



## Easy A (Cert 15)

**Directed by:** Will Gluck (2010)

**Length:** 89 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

*Easy A* is a light-hearted teen comedy which makes some serious points about the reputation we build for ourselves. Average, slightly geeky, high school student, Olive (Emma Stone), lies about losing her virginity when she feels under pressure from a school mate. The story spreads like wildfire and suddenly Olive is on everyone's radar; including the school's small group of Christians who brand her a prostitute.

While part of Olive enjoys her new-found infamy, things escalate when her gay friend, Brandon (Dan Byrd), convinces her to pretend to have sex with him so that people will stop tormenting him for being gay. This unlocks the flood gates as soon a whole stream of boys are asking her to claim she's slept with them in order to improve their street cred-and are willing to pay for the privilege.

Events get further out of control when a fellow student, Micah (Cam Gigandet), claims that he caught chlamydia from Olive. In reality, he caught it from the school's guidance counsellor, Mrs Griffiths (Lisa Kudrow) but wants to save her marriage to the English teacher, Mr Griffiths (Thomas Haden Church). At the same time, Olive struggles with the fact that, while many boys want to claim that they've slept with her, none of them are actually interested in her as a person. Eventually the lie all becomes too much and she has to break free.

### 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.

The whole plot of *Easy A* revolves around a lie; hopefully the group are not as convincing liars!

1. In pairs ask the members of the group to share three 'facts' about themselves; two true and one false (you may want to demonstrate this to the group with three facts about yourself). The other person in the pair has to guess which 'fact' is a lie. You can say you'll be keeping your eye on anyone who's too convincing. 😊

#### Alternatives:

At one point in the film Olive's friend, Rhiannon, says that she has a duty to tell her she's 'a dirty skank'. Later, Olive regrets telling Mr. Griffiths that his wife's having an affair. So are there times when you shouldn't tell the truth?

- Designate one side of the room the 'Definitely tell the truth' side and the other the 'Definitely don't tell' side. Explain that you're going to give the young people a number of imaginary truths. With each truth, the young people must decide whether or not they would tell the person concerned and

share their response visually by standing on the relevant side of the room (or in the middle if they aren't sure). You may want to ask individual young people why they've made the decisions they have.

Examples of 'truths' you might use for this exercise could be telling someone:

- their flies are undone.
  - they can't sing.
  - they have twenty-four hours to live.
  - their breath smells.
  - you snogged their boyfriend/girlfriend.
  - they need to meet Jesus.
  - you copied their homework.
- Arrange the chairs in a circle in the room, ensuring there is one less chair than players. Claim that, in the interests of truth, you're going to play a game of 'I have never'. Whoever is in the middle (yourself to begin with) must start a sentence 'I have never' and then complete it with something they have never done (e.g. 'I have never been on a plane'). Everyone who *has* done the thing described must get up and find another seat while the person in the middle tries to grab themselves a free seat in the process. Whoever is left standing in the middle begins another sentence 'I have never' and the game goes on.

However, you may want to suggest that, unlike the film, you don't choose this as the moment to reveal all the facts about your love life!

## PART 2: KEY THEMES IN THE FILM

While *Easy A* is a light-hearted film, it touches on some deep issues about self-esteem, truth and how we allow the views of others to affect our behaviour; pertinent themes at any age but particularly during our teenage years. This section gives young people a chance to explore these topics in more depth and to see what light the Bible sheds on them.

### 1. Desperate to conform?

Either in pairs (standing opposite each other) or in groups (standing in a circle), encourage the young people to take turns copying the movements of the other person or group leader. They must stay in the same place but can move the rest of their body as much as they like. Encourage them to see how good they can be at mirroring the movements of others.

When they've practised for a while, take it in turns to see if the other pairs/groups are able to guess who is the 'leader' and who is the 'copier' in each pair/group. If any pair/group manages to fool the onlookers, award them a small prize (Cadbury's Heroes work well).

Ask the young people which they found easier: copying or leading?

**CLIP TO WATCH. Taken from scene 10, it starts at 25 minutes and 8 seconds and runs until 28 minutes and 5 seconds.**

In the clip we see Brandon pleading with Olive to convince people that they've had sex together so that he won't continue to be bullied for being gay.

Earlier the young people copied each other because it was a game; you wouldn't consciously try to mirror people in real life like that. And yet, in many other ways, we do try to copy others, to conform. Can the young people think of any examples?

### Why do we try to conform?

Can the young people think of any examples of times when conforming is a good thing?

(Examples might include in a workplace, particularly the emergency services)

**Key Question:** When is conforming a bad thing?

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

- Romans 12:1–2
- John 5:44
- 1 Peter 1:13–16
- Acts 5:27–29
- Romans 12:18

## 2. Feeling used

Split the young people into groups of 4-6 people. Each group should choose a leader who will then make the rest of the group into a machine with which everyone is familiar (e.g. car, washing machine, etc). The leader must then act 'using' the machine. The rest of the groups must try to guess what the machine is by the way the leader uses it.

