Movies

Lincoln

Synopsis:
Steven Spielberg directs an all-star ensemble cast in this inspiring and riveting drama that focuses on the 16th president's tumultuous final four months in office. As a visionary leader pursuing a course of action to end the Civil War, the film documents Lincoln’s quest to unite the country and abolish slavery.

Discussion Questions:

1. What prior knowledge did you have about this period of American history? How did your knowledge (or lack of knowledge) affect your engagement with the film?

2. *Lincoln* (along with other abolitionist films, such as *Amazing Grace*) has been criticised for suggesting that slavery was ended solely because of the efforts of white people. To what extent is such a criticism of *Lincoln* fair? What significance can be put on the role of the various minor black characters in the film?

3. Spielberg noted that he was not trying to draw parallels. Yet, the democratic process was the same then as it is now. What parallels did you see with the political process today?

4. What did you think of the tactics Lincoln used to get the Amendment passed? Do you agree with Spielberg that, 'it was murky, but it was also noble and grand. Are there any causes where the ends justify any necessary means?

The Interrupters

Synopsis:
*The Interrupters* tells the moving and often surprising stories of three “Violence Interrupters” who work to protect their Chicago communities from the violence they once employed. Shot over the course of a year, the film follows the Interrupters as they attempt to intervene in disputes before they turn violence, including two brothers threatening to shoot each other, an angry teenage girl just home from prison, and a young man on a warpath of revenge. The film captures the Interrupters’ work and reveals their own inspired journeys from crime to hope and ultimately redemption.

Discussion Questions:
1. Violence in mainstream films, television shows, news programming, video games, music and YouTube videos has become increasingly graphic and prevalent over the last two decades. Do you think the consumption of violent imagery desensitizes people to violence in their public and private lives? Is the entertainment industry creating more violent content or simply reflecting an increasingly violent American culture?

2. Many of the Interrupters and the people they help trace their descent into criminal behavior at least in part to their problematic or absent relationships with their fathers. Why do you think the father-child relationship is such a prevalent factor in this issue? How can our communities support young people who lack positive male role models?

3. Talk about a time you witnessed an act of violence. How did it make you feel? How did you react? Did your presence make a difference in escalating or de-escalating the conflict? What could you have done differently to change the outcome? How should one decide when and how to intervene?

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**First Position**

**Synopsis:**
Every year, thousands of aspiring dancers enter one of the world’s most prestigious ballet competitions, the Youth American Grand Prix, where lifelong dreams are at stake. In the final round, with hundreds competing for only a handful of elite scholarships and contracts, nothing short of perfection is acceptable. First Position follows six extraordinary dancers as they prepare for the chance to enter the world of professional ballet, struggling through bloodied feet, near exhaustion and debilitating injuries, all the while navigating the drama of adolescence. A showcase of awe-inspiring talent, tenacity and passion, First Position paints a thrilling and moving portrait of the most gifted ballet stars of tomorrow.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. *First Position* illustrates the incredible lengths people go to for the chance at achieving success. Even so, actually being successful at the professional ballet level is extremely rare. What are the underlying motivations of the characters in *First Position?* Why do we try so hard at something we have very little chance at actually accomplishing?

2. The film also explores the relationship of adolescence and the pressures of competing at the professional level. What are the possible drawbacks of introducing kids to extreme competition at such a young age?
3. Ballet is infamously known for severe issues with eating disorders and poor body image. How might this contribute to a culture of self-obsession and unhealthy habits in young adults?

4. At the end of the day, people are drawn to extreme sports and artistic endeavors due to our desire to be challenged and tested. How has our culture diminished the avenues for competition in everyday life, and what effect might this have on future generations?

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**Man on Wire**

**Synopsis:**
This movie chronicles Philippe Petit’s stunt to walk across a wire illegally rigged between the World Trade Center’s twin towers. After dancing for nearly an hour on the wire, he was arrested, taken for psychological evaluation, and brought to jail before he was finally released. This extraordinary documentary incorporates Petit’s personal footage to show how he overcame seemingly insurmountable challenges to achieve the artistic crime of the century.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. How does this film explore the inability of police (and people in general) to just do nothing? They are programmed to take action even if the action is likely to cause more harm. In the film, the police threaten to use a helicopter to get the wire walker down. Our need for action gets us into a lot of trouble. There are lots of situations where doing nothing - at least for a while - is the wisest action. In what situations can the 'do nothing' option be more beneficial than taking action?

2. Think about the general questions that get raised when people do high risk activities and society's response to them. While Philippe's main motivation is simply the challenge of walking across that space and the sheer beauty of that act of human defiance of the impossible, it is also made clear in the movie that the illegality of the act is also a draw. Is it ever okay to break the law in order to satisfy the human desire for adventure?

