



(500) DAYS OF SUMMER (Cert 12)

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Overview: When lifelong romantic Tom gets closer than anyone else to free-spirited Summer, he thinks she must be 'the one'. But is he right and does such a thing exist, and what can they learn along the way? *(500) Days of Summer* offers a youthful, postmodern take on the rom-com in a culture shy of commitment.

Director: Marc Webb

Producers: Fox Searchlight Pictures

Length: 91 Minutes

Cautions: Contains infrequent strong language and moderate sex references

THE FILM

A short pre-credits sequence introduces us to young romantic Tom Hansen (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) and illusion-free Summer Finn (Zooey Deschanel). While Tom believes he will never be happy until he meets 'the one', seeing the disintegration of her parents' marriage has convinced Summer otherwise. Before the credits appear, we know to expect a courtship between opposites.

The story flashes back to Day 290 of Tom and Summer's friendship. Tom's friends McKenzie (Geoffrey Arend) and Paul (Matthew Grace Gubler) have called in Tom's kid sister, Rachel (Chloe Grace Moretz) to help Tom through his latest heartbreak. Tom thinks the relationship is going well and is shocked that Summer thinks differently.

As Tom recounts what happened, the film starts its out-of-sequence narrative, cleverly jumping back and forth between the good and bad times of Tom and Summer's volatile relationship. Architect-trained Tom

has settled for a job as a copywriter in a greetings card company. When vivacious Summer joins the firm, the two discover a shared interest in music and Tom's hopes of romance lift.

But, while chatting with Tom and his friends, Summer soon reveals, she doesn't have a boyfriend because she prefers her independence and 'relationships are messy'. Tom is confused as he is infatuated with her and they have already had a long kiss at the office photocopier.

His confusion grows when, Summer says, 'I'm not looking for anything serious', even though she is happy to sleep with him. After initial enjoyment, the relationship slowly unravels over this clash of values and expectations, until an unsuccessful blind date with another girl, leads Tom to think he has one more chance with Summer ...

FIRST REACTIONS

- What did you like most or least about this film?
- How did you feel about the film's apparently random order? Was it really random? In what ways did it help to stress the volatile nature of Tom and Summer's relationship? What did you think about the split-screen sequences near the end of the film?
- A lot of the discussions between Tom, Summer and Tom's friends concern whether true love and destiny are real or a lie produced by films, songs and greeting card companies. Is the film more or less realistic than other rom-coms in the way it portrays love and relationships? How truthful did your group find it?

INTERACTIONS

- In what ways do you think Tom and Summer were good for each other? How did they both grow

through their relationship? In what ways did they influence each other's thinking? Were Tom and Summer opposites and, if so, in what areas?

- What did the group think of Tom's friends and the value of their friendship, even if their understanding of women seemed somewhat limited?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is 'highly identify', ask the group to write down how much they identified, first with Summer and then with Tom. No one has to say what they wrote, but invite people to share what they empathised with in the characters, or what irritated them. It would be interesting to discover if the empathy splits down gender lines or in other ways.
- At the start of the movie, we were told Summer had 'only loved two things – her long dark hair and how easily she could cut it off and feel nothing'. On one level, this is just a quirky joke, but on another what does it say about her attitude to life and, perhaps, relationships?
- When Summer tells Tom and his friends 'I enjoy being free and independent' (Chapter 8), Tom probes, asking, 'What happens if you fall in love?' Summer says, 'There's no such thing as love. It's fantasy.' Why do you think she believes this? How do you feel about her reluctance to commit to a serious relationship? What are your feelings about couples entering into a commitment-free sexual relationship?
- At one of Rachel's football matches, Tom refers to his young sister as 'coach'. Alison, Tom's blind date, also helps Tom see he is being unfairly critical of Summer since she had made it clear she wanted a relationship without serious commitments, and he had agreed to this. How important is it to have

friends or family to help us see situations objectively? Were there any times when you would like to have given Tom some advice and what would it be?

- 'That wall Summer often hid behind was slowly coming down', the narrator says at one point (0.36.48 seconds). Apart from Tom, we don't see Summer talking over her feelings or decisions with anyone. If you were close to her, is there any advice you would give her at any point in this story?

CLIP TO DISCUSS

Chapters 10–11, 0.25.56–0.32.05

Begins at Day 282 when Tom tries a tap at the IKEA superstore and tells a bored-looking Summer 'Our sink's broken'. This cuts quickly to Day 34 – their first visit there when the mood was very different. They playfully try out the different showrooms as if they were at home. The scene continues to Tom's flat when Summer sets down the terms for their relationship. The next morning the whole street congratulate Tom in an Bollywood-style dance sequence.

- As Tom and Summer have fun in the superstore, were there any TV ads that came to mind? How much are the advertisers of furniture and household goods part of the same commercialisation of love and relationships that Tom later criticises at the greetings card company?
- Tom's expectations of his night with Summer suddenly change when she says she doesn't want a serious relationship. Is he right or wrong to be confused? Why do you think he accepts these terms that he later regrets? How important are trust and security to relationships between couples?

- Later in the film, Summer is ready for marriage and perhaps for lifetime commitment. **Read Genesis 1.21–25; Matthew 19.3–9.** The Bible seems only to support sexual relationships between couples who are seeking a permanent commitment. What are your feelings about this? If Summer, more so than Tom, is a casualty of her parents' broken marriage, is the Bible right to stress the permanence of marriage and divorce itself as a last resort?
- **Read Ephesians 5.21–32:** Earlier Summer reacted angrily when Tom defended her because she didn't want to be anyone's girlfriend or property. The idea of submission in this passage has been the source of much debate in recent years, but it was radical in New Testament times because of its two-way nature. Does this kind of Christlike, sacrificial love make commitment and trust sound more worthwhile?

OTHER ANGLES

- When Tom takes Summer on an architectural tour of Los Angeles, ending at his favourite spot of Angelus Plaza, he is full of enthusiasm. He says, 'There is a lot of beautiful stuff here. I wish people could see it more.' How did you feel about this scene and why? What fills you with enthusiasm and how do you find ways of sharing this with others? Are there overlooked things (like Ringo!) that you would like other people to value more?

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