

Movie Discussion Guide

GRAN TORINO

Gran Torino, focuses on the relationship between Walt Kowalski, a retired Korean War veteran who has just lost his wife, and his Hmong neighbors. As ethnic gang violence takes hold of his neighborhood, Walt finds himself begrudgingly drawn into the Lor family's life, especially that of the teenage son, Thao, and daughter, Sue. Thao, succumbing to pressure to join his cousin's gang, unsuccessfully attempts to steal Walt's prize possession, his 1973 Gran Torino. This one act starts a series of escalating violence that finds Walt taking steps to defend the Lor family from gang violence. With strong performances from Clint Eastwood (Walt), Bee Vang (Thao) and Ahney Her (Sue), *Gran Torino* deftly addresses the issues of racism, life and death, the meaning of family, and redemption in a riveting manner.



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GRAN TORINO

Programming Suggestions

This discussion guide is designed to facilitate educational programs after viewing the film GRAN TORINO. Its purpose is to generate discussion based on social issues found within the movie and for program participants to reflect on themes that may be pertinent to them. Therefore, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to questions in this guide.

The discussion facilitator may choose to utilize one of the following activities as a means of developing discussion:

- Host a panel discussion to discuss race relations and gang violence both in the past and present. Have professors (sociology, history, or psychology) discuss the state of race relations/gang violence over the past 50 years.
- Create a bulletin board that chronicles racism and gang violence in the United States. Encourage students to incorporate their thoughts into the bulletin board.
- Host a panel discussion to discuss death and loss and how religion is part of these two issues. Have religion faculty, or local clergy, discuss their views on these issues and how faith relates to them.
- Have a discussion related to family. Discuss how family dynamics impact relationships. Also discuss the idea of extended family.

An important consideration in choosing any facilitation option is that all students have an opportunity to participate. Be aware that many of the topics addressed in the film are not often talked about in public settings. Students who attend the program may have varying degrees of comfort level with the discussion.

ISSUES

DEATH/LOSS
FAMILY
PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
RACISM
RELIGION/FAITH

Discussion Questions:

- How would you describe Walt's relationship with his family? Do you know of anyone that has a similar family relationship?
- How does the physical state of the neighborhood impact the movie? What does the condition of the homes say about the neighborhood? How has the neighborhood's population changed over the years and why? Why has Walt stayed?
- At the start of the movie, Walt is seen at his wife's funeral. What impression does he have of his son's family from these scenes?
- What does respect mean to Walt? What does respect mean to you?
- How would you describe Walt's racial beliefs at the start of the movie? Do these beliefs change? Throughout the film he uses racial slurs. Does the meaning of the slurs change depending on the situation? Do you see where language/words can have different meanings depending on the situation? Is this right or wrong? Have you ever used racial slurs and not meant them as an insult?
- How would you describe the relationship between Walt and the priest? How does this relationship change during the movie?
- At the beginning of the movie, Walt tells the priest to call him Mr. Kowalski, at the end of the movie Walt tells him to call him by his first name. What does this signify? Talk about similar relationships that you have that have changed over time.
- The center piece of the film was Walt's Gran Torino. What does the car signify to Walt? What about the other characters? Does the car have significance to them? If so, how? Do you have, or know someone, that has a similar type of connection to a possession? If so, talk about it.
- Towards the end of the movie, Walt offers for Thao to use the car for his date. Discuss the significance of this. Are their similar real life situations in people's lives? Have you ever been offered to use something that had great significance to somebody?
- At the end of the film, Walt bequeaths the car to Thao instead of a family member. Was this unexpected? The last scene shows Thao driving the car down the road. The car has not been modified. What does this scene signify?
- Walt spends his birthday with his family and then begrudgingly with Thao's family. How were these situations different? Do you know of anyone that feels more comfortable or at home with friends or neighbors than family?
- Walt says that he has more in common with Thao's family than his. Talk about this statement from Walt. Have you ever had similar feelings? If so, talk about it.
- Midway through the movie Thao is required to work for Walt. How does this change their relationship? Have you had a similar experience where a relationship has changed due to a different type of interaction with someone?
- Walt tries to help Thao by teaching him how to work, talk like a man, etc. What changed in the relationship to make Walt want to help Thao like this?
- Walt and his friend the barber have an interesting relationship. Do you think the way they talk to each other is appropriate or inappropriate? Why or why not? Do you think it is okay to speak the way they do if both individuals are okay with the language? Why or why not?
- Walt states that Thao and Sue will never get away from the gangs that are in the neighborhood. Do you think that is a true statement? Can situations like this change without extreme measures?
- Walt calls his son after going to the doctor but doesn't discuss the visit with him. Why do you think that he didn't share the news about his illness? Under the circumstances would you have acted differently? Why or why not? Have you ever had big news that you changed your mind about sharing?
- Towards the end of the movie, the gang shoots up the Lor's home and attacks Sue. Thao wants immediate revenge but Walt says they must wait. How would you react if something like this happened to your family? Have you ever wanted revenge? How did you deal with the feelings?
- After the attack, Walt gets a haircut and shave, gets a new suit and goes to confession. What is the significance of these actions?
- Walt's wife had asked the priest to get Walt to confess. Walt is resistant until the end of the movie. Why does he change his position about going to confession? Have you ever been adamant about something and changed your mind or gone through with it because a family member wanted you to? If so, talk about it.
- Walt tells the priest that what haunts men is not what they are ordered to do, but what they do when not ordered to do something. What does he mean by this?
- How does Walt affect the priest? Does the priest change over the course of the film? Can you think of a real life situation where someone changes due to the influence of one person? If so, talk about it.
- Walt tells Thao towards the end of the movie that "I finish things. That's what I do". Talk about the importance of this statement in regards to how the film ends. What could be said about you?
- Walt gives Thao his medal. Why does he do this? Have you ever had someone give you something like this, something of great importance? If so, talk about how this made you feel.
- Walt locks Thao up. Why does he do this? Was locking him up the right thing to do? Have you ever tried to protect someone from themselves?
- At the end of the movie, Walt sacrifices himself for Thao's family and the neighborhood. Was there any other way to get the same result? Why did Walt do what he did? Would he have done the same for his family? What makes or allows a person to make such a sacrifice for someone else?
- Can you think of real life examples of people who have sacrificed themselves for others? What drives these people to make this sort of sacrifice?

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