

**LEARNING STRATEGIES:**

Close Reading, Marking the Text, Note-taking, Summarizing,

My Notes

**Literary Terms**

A **biography** is a description or account of someone else’s life or significant events from that person’s life. In contrast, an **autobiography** is an account written by a person about his or her own life.

**notoriously:** famously

**grisly:** horrific

**lore:** tradition

**classic:** highest quality

**revisoning:** new version

**Learning Targets**

- Identify the subject and important details in a main-idea statement.
- Write main-idea statements.

**Preview**

In this activity, you will read a biographical essay on filmmaker Tim Burton and summarize the main idea of the essay.

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

- As you read the essay, underline key facts and details that might contribute to the main idea.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.
- Draw a star next to Burton’s influences.

**Biographical Essay**

**Tim Burton: Wickedly Funny, Grotesquely Humorous**

“There’s a naughtiness in Tim that’s similar to Roald Dahl. A little bit of wickedness, a little bit of teasing, a subversiveness. Both of them never lost the gift of knowing what it’s like to be a child—a very rare gift ...”—Felicity ‘Licky’ Dahl<sup>1</sup>

**1** Stories written for children haven’t always been as tame as the stories created by Walt Disney. Grimm’s fairy tales are **notoriously** violent and **grisly**, especially considering the sheer number of abandoned and mistreated children that populate the **lore** of fairy tales. Roald Dahl, who wrote the **classic** children’s book, *James and the Giant Peach*, is as famous for his cruelly ironic adult short stories as he is for his popular and dark stories like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, written for and about children. These are just two of the direct sources and inspirations for Tim Burton’s films that have influenced his imagination and cinematic style.

**2** Tim Burton’s style is clearly influenced by his fascination with fairy tales and children’s stories. Whether bringing to life his own literary creations such as *Frankenweenie* (2012) or *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), or adapting popular works such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) or *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), Burton offers a dark and delightful **revisoning** of childhood stories. Like fairy tales, Burton’s stories encourage escapism into worlds of fantasy and the supernatural while often reminding his audience of traditional morals and lessons. Some of Burton’s most important and recurring inspirations have come from children’s books.

**3** Burton grew up loving Dr. Seuss. He thought Dr. Seuss’s books were a perfect blend of subversive storytelling with a playful, innocent use of rhythm and rhyme. It is easy to see the influence of Seuss’s imagination in Burton’s *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Based upon Burton’s original three-page poem and drawings as well as inspired by the well-known poem *The Night Before Christmas* (1823), the film is a gentle horror story.

<sup>1</sup> **Licky Dahl** was the executive producer of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) and is the widow of author Roald Dahl. This quote is from Leah Gallo, *The Art of Tim Burton*, Los Angeles: Steeles Publishing, 2009.

4 Burton worked for many years at Walt Disney Studios, whose approach to adapting fairy tales tends to understate the more sinister elements. Burton, however, embraces the dark elements. His first project as an **apprentice** was a six-minute film called, *Vincent* (1982), a tribute to actor Vincent Price and author Edgar Allan Poe, two significant childhood influences. Burton says he related deeply to these two icons of horror fiction and film. The film features a seven-year-old boy, Vincent Malloy, who fantasizes about acting out Poe’s gothic horror stories and dreams of being an **anguished** character like Price. In many ways this first short film anticipates many of the common themes and influences that Burton has continued to explore throughout his cinematic career.

5 In his 2005 adaptation of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Burton brings to life Roald Dahl’s subversive vision of childhood innocence. All of the children in the story, save Charlie, are undeserving **wretches**. Burton delights in including Dahl’s graphic rhyming songs celebrating the fates of the repulsive and ungrateful children of the story.

*We very much regret that we  
Shall simply have to wait and see  
If we can get him back his height.  
But if we can’t—it serves him right.*

6 Just as classic children’s literature can be enjoyed by adults with new appreciation, so too can Tim Burton’s films be enjoyed and appreciated after multiple revisits. By examining and understanding the influence of writers such as E.A. Poe and Roald Dahl, as well as Dr. Seuss and classic fairy tales, the sources of Burton’s cinematic style become clear. Characterized by a childlike innocence and playfulness coupled with a dark and somewhat grotesque sensibility, Burton’s films have already become classics.

## Second Read

- Reread the biographical essay to answer these text-dependent questions.
  - Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
1. **Key Ideas and Details:** How does the essay describe Burton’s cinematic style? Explain how it first developed.
  2. **Key Ideas and Details:** How does Burton’s cinematic style compare and contrast with Walt Disney’s style?
  3. **Key Ideas and Details:** Where can you see Edgar Allan Poe’s influence on Burton’s work?

**apprentice:** a person learning a trade

**anguished:** showing excruciating distress

**wretches:** annoying people

### My Notes

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### INDEPENDENT READING LINK

#### Read and Discuss

Discuss with classmates a story you have read that has a film version. Consider the cinematic techniques used in the film version and how they contribute to the filmmaker’s style. Refer to what you learned about Tim Burton’s style in the biographical essay to guide your discussion.

# Film in Context: An Authorial Study

## Literary Terms

A **main idea** is a statement (often one sentence) that summarizes the key details of a text.

A **theme** is the central message of a literary work.

## My Notes

## Working from the Text

Now that you have read a biographical essay on film director Tim Burton, you will spend the rest of this unit exploring his unique style. An understanding of his life and background will help you understand his directorial choices that define his style.

A statement of a **main idea** is not the same as a text's subject or the **theme** of a literary work. For instance, the biographical essay has a specific subject: Tim Burton's style as a filmmaker. The main-idea statement summarizes the important points of a text, usually informational in nature. Identifying the main idea of a text should begin with identifying the key points, or subjects, within the text. Now that you have read the essay, identify the main idea of the text by summarizing its key points in the following space.

Summarize the key points of this text into one main-idea sentence. You might use this sentence frame to guide your writing:

Because Tim Burton was influenced by \_\_\_\_\_,  
*(subject/key point)*  
 \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, his films are  
*(subject/key point)* *(subject/key point)*  
 characterized by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
*(adjective phrase)* *(adjective phrase)*

## Check Your Understanding

Choose one of the subjects that influenced director Tim Burton. Explain how this subject influenced him and how it impacted his style.

## Writing to Sources: Explanatory Text

Once you have written and shared your main-idea statement, use your notes to write a paragraph that supports your topic sentence. Explain how specific details contribute to Tim Burton's cinematic style and what makes it effective. Be sure to:

- Revise your main-idea statement if needed.
- Choose details about Tim Burton and his style that support your topic sentence.
- Organize the sentences in your paragraph, and use correct grammar.
- Provide a conclusion to your paragraph that follows logically from the points presented.