

William is a “Cool Nerd”

For this assignment, I decided to watch the movie *Almost Famous*. I decided to look at the character William, because he is the main character and because he is very interesting. I think that in some ways he really a nerd, but in other ways, he is also cool. I don't know if this makes sense, but I think he is a “cool nerd”.

At the beginning of the movie, William seems to be completely a nerd. Very early on, we see him in a bathroom. In that scene, we see other boys all combing their thin mustaches, and we can see that they have begun puberty and are beginning to get facial hair. William looks very different and weird from these other boys, because he is much shorter and looks much younger than them. So right away, William looks different from other kids. We hear his older sister Anita explain that other kids call him names and don't include him which is a big sign that he is a nerd. William's mother doesn't think this is a problem, but his older sister, who is obviously “cool”, thinks it is a big problem. If poor William is not already a nerd, it seems certain that he will someday become one. When William tries to speak in a cool way, he sounds nervous and awkward: the best example is when he says is “Hey, man, uh, take care of my sister... man!” to his sister's boyfriend. When he uses this slang term, “man”, he sounds very awkward, and Anita's boyfriend makes a rude face at him.

But something important and surprising happens on the day when Anita leaves. What happens is that Anita promises William that someday he will be cool. William is a nerd, so how can he become cool? His sister tells him to look under his bed because what is there will “set him free”. When William follows her instructions, he finds a collection of rock music records. Obviously, for Anita, there's a big connection between rock music and being “free” or “cool”. But William's mother thinks rock music is just about drugs and promiscuous sex, and she thinks William is better off not following Anita's ways.

At this moment, time jumps forward in the movie, and suddenly William is in high school. I

think he looks a little cooler, suddenly, because his hair is a little longer and his clothing doesn't look so conservative. When he meets the famous rock music critic Lester Bangs, Lester says to him, "There's nothing controversial about you," it seems that William might still be sort of a nerd. He's smart, which is a sign of a nerd – Lester tells him he's smart when he says that he doesn't use drugs. But even if he is sort of a nerd, William also somehow gets into the "cool" world of rock music. He goes to the Black Sabbath concert, becomes friends with Penny Lane, and gets close enough to the band Stillwater to be invited along on their concert tour. In fact, as time passes, William actually experiences many of the things that are part of the 1970s American rock culture: a little promiscuous sex, and seeing other people using drugs even if he himself doesn't use them. So does William become "cool"?

I don't think so. The big sign is when Lester and William are talking on the phone, and William is heartbroken about Penny and about his problems with Stillwater. Lester consoles William, but he doesn't lie to him. He says, rock musicians can have a strange effect on the way people think about themselves because "they make you feel cool", and tells William, "... hey. I met you. You are not cool." William admits that he always knew he was not cool, but Lester Bangs talks about cool in an unusual way. He says that many great artists are also uncool, and that most of the great art is about the problems uncool men have with women, and Bangs also tells him that "the only true currency in this bankrupt world is what we share with someone else when we're uncool."

So William is, in fact, still a nerd. He got a chance to visit the world of rock music with all the "cool people" and everything else it includes, but he did not fit in there, not perfectly. He isn't really "cool" like Russel or Penny, although in some way they accept him despite – or because – he is uncool. But really, William is a nerd like Lester. The big difference is that, by the end of the movie, William doesn't care about "cool" anymore, but only about rock music itself and his writing about it. To me, this gives him a special power around rock musicians like Russel, and makes him "cool" in a different way, and *this* is what finally sets him free.