**Biographical Essay**

**Roots and Affixes**  
The word subversive contains the prefix sub- which means “under, beneath, or below.” In the sense used in this essay, subversive means “to undermine established patterns.”

**Key Ideas and Details** Summarize the writer’s topic and opinion as presented in the first two paragraphs. Underline the thesis.

**Key Ideas and Details** In Paragraph 4, Burton’s style is contrasted with the style of films produced by the Walt Disney Studios. How are they different?

**Tim Burton: Wickedly Funny, Grotesquely Humorous**

“There’s a naughtiness in Tim that’s similar to Roald Dahl. A little bit of wickedness, a little bit of teasing, a **subversiveness**. Both of them never lost the gift of knowing what it’s like to be a child—a very rare gift . . .”—Felicity ‘Liccy’ Dahl\*

1 Stories written for children haven’t always been as tame as the stories created by Walt Disney. Grimm’s fairy tales are notoriously violent and grisly, especially considering the sheer number of abandoned and mistreated children that populate the lore of fairy tales. Roald Dahl, who wrote the classic children’s book, *James and the Giant Peach*, is as famous for his cruelly ironic adult short stories as he is for his popular and dark stories like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, written for and about children. These are just two of the direct sources and inspirations for Tim Burton’s films that have influenced his imagination and cinematic style.

2 Tim Burton’s style is clearly influenced by his fascination with fairy tales and children’s stories. Whether bringing to life his own literary creations such as *Frankenweenie* (2012) or *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), or adapting popular works such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) or *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), Burton offers a dark and delightful revisioning of childhood stories. Like fairy tales, Burton’s stories encourage escapism into worlds of fantasy and the supernatural while often reminding his audience of traditional morals and lessons. Some of Burton’s most important and recurring inspirations have come from children’s books.

3 Burton grew up loving Dr. Seuss. He thought Dr. Seuss’s books were a perfect blend of **subversive** storytelling with a playful, innocent use of rhythm and rhyme. It is easy to see the influence of Seuss’s imagination in Burton’s The *Nightmare Before Christmas*. Based upon Burton’s original three-page poem and drawings as well as inspired by the well-known poem *The Night Before Christmas* (1823), the film is a gentle horror story.

4 Burton worked for many years at Walt Disney Studios, whose approach to adapting fairy tales tends to understate the more sinister elements. Burton, however, embraces the dark elements. His first project as an apprentice was a six-minute film called, *Vincent* (1982), a tribute to actor Vincent Price and author Edgar Allan Poe, two significant childhood influences. Burton says he related deeply to these two icons of horror fiction and film. The film features a seven-year-old boy, Vincent Malloy, who fantasizes about acting out Poe’s gothic horror stories and dreams of being an anguished character like Price. In many ways this first short film anticipates many of the common themes and influences that Burton has continued to explore throughout his cinematic career.

5 In his 2005 adaptation of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Burton brings to life Roald Dahl’s **subversive** vision of childhood innocence. All of the children in the story, save Charlie, are undeserving wretches. Burton delights in including Dahl’s graphic rhyming songs celebrating the fates of the repulsive and ungrateful children of the story.

*We very much regret that we*

*Shall simply have to wait and see*

*If we can get him back his height.*

*But if we can’t—it serves him right.*

6 Just as classic children’s literature can be enjoyed by adults with new appreciation, so too can Tim Burton’s films be enjoyed and appreciated after multiple revisits. By examining and understanding the influence of writers such as E.A. Poe and Roald Dahl, as well as Dr. Seuss and classic fairy tales, the sources of Burton’s cinematic style become clear. Characterized by a childlike innocence and playfulness coupled with a dark and somewhat grotesque sensibility, Burton’s films have already become classics.

\*Liccy Dahl was the executive producer of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) and is the widow of author Roald Dahl. This quote is from Leah Gallo, *The Art of Tim Burton*, Los Angeles: Steeles Publishing, 2009.