

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 only we 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

- ▶ The 1992 Los Angeles Riots were triggered on April 29, 1992, when a jury acquitted three white and one hispanic Los Angeles Police Department officers accused in the videotaped beating of black motorist Rodney King following a high-speed pursuit. The riots lasted six days, caused damages of \$1 billion, and led to the deaths of 53 people.
- ▶ The film is based on the book *The Freedom Writers Diary* by teacher Erin Gruwell who wrote the story based on her experiences at Woodrow Wilson Classical High School in Long Beach, California. The title is a play on the term "Freedom Riders", referring to the multiracial civil rights activists who tested the U.S. Supreme Court decision ordering the desegregation of interstate buses in 1961.
- ▶ In 1997, Erin Gruwell and her students, the "Freedom Writers," founded The Freedom Writers Foundation in an effort to replicate the Freedom Writers' success in classrooms across the country. Since that time, the organization has grown nationally, providing unique and dynamic training to educators as well as lesson plan resource material. Further information can be found on their website www.freedomwritersfoundation.org.
- ▶ At the hotel dinner for the kids, after their trip to the Holocaust museum, all of the Holocaust survivor characters are played by actual Holocaust survivors.
- ▶ Pupils spend four years in American High Schools (ages 15 - 18). The four years are labelled: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Senior.

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

7th Aug	The Illusionist (2010)
4th Sep	Lemon Tree
2nd Oct	<u>Freedom Writers</u>
6th Nov	Sophie Scholl
4th Dec	Nativity!
8th Jan	TBA

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

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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Freedom Writers

Set in Long Beach, California, in 1994, *Freedom Writers* tells the story of an idealistic young teacher, Erin Gruwell, who is just starting her first teaching job as the freshman and sophomore English teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School, which, two years earlier, implemented a voluntary integration program. For many of the existing teachers, the integration has ruined the school, whose previously stellar academic standing has been replaced with many students who will be lucky to graduate or even be literate. Despite choosing the school on purpose because of its integration program, Erin is unprepared for the nature of her classroom. The students come from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds and live by generations of strict moral codes of protecting their own at all cost. Many are in gangs and almost all know somebody that has been killed by gang violence. The only person the students hate more than each other is Ms. Gruwell. Will Erin find a way of coming alongside her pupils? What difference can one person make?

Respect

Respect doesn't come for free and we have to be prepared to give of ourselves if we are to earn someone's respect in return. Who are the people you most respect? Why? And what does that mean, for you?

Tolerance

Over time, the pupils slowly overcome their prejudices towards each other and, instead, find points of connection, both with each other and with those beyond their own communities. How do you think this is achieved? What about your own intolerance? Given that everyone is precious and of worth in God's sight, how do we actually live that out in practice?

Understanding others

A number of times, the pupils accuse Erin of not understanding their situation. What happens in the classroom simply seems to have no relevance to what happens outside. As Eva says: "What are you doing in here that makes a goddam difference to my life?" The same could be said by many of what goes on inside the church. Critics will say: "You simply don't understand what sort of life I lead. What relevance is the church to me? What difference is it going to make?" How would you respond to someone who asked you such questions?

Self worth

For many of the pupils, the fact that no one has any faith in them leads them to have no faith in themselves. As a result, they can't see how anything will ever change. Life is a trial and all they long for is to reach the age of eighteen. Realising they are valued and that their story is of interest and worth telling makes all the difference. How can we affirm those around us?

Standing up for what you believe in

Erin has a hard time convincing those in authority in her school that her pupils are worth investing in. Yet her perseverance eventually pays off. It is easy to be put off by those around us and lose heart. Have you ever had the experience of "going against the tide"? How did it feel? Are there injustices you have seen but have done nothing about? What would have helped you?

Memorable Quotes

- Marcus** At least, when you die for your own, you die with respect. You die a warrior.
- Dept Head** You can't make someone want an education. The best you can do is get them to obey, learn discipline. That would be a tremendous accomplishment for them.
- Erin** But to get respect you have to give it.
Andre Bullshit.
Erin What?
Andre Why should I give you my respect to you? Because you're a teacher? I don't know you. How do I know you're not a liar standing up there. How do I know you're not a bad person standing up there? I'm not just gonna give you my respect because you're called a teacher.
- Eva** White people wanting their respect like its for free.
- Erin** Raise your hand if you know what the Holocaust is. (*One person raises their hand*). Raise your hand if anyone in this classroom has been shot at. (*Nearly everyone raises their hand*).
- Andre** You don't know nothing. You don't know the pain we feel. You've got no respect for the way we're living.
- Tito** Nobody cares what I do. Why should I bother coming to school?
- Eva** What are you doing in here that makes a goddam difference to my life?
- Andre** It's not about what happened or what didn't happen. Justice doesn't mean the bad guy goes to jail, it just means that someone pays for the crime.
- Dept Head** What gets me is they're violent, they break laws, they destroy school property and in the end we make them special. We reward them. I just don't see what that teaches them.
- Erin** I thought you still wanted it.
Scott It doesn't matter if I want it, Erin. It doesn't mean it is going to happen.
Erin Why not?
- Eva** I don't even know how this war started. It's just two sides that tripped each other way back. Who cares about the history behind it? I am my father's daughter, and when they call me to testify, I will protect my own, no matter what.
- Erin** You gave yourself an F.
Andre It's what I felt I deserved.
- Miep Gies** I did what I had to because it was the right thing to do. We are all ordinary people, but even an ordinary secretary in their own way can turn on a small light in a dark room.
- Miep Gies** You are heroes every day.