



## ATTACK THE BLOCK (Cert 15)

**Directed by:** Joe Cornish (2011)

**Length:** 88 minutes

As this film carries a 15 certificate, it is probably worth you watching it first to determine whether it's appropriate for your young people.

### SUMMARY

*Attack the Block* is a gory but good-natured sci-fi comedy, set in South London. While returning home, Nurse Sam (Jodie Whittaker) is mugged by a group of teenagers. The attack is interrupted when an alien falls from the sky into a car, giving Sam a chance to escape. The alien attacks the gang leader, Moses (John Boyega), before running away. The youths pursue and kill it.

However, soon more aliens start to fall from the sky. Flushed with the success of their first alien encounter the youths set out to attack the new arrivals but quickly realise that these new aliens are much bigger, stronger and more dangerous. They turn and run, with aliens hot on their heels.

After an encounter with the police (which ends in two policemen being ripped apart by aliens) the gang seek refuge in their block of flats where, by coincidence, Sam also lives. To Sam's dismay, the gang take shelter in her flat but it soon becomes apparent that both she and the boys need each other; she for the protection they offer and they for her nurse's expertise in dressing their alien-inflicted wounds. Together they end up hatching a plan to defeat the aliens, in the process developing a greater understanding of each other.

### PART 1: 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 the film and begin to develop a reaction to what they have seen in a way that everyone will have something to contribute. The following are some simple, quick exercises to get everyone thinking about their reaction to the film.

When *Attack the Block* was released several critics commented on the use of street slang and distributors in the United States considered releasing the film with subtitles.

Ask the young people to imagine that they have to write a translation for an American audience. In pairs or small groups, ask the young people to come up with definitions for the following words that appear in the film. Give no more than 30 seconds for each definition:

- Bear ('You're going to be in bear trouble.')
- Blaze ('He was blazing a zoot.')
- Merk ('If you go out at this time of night you might get merked.')
- Sick ('That was a sick goal Gareth Bale scored.')
- Blud ('I'm chilling with my bluds.')
- Skins ('Got any skins for a roll up?')
- Jokes ('That's a good one; jokes.')

Ask each group to feed back their definitions. Award chocolates to the group which comes up with the clearest definitions.

*OR*

While the gang may have a go at Sam for not liking the area, a South London council estate wouldn't be the first choice to live for many people. If you were an alien life form, choosing to land on the earth, where would you choose to arrive? Give the young people 30 seconds to think of an answer, and then go round the room asking them to share their choice with a brief reason as to why.

*OR*

The aliens in *Attack the Block* are little more than fur and glowing teeth and, apart from the fact that they're very good at killing, we never really find out anything about them.

In pairs, give the young people something to write/draw with and give them five minutes to design their own alien race. They can consider questions such as where they come from, what they eat, how intelligent they are, whether they're friendly/hostile and, preferably, draw a rough sketch of what they might look like. When the time's up, get each pair to share their new species.

## PART 2: KEY THEMES IN THE FILM

While *Attack the Block* is about an alien invasion, the true alien encounter is between the educated middle class worlds of Sam and Brewis and the working class world of Moses and his gang. In the midst of the excitement and comedy are some touching scenes on the bridges that can be built across the gulf between these worlds. This section gives an opportunity to explore some of the issues around this central theme

### 1. Stylin' it.

Ask if everyone knows the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. Explain that you need two volunteers to tell the story. However, they must do it in a very different style. The first volunteer must tell the story

as though they're a gangster, speaking to a group of teenagers like Moses and his gang, telling the tale as 'street' as possible (maybe as a daring account of breaking and entering). The second volunteer must tell the story as though they're a renowned academic, addressing a group of university professors, presenting the story as a great, intellectual, Nobel Prize winning piece of literature (the more long words used the better).

After the story telling, ask the others how convincing the narrators were. Could they really believe that the storytellers were a gang member/reowned professor? If not, what gave them away? (Be careful to do this in a way that affirms the storytellers)

### Watch the clip. Scene 2: 11 minutes, 38 seconds to 15 minutes, 4 seconds.

In the scene we see sheltered middle class university student, Brewis, desperately trying to fit in with Moses and his gang by trying to be 'street' in the way he talks. However, he fails miserably and the gang clearly think he's an idiot.

Can the young people relate to trying to change their behaviour to fit in? You may wish to share an example from your own past to help break the ice on this one. Why do we do it? What are we afraid of? Is it worth pretending to be something we're not?

Brewis is finally accepted by the gang when he stops trying to pretend to be street and is simply himself, using his university knowledge to help save them from the aliens.

*Key Question:* What gives us the confidence to be ourselves?

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- John 15:18–19
- 1 John 3:1
- Ezekiel 11:12
- James 4:4
- 2 Corinthians 10:3–4

## 2. Sticking together

**Watch the clip. Scene 4: 23 minutes, 13 seconds to 27 minutes, 25 seconds.**

In the clip we see the gang risking their lives to rescue Moses from the police van, despite having just seen two policemen torn apart by aliens. Although they are continually running into trouble with the law, we repeatedly see the loyalty which the boys show towards members of their own gang (and even their block, Moses later revealing he would never have mugged Sam if he knew she lived there).

In small groups or pairs, ask the young people to decide who out of the following list they would be willing to risk their lives for:

- Parents
- Siblings
- Pets
- Teachers
- Neighbour.
- Best friend
- Random stranger
- Boyfriend/girlfriend

- Al-Qaeda member

Encourage the groups to feed back their answers.