Ask the young people if they enjoyed being 'machines'. How would they feel if people continued to treat them as nothing but machines and not real people?

### **CLIP TO WATCH. The clip is taken from scene 15. It starts at 40 minutes and 48 seconds and runs until 43 minutes and 29 seconds.**

In the clip we see one of Brandon's friends offer Olive gift cards to say that she slept with him. While Olive agrees, she comments on the fact that he could have asked her out on a date, treating her as a human being rather than a service. This is a point she brings up again later in the film; that boys only seem to be interested in her to say they slept with her. In the case of the one boy who does ask her out on a date, he is only doing so to get sex. In effect, Olive's actions have turned her into a kind of virtual prostitute.

- What effect do you think it has on someone when the only interest someone has in them is sex?
- It may be worth noting that people can be turned into 'romance objects' as well as 'sex objects', when we ignore a person's real personality in favour of an idealised version in their head (Has anyone ever daydreamed about what it would be like to go out with someone?)
- While sex may be the obvious example, what are other ways in which people are simply used and their personalities/needs/desires ignored?

Examples might include parents, teachers, the people who provide the things we wear/eat/play with (How often do we think about the living conditions of the person who made our shoes?)

**Key Question:** Who are the people we are guilty of 'using'? What can we do to change that?

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

- Matthew 5:27–28
- Genesis 9:6
- Philippians 2:4
- 1 John 3:16–17
- Isaiah 58:1–4

### 3. Covering up

Before the session, go to:

[www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tees/7520803.stm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tees/7520803.stm)

Either print out copies of the story for the young people to read (possibly crossing out excess information in the interests of conciseness) or show them the 5-minute video news report at the very bottom of the webpage.

The story is the high profile case of John Darwin, the man who faked his own death in a canoeing accident in order to fraudulently claim the life insurance. In this he was helped by his wife, Anne.

- Ask the young people for their reactions to the story. What do they feel about John Darwin? Do they admire him? Despise him? What about his wife, without whom his scam wouldn't have been possible? Was she right to cover up his fraud?

**CLIP TO WATCH. The clip is taken from scene 20. It starts at 55 minutes and 14 seconds and runs until 58 minutes and 28 seconds.**

In the scene we see Olive take the blame for giving Micah chlamydia in order to try to save Mrs Griffiths' marriage. Was this the right thing to do?

How do you feel what Olive did compares to what Anne Darwin did? After all, they were both covering up someone else's wrong. Would you say that what Olive did was right? What would you do in her situation?

**Key Question:** When people do something wrong, should their wrong doing always be revealed to the world?

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

- 1 Peter 4:8
- Proverbs 17:9
- Psalm 32:3–5
- Matthew 7:12
- Hebrews 4:12–13

### 4. Standing in judgment

Provide each person in the group with a piece of paper and something to write with. Explain that you're going to mention a series of people. With each one, the young people must write down their first thought/initial feeling about that particular person; ideally just a word, no more than a sentence. It's important that they write down what they initially think-not what they think they should think; you're not going to ask anyone to share who doesn't want to. State that you're only going to give them ten seconds for each one – they don't have the time to think any more deeply about this.

Read out a series of people. Feel free to use the following list or use your own examples:

- Paedophile
  - Single mum
  - Churchgoer
  - Homosexual
  - Terrorist
  - Person infected with HIV
  - Drug addict
  - Tiger Woods
  - Muslim
- Ask the young people if they found any of the words they wrote down surprising.
  - Would they like to change their answers if they knew they were going to be shared publically?
  - Would they change their answers if they knew they were going to have to share their answer with the person they've described?
  - Would anyone be willing to describe their initial answers as judgemental? It may be helpful for you to share an example of your own judgementalism at this point.

**CLIP TO WATCH. The clip is taken from scene 3. It starts at 6 minutes and 50 seconds and runs until 10 minutes and 2 seconds.**

In the clip we see the judgement which Marianne and the other Christians at the school heap onto Olive. Throughout the film the Christian group is shown as being condemnatory rather than loving.

Do you think that, in your experience, this is a fair portrayal of the way Christians behave?

While it is true that churches can sometimes be judgmental (as all of us as individuals can be), do you think that judgmentalism is exclusive to church? You may wish to consider media campaigns, particularly those run by the tabloids (If I can say that without being judgemental!)

While no one wants to be like Marianne, why is it important to have a sense of judgment?

The fact is that, if we had no sense of judgment, we would have no sense of right and wrong; if we never made a judgment we would be saying that nothing is ever good or evil. However, it's important that we don't make snap judgments before we have all the facts. It's also important to remember that, while God judges our actions, He also offers us His forgiveness; this should have an impact on how we behave towards others.

