and raised their children. On the surface it all seemed fine, but underneath the seeds were planted for the next generation. Mona Lisa Smile is an exploration of a time and place, after the war, where rebellion and individuality were very much frowned upon, yet the seeds of change had already taken root.

The protagonist of the motion picture, Katherine Watson (played by Julia Roberts), is shown to be one of the most brawny, independent and liberal thinkers of her time. Settled in a time frame, where marriage was the whole and soul purpose of the existence of a woman, Katherine is seen to break those bonds and live on her own terms. She, just like any other girl, was also engaged to marry at the age of 18. However, after Pearl Harbor, she and her fiancé realized that both of them had changed for good and called it quits, after which, Katherine went to L.

A for graduation, and turned out to be an art history professor. She embodied the best kind of spirit for a teacher, one that allows individuality and exploration of our personal strengths. Though her students at first, regard her a spinster for being over the age of 30 and unmarried, Katherine feels comfortable with her decision which some of the young women find intimidating and others, empowering. The daughter of a Wellesley alumna who is as involved in the college as she is in her daughter's life, Betty, regards Katherine's challenge to the status quo almost as a personal affront.

In the very beginning of the movie we see Betty being just horrible and condescending to everyone around her. Later, in the movie, you come across her mother, a formidable and intimidating woman, and you see why Betty turned out that way, her cold exterior quickly thaws. All her life has been shaped by her mother and she believes that once she gets married everything will be perfect. But she doesn't love her husband and neither does he love her. It's just a planned affair. She pretends to be happy and puts on a smile. Finally, you see her break down.

Ultimately, it's Katherine who gives her the courage to be herself and fight her personal vendetta. That's essentially what the movie is about, being true to yourself and becoming the person you want to be. Betty's journey is her inner battle between image and truth. She fights Katherine's lessons and her presence at first only because, if Katherine is right, then her life is a sham. While she hails from the same social background as Betty, her roommate and class valedictorian Joan Brandwyn has a completely different reaction to intellectual challenges presented by her art history teacher.

Like the other girls at Wellesley she knows how to recite and regurgitate information. She's a great student, but she's a textbook great student. Then Katherine comes along and tells her to think for herself and that's really seductive to Joan. She is about to be engaged, but with Katherine's encouragement, she decides to apply to law school anyway. Joan is the woman, Katherine decides, who has the most potential for change, so she devotes her energies to making sure that Joan recognizes that she has a choice. Once Joan chooses, Katherine needs to learn to respect her choice.

Giselle Levy is a sophisticated student who shocks her fellow students by having numerous affairs at a time when such behavior was considered scandalous. When Katherine comes to teach at Wellesley, Giselle is fascinated. She has been desperate for some kind of validation for her unorthodox feelings and here is Katherine who acknowledges her difference and says it's okay. Giselle's essential problem is not her behavior, but the judgment that's placed on it by her peers and society at large. Giselle is pretty in-your-face and she doesn't know why everybody is making such a big fuss that she sleeps with more than one man.

All she's saying is that you should eat food if it tastes good, dance if you like the beat and have sex if you want to have sex. Now, some people might say Giselle's broken or unhappy, or that she's overcompensating for something, but I tried not to judge her while watching the movie. Though she has many advantages in life, Connie is plagued by insecurities. She thinks she doesn't have beauty, or talent, or smarts. All she's got are these other girls, and that is so important to her that she allows herself to be their punching bag.

Yet, Connie possesses strong attributes, like her appreciation for the possibilities of love as well as her talent at playing the cello. The cello is Connie's form of expression, the only form of beauty she's ever been able to associate herself with. Through Katherine, Connie gains confidence and opens herself up, for the first time, to the possibility of romance. Suddenly love becomes an option for her and not just a dream. And that sort of power enables her to put herself first for once. Like the other girls, she undergoes a real change.

Connie realizes she doesn't have to go out and Nancy Abbey teaches speech, elocution and poise at Wellesley. Nancy is trying very hard to be representative of what she thinks a woman should be, which is 'simply lovely.' There is a gentleness and grace about her manners and it's a shame we've lost that sense of poise. But Nancy also has a turbulent underbelly caused by the repression of the times. It's poignant that Nancy chooses to remain at home, a spinster, because society's judgment about her age makes her feel it's too late for her to go out and risk something different.

Mona Lisa Smile is a real mirror of the period and a tribute to the Wellesley women who were the pioneers in terms of going out and forging paths and shoving their way into businesses that didn't want them. They were the generation who went out into the world and made a change. Throughout the movie, Katherine tries her best to empower women around her and to break the bonds that bind these intellectuals. The movie follows the journey of change in every individual and talks about the struggle of the individual - male or female.

Everyone is looking to find their proper place in life, where they can serve the most and be at their best. The movie doesn't tell us what to think or it doesn't distinguish right from wrong; instead, it paints a depiction of both sides of the story and states you can do both - have a career of your choice and get married - albeit doing it a little unsubtle at times. One of the things you realize while watching the movie is the sensitivity depicted in it. By the end of the movie, you realize that success may not mean the same thing to other people as it does to you.

For a few, having a family, being able to manage your household and having dinner ready by 5 is a huge success; while for others, success could mean turning out as lawyers, doctors, etc. We realize that as Catherine tenaciously went about her business making a difference in the lives of her students and the people around her, she made a difference in her own life just as well. Her journey as a teacher was a part of her formation. We cannot 'make a difference' in the lives of others without impacting our own.

There is an ongoing dialectic that propels us into action for others, but it undoubtedly is action for ourselves as well. It is only in the end of the movie, that we realize that Catherine herself lives in the confines of her own biases and disregards. That is what changes about her ultimately and she makes peace with the traditionalists around her and accepts that some women will always be happier in families rather than in themselves, but also paves the path for women who wanted so much more than a family. Throughout the movie you see brilliant 1950 based sets, cathedrals and brilliant locations.

The cinematography of this movie is quite fine as its simplicity is its brilliance as is the background score. The original work of Rachel Portman is outstanding as the theme of Mona Lisa Smile is quite addictive. The cast, crew and director, according to me, have done a splendid job with this motion picture. Though this movie has been thoroughly criticized and been compared to the old movie, the deadly poets, I am still very much of the opinion that this movie is one of its kind. It is a movie that truly moved me and which made me appreciate the fact that I was born then as a daughter, mother, wife, etc.