



ABOUT A BOY (Cert 12)

Directed by: Chris Weitz

Running time: 101 minutes

SUMMARY

Based on Nick Hornby's popular British novel, *About A Boy* is a comedy-drama starring Hugh Grant as Will, a rich, child-free and irresponsible Londoner in his thirties who, in search of available women, invents an imaginary son and starts attending single parent meetings. As a result of one of his liaisons, he meets Marcus, an odd 12-year-old boy with problems at school. Gradually, Will and Marcus become friends, and as Will teaches Marcus how to be a cool kid, Marcus helps Will to finally grow up.

WHAT YOU FELT ABOUT THE FILM

Sometimes young people find it hard to contribute to a group discussion. They may feel shy or that their contribution might appear silly. The first part of the session is therefore a chance for young people to think about film and begin to develop a reaction to what they've seen in a way that everyone will have something to contribute.

You'll need pieces of card cut into circles about 10cm in diameter (See Slices download). Use a pen to divide one side into five even 'cake slices'. Give a circle to each young person and ask them to answer these questions, one a slice, writing in their thoughts and opinions.

- One word to sum up what you thought of the film.
- A scene that you liked or hated.
- Would your mates or your parents like this film and why?
- Complete the sentence, 'There wasn't enough ...'

- 'Was the filmmaker trying to make you ...?' (tick any that apply):

- [] laugh and have a good time
- [] cry and be moved by something you saw
- [] think about an idea or point of view
- [] understand something or a type of person
- [] change you views on something

When everyone has had a chance to fill in their circle, spend some time hearing what young people have written and why. This is light-hearted, 'no wrong answers', just an opportunity to hear what they think.

WHAT THE FILM MAKER WAS TRYING TO SAY

Leader's notes: *About a Boy* was made by Chris Weitz, adapted from the best-selling book by Nick Hornby. This next section is about beginning to think about what they might have been trying to say through this story.

Put these quotes up around the room on large sheets of paper and ask young people to go round and comment on them by writing a response on each sheet. If they agree that this was one of the points of the story, they should put a tick, if not a cross. In both cases, if they can, they should add a comment or explanation.

1. Life's about enjoying yourself and having fun. That's the main thing.

Leader's notes: At the beginning of the film, Will's life is about hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure. He's selfish and wrapped up in himself. Notice the words he says in the first few minutes of the film:

'The way I see it, every man is an island. But the great thing is, there's never been a better time in history to

be an island. Even fifty years ago, for instance, they didn't have daytime TV, or videos, or CD's, or home espresso makers, or glossy magazines with questionnaires about how cool you were ... Sure I was an island, but I was a pretty cool island. I was Ibiza.'

Key question: What other things might people say life is all about?

2. Look after yourself before you think about anyone else.

Leader's notes: Will is clearly pretty selfish but how does this show itself? Selfish with money, time or something else. Spending some time thinking about what it means to be selfish could be worthwhile here.

Key question: Who should have a say over what you do with your money, time, etc?

3. Divorce is wrong.

Leader's notes: Marcus comes from a home where the father has left, perhaps like some of the young people in your group. This is a sensitive issue, but worth exploring. Is the film saying that children from divorced homes are going to have more problems in life? Is the film approving or condemning of divorce, or does it leave the question open?

Key question: Is divorce ever a good idea?

4. Family matters more than success and money.

Leader's notes: The 'feel good' ending to *About A Boy* at Christmas gives us an image of a restored family for Marcus and his mother, now including Will and others as part of an extended family. The film leaves us in no doubt that this is a satisfying and appropriate end to the story: Will has learned that people matter and that family matters above all. There is an interesting image of community here: a group of people, broken in many

ways, but resolved to support and serve each other. Is this perhaps a glimpse of what the church might look like at its best?

Key question: What makes a good family?

5. Happiness comes from what you give not what you get.

Leader's notes: Will's transformation in the story takes from selfish hedonist to a generous and supportive role model to Marcus. He learns that being an island isn't all there is to life and that thinking of others is not only important for their benefit, but his own, too.

Key question: What is the secret to lifelong happiness?