**Key Question:** What is the difference between judging a person and judging their actions?

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

- Matthew 7:1–5
- John 8:1–11
- John 7:24
- Romans 14:9–10
- James 4:11–12

## 5. Only pretending?

Split the young people into small groups and provide each group with something to write with. Explain that each group is going to have to write an advert of some kind. You will tell them what that advert is for and they must try to portray that thing in the best way possible – without telling any outright lies.

Possible things to advertise could be (feel free to add your own):

- Ad for a one room, rat infested flat, which looks out onto a brick wall and is in the area of town with the worst crime rate.
- Advertise the 'Titanic' (as it is now-at the bottom of the ocean) to someone who wants to buy a ship.
- Pitch to a potential investor in a football club; the club is at the bottom of the league, haven't won a game or kept a clean sheet since Christmas and have never won any silverware in their 127-year history.
- A personal ad for King Henry the Eighth, looking for a new wife.
- A character reference for a notorious world dictator (take your pick!)

Ask a spokesperson from each of the groups to read out their ad. Whose ad do the young people think is the most misleading?

**CLIP TO WATCH. The clip is from scene 22. It starts at 1 hour and 26 seconds and ends at 1 hour, 1 minute and 48 seconds.**

In the scene we see Olive confessing her regrets at have given people the impression that she was sleeping around. She thought that this was okay but realises that a lot of people have been hurt and are angry with her. While we only see Olive only tell one explicit lie, right at the beginning of the film, she does nothing to discourage the escalation of those lies around the school community; in fact, she actively encourages them (particularly in faking sex with Brandon).

- Is deliberately misleading someone the same thing as lying? Is it as bad as lying?
- Although there may be a legal difference between the two (which ad companies know only too well), the fact is that we feel cheated if we think we've been misled. You might like to encourage the young people to share any examples they have of feeling misled.
- Are there any circumstances when it may be okay to give a false impression? Examples might include things such as setting your house lights on timer switches when you're away to deter burglars. Biblical examples might include Gideon blowing trumpets and waving torches to make the Midianites think he had more than three hundred men (Judges 7) and Jesus not wanting people to reveal his true identity too early (e.g. Mark 8:27–30).
- Despite the fact that there are some exceptions to the rule (and sometimes people get the wrong impression no matter what we do), the fact is that if someone consistently misleads us, we find it hard to trust that person.

**Key Question:** How do we mislead others? Should we be doing it?

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

- Acts 5:1–10
- Matthew 23:27–28
- Ephesians 5:3
- 1 Peter 3:10
- 3 John 3–4

### 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.

Olive's story, that of a single lie leading to a whole host of lies which spiral out of her control, has much in common with that of King David and Bathsheba. An act which both of them thought was relatively innocent ends up having unintended painful consequences for a large number of people (even if the scale of those consequences differs).

- As a group, read the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1–12:25) or summarise it in your own words for the group. It's worth pointing out to the group that prophecy of Nathan turned out to

be true in every part (as the next few chapters of 2 Samuel show), with one of David's own sons declaring war against him and sleeping with David's concubines in full view of everyone.

- Compare and contrast the actions of Olive and David. You may find the following questions helpful:
  - Both Olive and David's problems began because they put themselves in situations they should never have been in; what were these? What action should they have taken?

(Olive should have been brave enough to say she didn't want to go away for the weekend with Rhiannon's parents; David should have been out leading his army).

- In what way did these initial actions make them vulnerable to temptation?
- Olive gave in to peer pressure to lie; David gave in to lust by staring at Bathsheba's naked body when he should have looked away. Leaving aside what we know happened next, who do you find it more difficult to have sympathy with? Why?
- Who had more to gain from their initial wrong doing? Who had more to lose?
- How many people did they each hurt? In what way?
- The result of David's action ended up splitting the nation; Olive's obviously didn't. But, although the scale of consequences was different because of the position they each held in society, both actions were wrong. Imagine they swapped roles. What effect would Olive's lie have had if she were Queen? What effect would David's lust have

had if he were a high school student? Does the seriousness of our sins vary depending on our position in society?

- How much control did each have over the wrongs which stemmed from their initial actions? Who do you think would have found it easier to stop things escalating, had they so chosen (which they didn't)?
- Both David and Olive reached a point where they were forced to confront the sinfulness of their actions. What is it that brought each of them to that point?

- Both David and Olive were presented with the truth about their sins by other people. Describe how this happened. How did David and Olive respond?
- What did each of them do to put things right?
- Do you feel that each of them learnt their lesson? Did you feel they got what they deserved?

*Reel Issues scene is collaboration of Bible Society and Urban Saints.*

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