End Stage 5 English student work sample – Grade A

She is a h0e: Amanda Bynes is the man

In recent years, Hollywood has been mildly starved of originality, occasionally choosing to adapt older movies, television programmes, books and even foreign-language films instead of writing original screenplays. “She’s the Man” is one such movie. “She’s the Man” takes Shakespeare’s original play, “Twelfth Night”, or “What you Will”, and places its characters and situations into a modern-day high school. The Shakespeare transformation is not a particularly original concept (“Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet”) and neither is the high school romantic comedy (“Mean Girls”) – in fact, we have already seen a combination of the two in 1999’s excellent “10 Things I Hate About You”. Nevertheless, “She’s the Man” sets out to appeal to the teenage demographic with its light mix of comedy and romantic intrigue.

Viola (Amanda Bynes) is far from the stereotypical girl – she plays soccer better than the boys, she burps with reckless abandon and she eats like a pig. Unfortunately for Viola, the people around her want her to change – she dumps her boyfriend (Robert Hoffman) after he insinuates that males are superior, the girls soccer team is abandoned due to a lack of interest, and her mother constantly drops hints of a debutante ball when Viola’s guard is down. When Sebastian, her brother, plans to cut school for a week to play a concert in London with his band, he asks Viola to help by keeping his secret. Instead, Viola decides to take the opportunity to show that girls can do whatever boys can do by dressing up as Sebastian and taking his place at school.

Directed by Andy Fickman, “She’s the Man” is merely school holiday filler for the teenage audience. There’s nothing inherently wrong with it, but it also fails to astound. The acting is adequate; all members of the cast play their roles competently, if not overenthusiastically – Amanda Bynes particularly, whose over-acting, while suiting her role, also exposes her to be a very average actress. The story is also fairly mediocre; the plot can be predicted fairly accurately within the first fifteen minutes of the movie. But hey, this is a teenage chick-flick – we were all expecting such setbacks, and anything more would be a bonus.

No, where this movie really fails, is in its sub-standard screenplay, written by Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith. The strengths of a teenage flick lies in its witty dialogue, which unfortunately, “She’s the Man” is very sparse in. The humour is mostly simple and dull, eliciting at most a snort from the viewer. The characters are all very two-dimensional; we have the tomboy, the chauvinist, the misunderstood beefcake, the conservative mother – the list goes on. And finally, numerous plot holes suddenly appear out of nowhere. How is Viola’s high school not notice her missing for a whole week? How can two parents misplace their child? How does a present-day movie set in high school and revolving around cross-dressing manage to go one-and-a-half hours without mentioning homosexuality a single time?

“She’s the Man” is not really a bad movie, but it’s the sort of movie to be enjoyed by teenagers who don’t care about silly things like plot and character – just a good time. It’s probably better to watch this movie in a crowd as well; laughing is infectious, and it amplifies the impact several jokes have. The average teenager will love this movie; it’s perfect for a sleepover, or a date, but anyone not within thirteen to seventeen could probably give this a miss.

Grade Commentary

Sam has demonstrated an extensive understanding of film techniques and a very high level of competence in film analysis. An appropriate register has been adopted, and there is a strong sense of personal voice suited to the audience and purpose. Sam has produced a sophisticated, highly skilful and fluent review showing a confident grasp of language.

Sam’s response demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at A standard at the end of Stage 5.