



HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON (Cert PG)

Directed by: Dean DeBlois & Chris Sanders

Running time: 94 minutes

SUMMARY

Young Viking teenager Hiccup (voice by Jay Baruchel) is a frustrated boy. He lives on the island of Berk and would love to follow in the steps of his tribe and become a fierce Viking warrior, just like his father, the village chieftain, Stoick the Vast (Gerard Butler). Stoick is skilled in fighting the village's greatest enemies – the dragons.

Unfortunately, the skinny Hiccup does not have the classic Viking build, but he's inventive and he manages to bring down the legendary Night Fury dragon with one of his contraptions. When he finds the place where the injured Night Fury fell, Hiccup also discovers that he doesn't have the heart to kill dragons. Worse, Hiccup knows as the village loser he won't have a chance of impressing Astrid (America Ferrera), the girl of his dreams and a formidable dragon fighter in her own right.

Resigned to being different, Hiccup learns a new way of relating to dragons, through friendship rather than war. At the same time, his father decides it is time Hiccup initiated in the art of killing dragons. Enrolled in dragon-killing training school, and sneaking off between times to develop his friendship with his new dragon friend (Toothless), Hiccup leads a double-life.

Matters come to a head when Stoick witnesses Hiccup laying down his arms and armour before a dragon. Stoick sparks off trouble by trying to defend his son. Toothless hears his friend's cries, and flies to rescue Hiccup, but gets caught in the process. Stoick shackles Toothless and uses him to lead the Viking village to

the place where all the dragons gather in an attempt to rid the village of dragons forever. But there they come across a beast of unimaginable proportions and unleash a force far beyond their strength and valour to contain.

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. This is a simple, quick exercise to get everyone thinking about their reaction to the film.

Film posters and DVD covers normally have some ratings and summary statements of the film being promoted. For example, the *Daily Mirror* awarded *How To Train Your Dragon* four stars and described it as 'The Perfect Family Film'.

Ask the individuals in your group to give the film a 'star rating' and write a brief summary statement.

KEY THEMES IN THE FILM

How To Train Your Dragon is an amusing animation from DreamWorks, makers of some great animation films like *Shrek*, *Madagascar* and *Kung Fu Panda*. It is one of those films that has something for younger and older viewers alike, touching on some important ideas about faith and God in the process. This section gives a chance for young people to explore some of those questions by looking at four themes that the film raises.

1. Be yourself

The clip starts at 0.07.00 and runs until 0.09.00.

Hiccup struggles with a problem that all of us have to deal with at some time or other: the problem of other people's expectations. He wants to please his father and to convince him that he is the son that his father wants. 'I just want to be one of you guys,' Hiccup laments to Gobber (Craig Ferguson) the blacksmith. Much later in the film, his father will be so angry that his son has not turned out like him that he will say to him, 'You're not a Viking. You're not my son!' In this earlier scene, Gobber advises Hiccup, 'Stop trying so hard to be something you're not.'

There is a great pressure on a young person to be someone they are not and to live up to the expectations of their peers or their family. The pressure can take various forms including put downs ('You're so weedy, you'll never make a Viking!') and the threat of rejection ('A boy who can't kill dragons is no son of mine.').

Make sure the young people in the group understand the distinction between *put downs* and the threat of *rejection* and then ask them to categorise the following statements by pointing to the ground (put down) or forming a cross with their arms (rejection):

- 'You're such a mummy's boy!' (put down)
- 'You can't go around with us unless you paint your face.' (rejection)
- 'You can't go to a party wearing those!' (put down)
- 'Go on, have a smoke. Only a coward wouldn't.' (put down)
- 'We're expecting all A's in your exams, just like your sister got. Don't let us down.' (rejection)
- 'Don't let them know I am underage, or I'll never speak to you again.' (rejection)
- 'You look so plain without make-up.' (put down)
- 'If you really loved me, you'd stay another half an hour.' (rejection)

Ask them what *put downs* or *threats* of rejection they have encountered. Where do they feel the greatest pressure to be someone they are not?

Key question: How can you resist the pressure to be someone you're not?

Relevant Bible verses:

- Romans 12.1–2
- Galatians 5.16–25
- 1 Corinthians 12.14–27

2. Be honest about your prejudices

The clip starts at 0.21.06 and runs until 0.23.46.

