Traits of a Bildungsroman
(“formation novel”)

1. The story focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood.

2. The protagonist is often a sensitive person who is looking for answers and experience.

3. The goal is maturity, and the protagonist achieves it gradually and with difficulty (a “hard-won” maturity).

4. The protagonist is then able to reach out and help others after having achieved maturity.

5. The plot must follow a certain course. The protagonist grows from child to adult in the novel.

6. Often involves a separation from family. The protagonist desires to leave home and become "his own man."

7. Often in autobiographical form.

8. The protagonist often seeks to gain an identity of his own.

9. He is usually from a small, provincial place, venturing into a much more complex place.

10. Education is crucial to the protagonist, in that it is part of the child's maturation and preparation for impending adulthood.
11. Often, the **protagonist becomes disillusioned** (disappointed). The **new world does not match his shining hopes and dreams**.

12. He must **come to terms with or accept, after painful soul-searching, the sort of world he lives in**.

13. In other words the inner development and maturity of the protagonist takes place after his "education" in the new place. It is this **newfound self-knowledge that signals the ultimate maturity of the hero**.

14. **Often ends with a display of pride** in his accomplishment (maturity)

15. Often, the protagonist **returns to the place he wanted so desperately to escape to achieve this maturity**.

16. It is with this **return home**, where the reader is **reminded of who the protagonist was** and where he came from, that **his development can most clearly be seen**.

17. Although he has come full circle, the memories of the boy that was are perfectly suited to emphasize **the man that he has become**.

18. The protagonist is NOT superior to others
**Film Examples**

*Stand by Me*  
*Rushmore*  
*Almost Famous*  
*Big*  
*Good Will Hunting*  
*The Graduate*  
*An Education*  
*Persepolis*  
*A River Runs Through It*  
*Lost in Translation*  
*Dead Poets Society*  

**Novel Examples**

*The Catcher in the Rye*, by JD Salinger  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee