

‘A Teacher’ Explores Torrid Student Obsession with Unexplained Adult Regression

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – We often go to the movies to suspend real life and explore what we think about doing but won’t or would do but can’t. Have you ever fallen for a much younger man or woman? Have you ever had a secret affair with someone at work? Have you ever obsessed over someone you shouldn’t?

New filmmaker Hannah Fidell explores these burning questions in her feature debut “A Teacher” about an inappropriate student/teacher “relationship”. The film was an official selection at 2013’s SXSW and Sundance Film Festival. Hannah Fidell’s short 75-minute feature won SXSW’s Emergent Narrative Woman Director award. She has also been named one of the “25 new faces of independent film”.



Lindsay Burdge and Will Brittain in “A Teacher”.

Image credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories

I found her new film On Demand and decided to give it a chance to see if you should. “A Teacher” is now live On Demand and at iTunes and

will appear in limited theatres on Sept. 6, 2013. In Chicago, the film opens on Sept. 13, 2013 at Facets Cinémathèque.

We're a fly on the wall in the secret life of Diana Watts – played very promisingly by an established independent actress who you've likely never heard of named Lindsay Burdge. An adult acting like a teenager, she's a teacher who has a forbidden and torrid love affair with her student, Eric Tull (played by the very new actor Will Brittain). He's a kid who never evolves into anything more.

What we discover throughout is something that got halfway there and could have been so much more. The premise is attractive, but the execution is unfinished.



Lindsay Burdge and Will Brittain in "A Teacher".

Image credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories

All eyes are primarily on the high school AP lit teacher Diana Watts. While we have reason to believe she's smart, we never understand why she's so stupid. This is the film's biggest downfall. It's this unanswered question that frustrates from start to finish. While she's obsessed with this boy for no apparent reason, you're forced to wonder why and never find out.

Diana has everything to lose in this hidden fling and nothing to gain. Eric's just having risk-free fun and can easily bat her away and go to a dance with some other age-appropriate girl. There's no reason this woman should be so emotionally obsessed with this boy and make her entire life about him when he only shows interest in sex.

Never once does he show emotional investment or respond to her statements of inner attraction. Many smart, strong and independent women may feel like Diana isn't representative of who they are. While some women may have made mistakes like this, many could watch this film and feel like they can't relate because a back story never explains why we should believe it.



Lindsay Burdge in “A Teacher”.

Image credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories

Early on in a quick scene with her brother, we briefly learn about some sort of conflict between Diana and her mom. But what could be important there leaves us with yet another unexplained red herring. And Diana has a momentary opportunity to meet a real man, but never shows any interest and simply continues fawning over the boy who doesn’t reciprocate her emotional intelligence.

While my connection to this film wavered on and off as I went in and out of needing answers and trying to forget about them, an effectively tense score along with darkly lit and patiently paced cinematography helped fill the void left by these plot holes. These environments help you to feel nervous about Diana getting caught even though you never care if Eric does. Effective camera blurring helps give you the same confusion she’s feeling.

But awkward scene cuts and fade-outs sometimes make the film feel too segregated like it’s a series of connected one-acts rather than a complete, smoothly flowing film. These separations sometimes feel like emotional interruptions – like reading a chapter in a book, putting it down and reading the next one a day later – and can prevent you from continuing your feelings.



Lindsay Burdge in “A Teacher”.

Image credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories

Despite some of the promise and mistakes shown by filmmaker Hannah Fidell – who I’d be interested to see in her next feature if she investw

more carefully in her script – star Lindsay Burdge as Diana is the reason to discover this film. She's being described as a "lightning in a bottle" and does indeed do the most she can with the imperfect script she's given. You keep waiting and wondering about her, and though her story isn't fully fleshed out, you do feel her inner anguish.

You just don't understand how she got there. Without her back story, you can't feel sorry for her, hate her or relate to her. Instead, you just want to fix the script that never explains why she's trying to have this ridiculous relationship with a boy who wants nothing more than a hidden affair. Never are these sex partners seen even having a friendship.

Ending with a song performed by Lee Moses entitled "If Loving You is a Crime (I'll Always Be Guilty)," you always feel like you know from the set up where the film is going. Even if it goes there, I wouldn't mind so much if I just understood why it did. This question isn't a cliffhanger you can mysteriously leave unexplained. Because it's never answered, you end up frustrated that you could never understand why she'd love a boy so much who never does in return.

"A Teacher" stars Lindsay Burdge, Will Brittain, Jennifer Prediger, Julie Dell Phillips, Jonny Mars and Chris Doubek from writer and director Hannah Fidell. The 75-minute film is available now On Demand, at iTunes and in limited theatres on Sept. 6, 2013. In Chicago, "A Teacher" opens on Sept. 13, 2013 at Facets Cinémathèque. The movie is distributed by Oscilloscope Laboratories, which is the independent film distribution company started by Beastie Boys member Adam Yauch.

When you search online for "A Teacher," you'll get a lot of confusion with the mainstream movie "Bad Teacher" with Cameron Diaz and Jason Segel. The film's Twitter is [here](#) [19], its Facebook is [here](#) [20] and its official Web site is [here](#) [21]. Director Hannah Fidell's Twitter is [here](#) [22].

All filming was done in the "great state of Texas" including Austin. The film was made possible in part by the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program and the Cinereach Project at the Sundance Institute. Co-produced with Kim Sherman, "A Teacher" was awarded the U.S. In-Progress Grand Prize at the 2013 Champs-Elysees Film Festival.



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