3. Americans clearly love daredevils. We have a history of stunts like riding barrels over Niagara Falls and making heroes out of people like Evel Knievel. Yet there is also an element that wants to save people from killing themselves. So, we congratulate the heroes who successfully get to the top of Denali and Everest, but shake our heads at the foolishness of those who die trying. As the film shows, Philippe's act is breathtakingly beautiful - it's a spiritual triumph to do something so seemingly dangerous and outrageous. Yet what if he had fallen to his death? What would we say then? What if he had killed several spectators as he landed?
4. We continue to allow people to jump out of airplanes, climb difficult peaks, sail across oceans. But what is society's obligation to rescue such people if they run into trouble? Should public resources be diverted to saving daredevils? Should they be required to buy insurance? Could we NOT rescue them if they didn't?

My Name is Khan

**Synopsis:** Rizwhan Khan, a muslim from Mumbai, immigrates to the United States. As a person with autism, he struggles with social interactions. After 9/11, Airport personnel see his disability as suspicious behavior. Afterward, he works with a therapist to accomplish his goal of speaking with the President to tell him his name and that he is not a terrorist.

**Discussion Questions**
1. Even after more than 10 years after 9/11, do you still see this bias against the Muslim faith in American society? If so, where do you see or hear it the most? This question does not need to be answered aloud, but have you ever felt this bias in a situation? Think about why we let these biases affect our view of a group of people as a whole.

2. In past years, the prevalence of Autism in society has increased. Does this prevalence affect the frequency of prejudiced behavior? What disability prejudices do you see in this movie?

3. This movie is very powerful. Explain how you felt through various parts of the movie. How did you feel when Sam died? What about when Khan was stabbed? And finally, how did you feel at the end when Khan got to speak to the President?

Forever Strong

**Synopsis:** Rick Penning is put into a juvenile detention center after his second drunk driving incident. His disappointed father and coach of his rugby team abandons him in jail, worsening their already weak relationship. Due to a bad attitude and misconduct as a prisoner, he is looking at being transferred to an adult prison after he turns 18. The counselors send him to play for the Highland Rugby Team where the coach values developing his players as people first, then athletes. Eventually, Rick plays his father’s team in the state championship game of rugby where relationships are truly tested.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. How do valuable relationships play a role in this film? Which relationship is the most beneficial for Rick? Why?

2. Rick learns several lessons in this film. What lessons does he learn? Which is most important? How does he fix his behavior and better himself because of these lessons? What about your own life? Which lessons have been most influential?

3. How is Coach Gelwix a life coach as well as a rugby coach? What does he teach the team about life and their behavior? What is important to him and to a high-functioning rugby team? How can you relate this to your organization?

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**Coach Carter**

**Synopsis:** A sporting goods store owner, Coach Carter, accepts the position as Varsity Basketball Coach at his old school which is located in a rough area of Richmond, CA. The players consist of boys who are cocky and undisciplined. Not only are they mediocre players, but they also are poor students. Coach Carter is determined to change the way his players view themselves, their futures, and the game of basketball. However, his tactics are not well received by the players or the community, but that does not impede him.

1. How does Coach Carter’s behavior reflect the saying “What is right isn’t always popular, and what is popular isn’t always right?” Additionally, were all of Coach Carter’s actions justified, or did he react too strongly to some incidents? Think of an incident when something you did was not well received, but was the right decision?

2. From where does discipline come? How does Coach Carter affect the discipline of his players? Some are very self-disciplined and others are not. Where do you fall on the spectrum? Who taught you discipline?

3. What is the relationship between Coach Carter and the players like? How would you categorize it? How does it develop as the film progresses?

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**The Last Castle**

**Synopsis:** General Irwin, a three star general, is stripped of his rank because of disobedience and ends up in maximum security military prison. The warden, Colonel Winters, knows and admires Irwin for his
efforts as a soldier and gives him special treatment while the other inmates are treated poorly. Irwin gradually gains command of the facility and the Colonel may be too late to stop it once he realizes what is happening.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Once Irwin gains control, is he different than Winters? What are the differences and similarities between these two? They both joyfully manipulate those they control. So, who is the better man?

2. What examples of leadership are seen through the film? Obviously, Irwin and Winters stand out as leaders, but what are the roles of the other minor characters? Do any of them attempt to lead, or do they just remain followers to whoever is in charge?

3. This movie may create confusion of allegiances. Did you find yourself rooting for the poorly-treated criminals against the unjust warden? If this were not a film, would you still root for the criminals? How does this film challenge morality, and the way we see the underdog?