

# "Napoleon Dynamite"

## Hero/Quest Archetypal Story

### **SEPARATION**

When this movie begins, ND is already separated from society. He is on the outside of a social structure which has never included him. At the beginning of the film, we see that he is upset about this separation because he is always very angry. He kicks--without ever hurting anyone--and shouts harmless expletives like "GEEZ!" and "GAW!" with violent tosses of his head and other body parts. Clearly, he is on the outside of every group he might want to be a part of, groups at school and even his family.

### **INITIATION**

Initiation is ongoing throughout this film. At various points, people march past ND and punch or kick him. He is the victim of random (and not so random) acts of violence. In most stories, the initiation happens and then is over, but in this film, because ND has been sort of stuck in this SEPARATE mode for quite some time, his initiation continues throughout much of the film. He continues to be the victim of this initiation until the point at which he begins to take action.

### **BELLY OF THE BEAST**

ND stands in the wings of the stage, watching Summer's speech. Other bad things have happened leading up to this moment (Pedro has to take down his flyers and is disciplined for "The Piñata Incident"; Deb is angry about something ND didn't do; Uncle Rico is out of control.) and now the bottom drops out of everything when Pedro and ND find out they're supposed to have a skit. There is no skit. There is no way Pedro can win. Pedro even says, "Well, I didn't want to be president anyway" and uses ND's ridiculous line: "If you vote for me, all your wildest dreams will come true." It is clearly a last-ditch effort and indicates that both characters (Pedro and ND) have reached a bottom.

### **DISCOVERY**

ND faces his fears when he dances in front of his peers at the assembly. He discovers that he can bear it all. He discovers that he does have skills.

### **RETURN**

ND returns to his life on the outside, but after facing his fears, he now seems better able to accept his lot in life. Earlier in the film, he asks Summer Wheatley to play tetherball with him, a clear indication that he would like to be a part of a different social circle. Here at the end of the movie, he asks Deb to play with him. She accepts his offer in the same way that ND has come to accept who he is.

P.S. Did you notice that the initials of the main character of this film sound like the name of another popular hero of film?

## OTHER ELEMENTS

### **extended search**

ND is searching for a girlfriend, claims to have a one in Oklahoma, calls Tricia his "woman" who he's taking to the dance, but what he doesn't realize is that he's searching for the wrong thing. He does finally discover what he really needs to be searching for.

### **supernatural forces**

the internet--which brings Kip's "soulmate" to him

the time-travel device--?

the power of groups of teenagers to inflict such pain and suffering on others

### **decisive victories (usually triumphing over evil)**

ND throws Summer's campaign button

### **acts of selflessness**

ND gathers Deb's craft boxes (ND refers to them as the "crap she left on my porch") and returns them to her.

### **rescue of the princess (or other helpless person)**

This might be missing...I can't think of it right now.

### **call to adventure**

"If you want to run for president, sign up in the office."

### **wise and helpful guide**

Pedro and all that comes with him...family, hook-ups, etc. "Draw her a picture."

### **into the unknown**

Look at the lighting of the stage when ND begins to dance. It's a tiny spot of light in the midst of darkness.

asking a girl to a dance

helping a friend to run for class president

## HOMEWORK:

Now, rent the movie again.

Watch it more carefully, looking for each of these elements.

I'll bet you will find even more.