Once everyone has had a chance to comment on the sheets, you can take them down and gather the group around so that you can look together at what people think. This is a chance not only to hear what the young people think but also to ask some questions and make some points yourself.

TAKING IT BACK TO FAITH

The third part of the session is a chance to begin to reflect about how Christ and his values interact with the film. Are they in synergy or conflict? Young people may not grasp all the theological points that could be made, but it's important for them to begin to get used to the idea of critiquing what they see and holding it against the values and beliefs of the Christian faith.

Some of this reflection may come from an open discussion, but there is also an interesting contrast with Joseph's story in Genesis. Here is a man who also lives without a family and in considerable wealth by the time Pharaoh has put him in charge of Egypt (Genesis 41).

Print multiple copies of the *About a Boy* worksheet which summarises the story of Joseph. You could

either divide your young people into groups or, if you are small group, have just one group. Cut and mix up the pieces of the story and give a set to each group.

Invite the group to work out the order of the story of Joseph by putting together the pieces of the story. Offer help where required.

Once the story is confirmed, you could start a discussion by drawing out the similarities and contrasts in the two stories. For example:

- Joseph and Will are both living away from family but for different reasons.
- They both have wealth. However, they have acquired it differently.
- They both have experiences that remind them that family, of some kind, is something they need.
- There is a positive resolution to both their lives.

Looking at these similarities and differences may create a helpful discussion in itself, but here are also some suggestions to get groups going, if needed.

- Put yourself in Will's shoes for a second and look at the life of Joseph. What do you observe about his life?
- Now put your in Joseph's shoes and look at Will's life. What do you observe? If you need help with this, consider both characters attitude to:
 - Money
 - People
 - God
- Who would you rather be and why: Joseph or Will?

At the end of the session, try to draw out some key themes that have emerged. Encourage the young people to consider the implications of these for their own lives.

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ABOUT A BOY worksheet

JOSEPH'S STORY

JOSEPH HAS DREAMS ABOUT HIS BROTHERS
ONE DAY BOWING DOWN BEFORE HIM

JOSEPH TELLS HIS BROTHERS ABOUT HIS DREAM

JOSEPH IS GIVEN A BEAUTIFUL COAT BY HIS DAD

JOSEPH BROTHERS PLOT TO KILL HIM AND THROW HIM IN A WELL

JOSEPH BROTHERS SELL HIM AS A SLAVE

JOSEPH BECOMES A SLAVE OF POTIPHAR IN EGYPT

JOSEPH IS ACCUSED OF RAPE BY POTIPHAR'S WIFE

JOSEPH IS SENT TO PRISON BUT BECAME POPULAR
AND TRUSTED BY THE PRISON GUARDS

JOSEPH INTERPRETED THE DREAMS OF AN
IMPRISONED CUPBEARER AND BAKER

JOSEPH IS FREED FROM PRISON AND
INTERPRETS THE DREAMS OF PHAROAH

JOSEPH IS GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADING THE COUNTRY
THROUGH SEVEN YEARS OF PLENTY AND SEVEN YEARS OF FAMINE

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS COME TO EGYPT TO BUY FOOD

JOSEPH IS RECONCILED WITH HIS BROTHERS

JOSEPH BRINGS ALL OF HIS FAMILY TO BE WITH HIM IN EGYPT

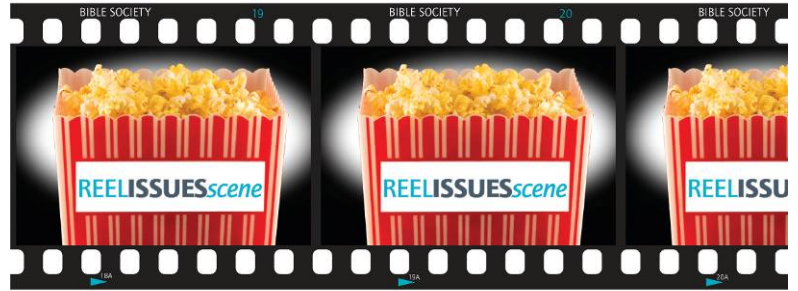
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ABOUT A BOY *slices activity*

