Stranger Than Fiction
Discussion
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Main Topics/Questions to Discuss

1) Think about what is the responsibility of a fiction writer to his or her audience.
    a. What do you believe Karen Eiffel's priorities were, throughout her writing career, and why do you think these changed in the end?
    b. If Harold Crick hadn't been a real person (in the context of the movie), would you still support her decision to sacrifice literary merit for a "happy ending" and "keeping a worthwhile character alive" for readers? Do you think her new ending – where Harold's sacrifice results in extreme injury - could be just as powerful as the first – where his sacrifice results in his untimely and tragic death?

2) We hear, throughout the story, Karen Eiffel's narration of Harold Crick's story.
    a. What literary point of view is Karen Eiffel's book being written in?
    b. What purposes does this type of narration serve?
    c. Does this narration have anything to do with the mathematics involved in the film?

3) Why do you think the characters are given their specific Mathematician names and what purposes do they serve?
    a. Do the names match their roles and fits into the larger plot?

4) Think about the sacrifices several characters made.
    a. Do you think Karen Eiffel and Penny Escher also, to a smaller degree, sacrifice themselves for the good of another?
    b. Harold's sacrifice prompts Eiffel to sacrifice in turn, which prompts Escher to sacrifice. What does this pattern suggest about the nature of sacrifice? Do you believe that this principle is true to life?

5) Karen Eiffel says, near the end of the film:
    As Harold took a bite of Bavarian sugar cookie, he finally felt as if everything was going to be ok. Sometimes, when we lose ourselves in fear and despair, in routine and constancy, in hopelessness and tragedy, we can thank God for Bavarian sugar cookies. And, fortunately, when there aren't any cookies, we can still find reassurance in a familiar hand on our skin, or a kind and loving gesture, or subtle encouragement, or a loving embrace, or an offer of comfort, not to mention hospital gurneys and nose plugs, an uneaten Danish, soft-spoken secrets, and Fender Stratocasters, and maybe the occasional piece of fiction. And we must remember that all these things, the nuances, the anomalies, the subtleties, which we assume only accessorize our days, are effective for a much larger and nobler cause. They are here to save our lives. I know the idea seems strange, but I also know that it just so happens to be true.

    a. Do you agree with her ideas, as you understand them? What do you think she is trying to say?

6) Ana Pascal tells Harold, "...I figured if I was gonna make the world a better place... I would do it with cookies..."
  c.   What does she mean?
  d.   Do you agree with her mentality? Can you "make the world a better place" with cookies?
  e.   What do you think is the role of mathematics in Harold's life? Is it like that of a cookie to Ana?

7) This film includes an unusually high number of "over-the-shoulder" shots. What effect do you think this technique was intended to have?

8) Music and sound was used very intentionally. What effect can music have on a viewer's mood/understanding of the film?

9) There were a number of motifs used throughout this film. Describe the possible role (symbolic or otherwise) of: Taxes/numbers, The wrist-watch, and Cookies/baking

Mathematical References and Bibliographies

Many of the names of characters and locations in the film are names of famous mathematicians.

Pascal
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaise_Pascal

Hilbert
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hilbert

Cayley
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Cayley

Mittag-Leffler
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gösta_Mittag-Leffler

In addition, the bus route identified as "Kronecker" and the publisher named after Benjamin Banneker.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_Kronecker

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Banneker

Last but not least, there are Gustave Eiffel, Francis Crick and M.C. Escher, who are not strictly mathematicians, but whose work for which they are most famous certainly depended to some degree upon mathematics.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Eiffel

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Crick

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._C._Escher

Song in *Stranger Than Fiction* - My Mathematical Mind by SPOON
Lyrics:
http://www.sweetslyrics.com/603502.Stranger%20Than%20Fiction%20movie%20-%20My%20Mathematical%20Mind.html

Lastly, I think the film's animated overlay reflecting the computations are fun to watch and are reminiscent of *NUMB3RS* and *A Beautiful Mind*.

NUMB3RS
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numbers_(TV_series)

A Beautiful Mind
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Beautiful_Mind_(film)