The Vikings' beliefs about dragons were based on 300 years of experience, all of which had been encoded into the dragon manual ('Everything we know about every dragon we know of'). 'Extremely dangerous. Kill on sight!' is the summary of its ancient wisdom. It is only at the very end of the story that the Vikings learn that for all these years they have been fighting an enemy that could have been a friend.

Find some suitable newspaper or magazine articles that contain a photograph of someone and some factual information about that person. The information might concern their age, nature of employment, celebrity status, etc. You want facts the

group might be able to guess on the basis of the photograph alone.

Hand out the photo to the group and ask them to guess the answers to questions for which your article provides the answer. For example (depending on the contents of the article):

- How old is this person?
- What is their job?
- How much do they earn?
- How do they like to spend their time?
- What is their nationality?
- Where might you bump into them?

Invite them to comment on the basis for their answers.

Key question: How can a person become aware of their prejudices?

Relevant Bible verses:

- Psalm 139.23–24
- John 1.45–46
- Acts 10.9–16,34–35
- Acts 22.3–8
- Galatians 2.11–14
- 2 Timothy 3.16

3. Learn to say, 'Sorry'

The clip starts at 1.14.54 and runs until 1.16.07.

It takes a major catastrophe to open Stoick's eyes to his stubbornness and his error, but he does the right thing and utters those powerful words, 'I'm sorry!' Earlier in the story Astrid had said the same thing after her eyes had been opened to see dragons in a different light. The Bible calls this change of mind that

leads to 'I'm sorry' *repentance* (to think differently).

Use the following questions to explore this theme.

- How do we know that the apologies of Stoick and Astrid were genuine?
- How had their thinking changed?
- What changed it?
- Could they have shown they were sorry without saying the words, 'I'm sorry'?
- What is more important – the apology, or the change of actions that follow?
- If a friend asked you now what repentance means, how would you answer them?

Key question: Rock artist Elton John wrote and performed a song called 'Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word'. Why do we find it so hard to say, 'Sorry'?

Relevant Bible verses:

- 2 Chronicles 32.24–26
- Hosea 4.16
- Matthew 3.4–8
- Romans 2.4
- Revelation 3.19–20

4. Count the cost

The clip starts at 1.21.55 and runs until 1.24.10.

Losing boats, livestock, limbs and lives to the dragons was an occupational hazard for the Vikings, and they knew it. When Stoick led his men to find the dragons' island he understood there might be losses, and when Hiccup made his crazy decision to take on the monster dragon he appreciated the risk he was taking. Hiccup lost his left foot in the final fight (a fitting match for

Toothless' missing tail piece). There was a personal cost to his heroism. Nevertheless, Hiccup's personal loss was small in comparison to the great gain he achieved on behalf the entire village of Berk.

Use one of the resources below to get some up-to-date information about Christians around the world who face persecution:

- Open Doors
<http://www.opendoorsuk.org>
- Release International
<http://www.releaseinternational.org>
- Barnabas Fund
<http://barnabafund.org>

Print out some information about countries or individuals which you can hand out. Give the young people some time to read and absorb the information, and then ask them to report back something they read that stood out for them.

Explain what it means to count the cost in some parts of the world. What cost do they have to count in their own family and school situations?

Key question: What price are you willing to pay to follow Jesus?

-Relevant Bible verses:

- Luke 14.25–33
- Philippians 2.5–11
- 2 Timothy 4.10
- Hebrews 11.32–40
- Revelation 12.10–11

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.

Invite the young people to read together 1 Samuel 17.17–50.

In this well-known story we read about another young man who was not rated by his family. Like Hiccup, David has to fight against the prejudices of others and tackle the problem facing him in his own way, being true to who he is. Use the following questions to explore how these stories are similar and how they are different.

- What disadvantages did Hiccup have, compared to his peers? What disadvantages did David have, compared to his brothers?
- What prejudices do Hiccup and David have to overcome?
- What disadvantages or prejudices do you have to cope with?
- What were Stoick's motives in wanting his son to become a great Viking warrior?
- Why did Saul offer David his armour?
- Have you ever been asked to do something that went against the kind of person you are? How did it feel?
- Both Hiccup and David did something

'crazy' (Astrid's words). What was crazy about what they did?

- Both Hiccup and David had to face a giant, and both won victory and fame for themselves, and peace for their families and friends. How are Hiccup and David similar? What is different about them?
- What 'giants' are you facing?
- What, according to David, is the secret of victory over our Goliaths?

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