

Gina B. Yeager

WATCHING WITH THE EYES OF FAITH

How can we use movies to test what we're learning in church? Try this simple film review process.

For a recent youth trip, we rented a van with a swanky TV/VCR/DVD unit and two separate sound systems—one in back for the kids and one in front for the drivers. We invited the youth to bring along their favorite movies. The film of choice was the “deeply theological” cheerleader film *Bring It On*.

I had seen *Bring It On*, and I liked it. The sarcasm, humor, music, and rhythm made it a fun, fluffy movie. But as I drove along and listened to the youth laughing, I wondered what exactly they were laughing at. Were they watching the movie from a strictly secular perspective? Were they seeing the movie through the eyes of faith? Did they notice the stereotyping, reckless behavior, careless language, and sexual inappropriateness?

I believe that, as Christians, we are able to learn from the *absence of value* as well as the *presence of value*. It takes some skill to be able to see the sketchy side of the world and then to examine it with the eyes of faith. But I think Jesus modeled for us a way to look at life as it is and to discover within it that which is good and redemptive.

Jesus talked about criminals, prostitutes, dangerous situations, unpleasant social structures, slavery, adultery, abuse, and illness as well as common situations and everyday people—and he used these stories to show the power of God’s transformational love and mercy. We have the same opportunity with today’s art and culture. Music, movies, and websites are cultural offerings that are not necessarily created from a Christian perspective but may suggest lessons, questions, or conversations about faith.

So, what can we discover in a film like *Bring It On*? If we look beyond the language and bare midribs, what does the film say about friendship, faithfulness, integrity, courage, or betrayal?

2000 / 1 hour, 40 minutes /
Rated PG-13 for sex-related
material and language.

In the hallways of the church and at youth group meetings, it’s easy to talk the talk of faith. But how do we start to test the language and actions of faith in the real world? How can we use movies to test what we’re learning in church? Here is a simple film review process:

- **Begin with the first shot, the first note of music, or the first few minutes of footage; what is your initial impression of the film? How does it make you feel? Why? What do you expect from the rest of the film?**
- **What is the main point of the film? What are other important points?**
- **When you watch the film, what do you learn about life? God? the church?**
- **What in your own experience relates to the film?**
- **What about the film—story, character, style, color, costuming, symbolism—helps you to uncover its deeper meanings?**
- **Does the film remind you of something from the Bible? something from your own faith journey?**
- **What are the issues raised by the film—for example, stereotyping or reckless behavior? What similar issues do you find in your school, family, church, community, or world? How would you handle the situations or problems raised by the film?**

There are times in our lives to simply relax, have fun, and play. Christian disciples are not always serious. Christ also calls us to keep our eyes wide open and to test the lessons of faith in the secular world.

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NEXT DAY **Stretch**

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life. 1 John 1:1 (NRSV)

Choose your favorite movie—not necessarily one with out-and-out theological meaning, but your favorite film. Watch it with a few friends, your family, or the youth group. Use the film review questions above to think and talk through what you’re viewing.