According to Moses, Sam was fair game to mug when she was just a random stranger but her relationship with the gang changed when they realised that she was a neighbour and that they needed her help. But Sam herself hadn't changed at all; merely Moses' perception of her.

- Why does our relationship with the person concerned make any difference as to how much we're willing to do for them? Should it make a difference?
- How do we know that a random stranger won't turn out to be a neighbour?

*Key Question:* What makes us willing to sacrifice for someone else?

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- Matthew 25:31–46
- Hebrews 13:2
- Romans 5:6-8
- Matthew 5:38–48
- John 3:16

## 3. Trying to apologise

**Watch the clip. Scene 10: 1 hour, 3 minutes, 45 seconds to 1 hour, 7 minutes, 30 seconds.**

In the scene we see Moses first regretting his actions, then apologising and finally doing something to put them right.

In small groups, ask the young people to consider the following scenario:

Imagine you're cycling along a road when a car pulls out of a side road and knocks you off your bike (It was your right of way; there's no question legally that this was the driver's fault). You're okay physically (if a bit shaken) but your bike is a mess. If you could only pick one of the following three options, which would you choose to happen next:

- **Regret.** The driver gets out of his car and clearly regrets his action, saying things like 'I can't believe I did that, I'm an idiot, I shouldn't be allowed on the road, etc'. He then gets back in his car and drives away.
- **Apology.** The driver gets out of his car and says 'Sorry for running you over'. He then gets back in his car and drives away.
- **Reparation.** The driver gets out of his car and, without saying a word, hands you a wad of cash which is enough to buy a brand new bike. He then gets back into his car and drives away.

Ask the groups to share their answers and their reasoning. Are any of the options enough on their own? Are any of them unnecessary? Would all the options together be enough or is anything else required?

What's the difference between regretting what you've done and being sorry? Can you have one without the other?

What message does it send out if we don't back up an apology with action?

You may want to ask the young people to consider whether there's anyone they owe an apology. You could close this section by praying that God would bring to mind anyone who we need to repair

relationships with and that we'd have the courage to do so.

*Key Question:* Why is saying sorry with words and actions so important?

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- Psalm 38:18
- James 2:20–24
- Psalm 51
- Isaiah 58:2–8
- John 21:15–19

#### **4. We're all from the same block**

Beforehand make sure that you have a simple jigsaw puzzle (maybe around 100 pieces). Divide the pieces equally into two piles.

Split the young people into two teams. Explain that, in their teams, they have to complete the jigsaw puzzle before the other team; whichever team finishes first will win a box of chocolates. Explain that, in order to make it fair and the same level of difficulty, you're giving each team the same jigsaw puzzle (But don't let on at this stage that it is only one copy of the same puzzle between them). Any team who tries to sabotage the other team's efforts (e.g. by stealing pieces) will be disqualified.

Each team should soon realise that they don't have all the pieces and that the other team has the bits they need. Explain to them that they're going to have to work out a solution to their problem if they want to get the prize.

The only solution which can actually win the prize is if the teams agree to cooperate, share the pieces and split the prize between them. Don't actually give them that solution but you can point them in that direction. Hopefully they will come to that conclusion by themselves; if you have to give them the answer then no one wins the prize.

**Watch the clip. Scene 6: 36 minutes, 8 seconds to 38 minutes, 25 seconds.**

In the clip we see the gang and Sam forced into a partnership with each other. Although it isn't easy, by the film's end we see that there's an understanding of each other and a real affection.

How do Sam and the gang see each other at the beginning of the film? In what ways are they right to hold those views? In what ways are they wrong?

Ask the young people if they've ever had the experience of being forced to get along with someone they wouldn't normally have spent time with (You might want to start by sharing an experience of your own). What preconceptions did they have of the other person beforehand? Were they surprised at what they found in practice?

Sam has a greater sympathy for Moses when she sees his flat and realises that he's never really had any parenting (by contrast with the close relationship she clearly has with her own mother). How important is understanding others for building relationships with them (If they hadn't realised that the other team was missing jigsaw puzzle pieces too, how much sympathy would they have felt when the team asked to share theirs)? What can we do to better understand people who are different from us?

If Sam and the gang hadn't learned to build bridges with each other, how would the film have ended differently?

*Key Question:* Why is it important to build bridges to people who are different from us?

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- Galatians 3:28
- John 15:12
- Luke 14:12–14
- 1 Corinthians 1:10
- Luke 10:25–37

### PART 3: COMPARING THE STORY

The third part of the session is a chance to compare the story of the film with a story in the Bible. What are the similarities and differences, and what does this tell us about God's Kingdom?

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 and as seen above, there are many themes and directions that this could take.

The character of Moses bears certain similarities to that of the prodigal son in the parable which Jesus told in **Luke 15:11–32**. Read the passage together and then compare the two, using the following questions as a starting point:

- Is there any similarity between the backgrounds of Moses and the son?
- What did each do wrong? (If no one mentions it, it may be worth pointing out that to ask for your share of the estate early is to effectively say to your father 'I wish you were dead').
- What did each gain by doing wrong?
- What were the consequences of their actions?
- What did it take to make each of them regret what they'd done?
- How did they attempt to wrong their right?

- What were the consequences of their attempts to right their wrongs? Were there any negative consequences?
- Was it worth them putting right their wrongs? Why?

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