

## Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

### Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

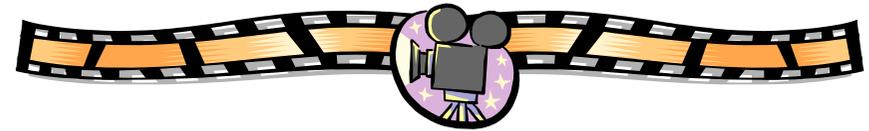
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

### Some facts about the film

- Actor Johnny Depp had originally been set to play the lead character, Jean-Dominique Bauby. However, he later dropped out of the project due to scheduling conflicts (filming for *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*).
- The script, written by Ronald Harwood, was originally in English. Director Julian Schnabel convinced the studio, Pathé, to change the language to French to stay true to Bauby's life and story. He even went so far as to learn French in order to be able to make the film.
- The film premiered in competition at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival on May 22, where Schnabel won, two weeks later, the Award for Best Director. It was nominated for four Academy Awards, and won a BAFTA award for best adapted screenplay.
- Jean-Dominique Bauby actually only had two children instead of three. Sylvie de la Rochefoucauld, Bauby's partner of 10 years and mother of their two children, Théo and Céleste, says Schnabel liked all three child actors and couldn't make a decision of whom to cast. He rang her and asked if it would be alright to use them all. She said yes.
- ALIS, an association for the locked-in syndrome, was set up by Jean-Dominique in March 1997 just before he died. Its aim was to show the world that, although this condition impedes movement and speech, it does not prevent patients from living.
- Ironically, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the book which Jean-Dominique wanted to "rewrite" before he had his stroke, contains the first known literary description of locked-in syndrome in the character of Monsieur Noirtier de Villeforte. He, too, communicates by blinking and his granddaughter, Valentine, uses a dictionary to help him spell out words he wants to say.



**A chance to watch films together.  
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.  
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

<b>2nd Nov</b>	<b>The Diving Bell &amp; The Butterfly</b>
<b>7th Dec</b>	<b>Edward Scissorhands</b>
<b>4th Jan</b>	<b>Juno</b>
<b>1st Feb</b>	<b>The Kite Runner</b>
<b>1st Mar</b>	<b>Son of Rambow</b>
<b>4th Apr</b>	<b>Son of Man</b>

**Films start at 5:30pm  
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

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## The Diving Bell and The Butterfly

This film tells the story of Jean-Dominique Bauby, the high-flying editor of Elle magazine and father of two, who was renowned for his sense of humour and joie de vivre. Then, at the age of 43, he suffered a massive stroke which left him almost completely paralysed. Faced with a harrowing predicament, Jean-Do uses enormous courage and determination but, most of all, his soaring imagination to escape. Tapping into the limitlessness of his memories, fantasies, wit and wishes, he finds a way to race through experiences of wonder and grief, sex and love, fatherhood and childhood, faith and questioning, ecstasy and absurdity—and touches the very essence of what it is to be human. Along the way he is supported by a group of remarkable friends: Henriette and Marie, who give Jean-Do the power to reconnect with the world and his loved ones; Claude, his literary assistant to whom he dictates the book on which the film is based; Celine, the mother of his children who remains devoted to him despite his betrayal; Inès, the girlfriend who still haunts him.

The title comes from the idea that while his body was submerged and weighted down, Bauby's imagination and memory were still free and as light as a butterfly's wings: "My cocoon becomes less oppressive, and my mind takes flight like a butterfly. There is so much to do. You can wander off in space or in time, set out for Tierra del Fuego or for King Midas's court." His book was published, to rave reviews, in March 1997. A few days later, Bauby died of pneumonia.

### **Being human**

Jean-Do's story is one which celebrates the resilience of the human spirit. Roussin tells him: "Hold on to the human inside of you and you'll survive". But what does it mean to be human? How would you define the human spirit, "the human inside of you"? Although in one sense it is impossible to speculate, how do you think you might cope in a similar situation? What sort of things would keep you going? What things would be most difficult?

