



HOW TO SET UP A *REEL ISSUES* GROUP

AIMS AND AUDIENCE

First of all, know what you are aiming for, who you want to reach and how.

Broadly, there are three possible ways of running a *Reel Issues* group.

1. **A group that is open to all.** The agenda is to discuss life's big issues as they are treated in popular films and to see what the Christian faith has to say about them. Everyone understands that the discussion is Christian-led and will include Christian perspectives, but there will be opportunities for all members to share from personal experience and their individual perspectives. It's an opportunity for friendships to grow and beliefs to be shared in an atmosphere of respect and trust. Think dialogue rather than traditional evangelism.
2. **A group enabling Christians to make connections between the Bible and the stories and values in popular films.** The aims are (a) to help Christians relate their faith to the stories and messages of popular films and (b) find points of contact for conversation and faith-sharing among their friends.
3. **An open group, like a book reading group, which can be led by anyone, whatever their views and faith.** As a Christian member of the group, you have the same opportunity as anyone else to choose the films the group wants to discuss, and to lead or contribute to discussion.

Reel Issues is designed primarily with the first approach in mind, but can easily be adapted to the

second approach., Christian members of a group taking the third approach can also draw on the material when they are leading or contributing to a session.

WHERE WILL YOU MEET?

For copyright reasons, when watching film clips together it is easiest to arrange the discussion in a home, since high street videos are licensed for home viewing (see Keeping it legal article). For privacy (when trying out role plays) and for comfort, too, a comfortable lounge perhaps in someone's home is probably best.

If you are showing clips or films outside the home, you will require a licence. This is becoming easier now that churches can purchase a licence for a relatively low fee that enables the showing of films from a number of major studios.

PUBLICISING THE GROUP

Who is it for? Here are some options to pray over and think through before you get to work:

- Invite friends, friends of friends and anyone found browsing in your local video shop?
- Publicise it in your local newspaper, gym, library, student bar, arts centre ...
- Promote it in your church?

PLANNING THE SESSION

Choosing your film

Every month *Reel Issues* adds a new Epic, Clip and Scene film discussion to the site, but not every film will suit everyone's tastes or sensitivities. If the latest doesn't appeal, there is a big and growing archive of previous films to dig into.

Decide how you will choose, but allow everyone to be heard. Or delegate the choice to different group members from session to session.

It will be best if at least one person does a bit of research, say by looking at the *Reel Issues* outline, watching the trailer at the film's website, or recommending it if they have seen and enjoyed the film themselves.

Watching

Hire/buy a copy of the video and watch it together or pass it around the group ahead of your session (or go together to the cinema if it's a new release or re-release. *Reel Issues* usually focuses on films that are newly or recently released on DVD so you can watch clips together.)

Meeting

Arrange a time for the *Reel Issues* session, when you will watch two or three clips and discuss them. You might want to arrange snacks or invite people to provide something savoury or sweet, perhaps even choose a theme to match the movie.

Planning

With the aid of the *Reel Issues* outline, watch the film yourself and plan some questions and activities. Allow for variety, e.g. pairs and small group exercises, feedback to the whole group, role-play as well as straight discussion.

As with any group, be flexible and allow for spontaneity too.

Although you will have issues you want to discuss, each member will have their own spiritual, moral, emotional and artistic responses to the film. Exploring these could open up fruitful dialogue and will be more stimulating than sticking too rigidly to an imposed agenda. Ensure, though, that you don't let your group

be hijacked by marginal interests from a particularly vocal individual.

Reel Issues has three points of focus: (1) the film; (2) Christian faith and the Bible; (3) the people watching the film – their experiences and beliefs.

Hold a balance within these three, and your group will make film, faith and life connect.

Talking

A key skill is to ensure the level of discussion is at a level – spiritually, intellectually and technically – that everyone can reasonably relate and contribute to.

As with all groups, respect the right for quieter members to "watch and listen" but don't let the most vocal hold the floor!

As a leader, ensure that it is understood that the group belongs to all the members and the opinions ventured are to be respected even though members may disagree strongly at times.

Prayer

Only you will know if prayer or any overt spiritual activity is appropriate for your group. If it is, introduce it. If not, don't force it – *Reel Issues* groups are as much about building trust and friendships as anything else and this takes time. Either way, take time in your own devotions to pray regularly for group members and any issues they may have shared with the group.

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