### **Is life always worth living?**

Although Jean-Do's overall outlook is positive, there remain moments when things get too much for him; times when he wants to die. However, it remains something he cannot do on his own. There has been much discussion recently in the press and elsewhere about the whole issue of "assisted suicide". How would you have responded if Jean-Do had talked about dying with you? Would you have told him, like Henriette, not to be so selfish? Or would you have reacted differently? Is there ever a time when a life is no longer worth living? And, if it seems to be no longer worth living today, how do we know that that will be true tomorrow?

### **Being locked in**

Jean-Do's condition is known as "locked-in syndrome". However, as his father points out, it is not just Jean-Do who is "locked-in". There are many other ways and situations which can cause us to feel trapped. Some of those arise out of an inability to communicate with those we need to; others may be a result of physical difficulties. Are there situations in which you feel "locked-in"? Why might that be? And in what ways do you cope? Are there situations in which our actions may be causing others to feel "locked-in"? How can we, like Henriette and Marie, discover ways of enabling people to communicate the things they need to say, and thus be the people they were made to be?

### **Does he take sugar?**

One of Jean-Do's frustrations is not being able to communicate with people who don't want to communicate with him, either because they don't know how or don't want to make the effort. The result is people make assumptions, whether about what TV channel he wants to watch or whether he wants to watch at all. How good are you at including people in the decisions that affect them? How willing are you to communicate with those around you, however different their form of communication may be to yours or however much effort it might take?

## Memorable quotes

<b>Dr Lepage</b>	We want you to take it easy for a few days.
<b>Jean-Do</b>	What do you think I'm doing now?
<b>Dr Lepage</b>	These days we can prolong life.
<b>Jean-Do</b>	This is life?
<b>Jean-Do</b>	I decided to stop pitying myself. Other than my eye, two things aren't paralyzed: my imagination and my memory. They're the only two ways I can escape from my diving bell. I can imagine anything, anybody, anywhere. I can imagine anything I want.
<b>Jean-Do</b>	A poet once said, "Only a fool laughs when nothing's funny"
<b>Jean-Do</b>	God! Who's that? I look as though I came out of a vat of formaldehyde.
<b>Jean-Do</b>	Even a sketch, a shadow, a fragment of a Dad is still a Dad.
<b>Roussin</b>	I survived by clinging to what makes me human. I had no choice. It was all I had left—same as you. Hold fast to the human inside of you and you'll survive.
<b>Henriette</b>	You want to die? How dare you? There are people who love you, to whom you matter. I hardly know you, but you matter to me already. You're alive. Don't say you want to die. It's disrespectful. Obscene!
<b>Jean-Do</b>	It can't be easy speaking to your son knowing full well he won't reply.
<b>Father</b>	I've had a thought. About us. We're in the same boat. You and me, we're both locked in. You in your body, me in my apartment.
<b>Father</b>	I'm very proud of you. Really, very proud.
<b>Jean-Do</b>	A father's approval. It comforted me then and it comforts me even more now. We're all children. We all need approval.
<b>Jean-Do</b>	Sundays are a long stretch of desert. But today, Marie has nobly offered to take me to church. I tried to tell her I'm not religious but to no avail. People are praying for me all over. Multiple deities have been enrolled to help me.
<b>Inès</b>	My darling, I love you more than ever. I want to see you but not in that condition. I want to think of you as you were. I hope you'll pull through. I miss you. I miss you so much. I feel so alone. I can't bear it. I know you understand. I think about you all the time. Do you want me to come?
<b>Jean-Do</b>	Each day I wait for you.

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### **Praying—for what?**

A whole range of deities were apparently enrolled to help Jean-Do. People remembered him in their prayers week by week and some would argue that his life-affirming book was an answer to prayer. Others were no doubt looking for a miraculous recovery. But what do we pray for in these situations, those cases for which we personally can do nothing else but pray? And who are we praying for? Jean-Do? His friends and family? Or us, because it makes us feel better?

### **Praying—without permission**

When Marie takes him to the priest, she deliberately mistranslates his answers. Is it right to pray for people who don't want our prayers?