

“Avatar” Film Discussion Guide

Film length: 2hrs. 40 minutes

Film rating: PG-13

Director: James Cameron

Genre: Sci/Fi- Action/Adventure

Synopsis:

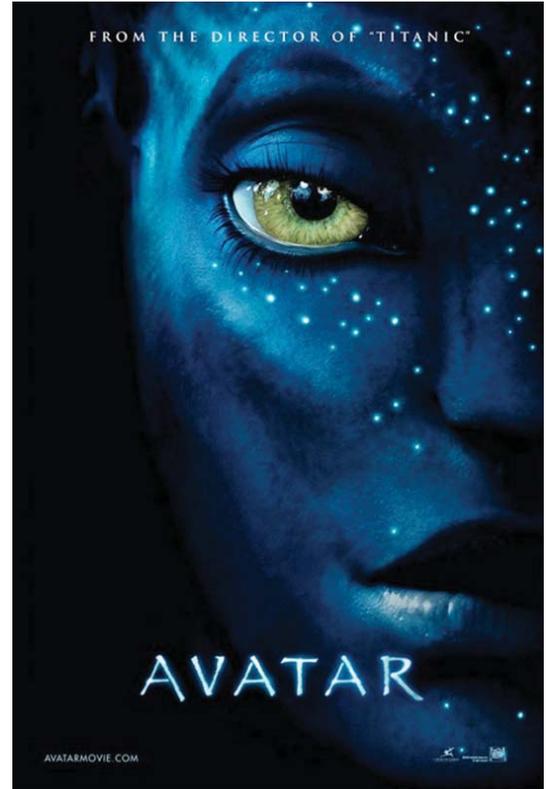
Worlds and values collide in this visually engrossing action/sci-fi film. The main character, Jake Sully, is an identical twin who is paralyzed as a result of military service as a marine. He takes up his deceased brother’s mission and embarks on a fantastical journey to the planet, Pandora. There he must come to grips with carrying out his assigned mission, or defending the people he was sent to destroy.

Jake takes on an alternative life form as an Avatar in order to gain the trust and develop an understanding of the native Na’vi “people” of Pandora. The Na’vi enclave sits atop a vast deposit of “unobtainium.” Jake’s mission is to convince the people to leave the area so that the corporate interests behind the mission can profit from the mineral deposits.

Jake encounters “the aliens” only to discover his deeper humanity. The film provides action, adventure and striking computer generated effects. As part morality play, part allegory the themes and underlying story are worth engaging. Director, James Cameron notes, “Filmmaking is about storytelling. It’s about humans playing humans. It’s about those actors somehow saying the words and playing the moment in a way that gets in contact with the audience’s hearts. I don’t think that changes. I don’t think that’s changed in the last century.

Themes to Engage Through the Film:

- *What does it mean to be human?*
- *The nature and essence of freedom*
- *Complex moral decision-making and ethical choices: Where is the line between right and wrong? When is an action always wrong?*
- *Do the ends justify the means?*
- *The stewardship of resources and reverence for creation*
- *The sacredness and unity of life*
- *The use of force for material gain, profit-taking and greed*
- *The extractives industries and capitalism today*
- *Imperialism, greed, ecological disregard and corporate irresponsibility*



- **This film is an excellent tool to explore and examine moral decision-making, ethical issues and social justice themes.**
- **This film explores the tension between reality and identity....being and becoming.**
- **The film raises significant questions about the use of military power to achieve the goals of capitalism and returns to shareholders.**

Web Links:

Official Movie Site:

<http://www.avatarmovie.com/>

USCCB Review:

<http://www.usccb.org/movies/current.shtml>



Catholic Social Teaching Connections:

The film, *Avatar* is a visually engrossing non-stop action adventure with an abundance of food for thought. The following themes can be explored, and the following connections or illustrations can be teased out through the film.

The Life and Dignity of the Human Person:

- *In the beginning of the film, Jake is trying to uphold the memory and dignity of his brother's life. He takes his twin brother's place and finds himself in the midst of a moral dilemma.*
- *The Na'vi people greet one another with the designation, "I see you" as a recognition of honor and dignity*
- *Jake defends the people of Na'vi and demonstrates growing respect for their ways. He begins "as a baby" and gradually understands the values they hold sacred.*

The Principle of Stewardship:

- *In the film, the Na'vi people have a sacred relationship with their surroundings and teach Jake a new way of being in their world - being in harmony with his natural surroundings.*
- *As the conflict ensues over the destruction of Pandora's habitat, even the creatures come to the assistance and defense of the land.*
- *Consumerism seems to be at the center of the film as another character driving the destruction of Pandora. Living with less could prevent the destruction of Pandora and the Na'vi people.*
- *Neytiri says, "our great mother does not take sides Jake, she protects only the balance of life."*

The Principle of Solidarity:

- *Dr. Grace Augustine tried to speculate as to how the Na'vi interconnect, she said, "its more than connections to the human brain, get it, its a network, its a global network and the navi can access it, they can upload and download data, memories...." The sense of interconnection and solidarity abound in the film.*
- *Jake is balancing between two worlds - the world of the military mission he is part of, and that of defending the Na'vi people. As he gets more integrally intertwined with the life of the Na'vi people, the sense of solidarity he has with them grows to a point of conflict and personal consequence.*
- *The Na'vi people work together to gather the clans and harness the power of unity working together against their foe, "The Sky People."*

The Common Good:

- *Dr. Grace, Jake and the rest of the team must work together cooperatively and depend upon one another for survival. Their work is also an effort (eventually) to promote the good of the Na'vi people.*
- *Jake is true to his vision of protecting and defending the common good.*

What other connections do you see?



Supporting Education for Justice Resources:

- **Backgrounder on Structural Sin**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/2906>
- **Care for Creation**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/610>
- **The Principle of the Common Good**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/329>
- **The Principle of Solidarity**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/644>

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Questions for Discussion:

1. Where in the film do you see critiques evident of the current state of the world in the characters, dialogue and content of the film?
2. Describe the transformation that takes place in Jake from the beginning of the movie until the end. What are some of the key turning points that you can identify in his encounter with the Na'vi people?
3. The film grapples with the issue of authentic identity and does so through the use of "virtual reality". What is the most important thing Jake learns about himself and this true identity? About the Na'vi way of being?
4. What is Selfridge's authentic identity? [Selfridge: "This is why we're here; because this little gray rock sells for twenty million a kilo."] Colonel Quaritch? What is their own internal motivation and what does it reveal about their characters?
5. One interesting paradox in the film is the way in which the alien Na'vi people actually display far more human tendencies than the humans in the story. They appear more highly evolved than the humans in their respect of the life and the energy surrounding them. How do you see evidence of this throughout the film?
6. What is the author's point in this portrayal and what are the causes of the "dehumanization" of the humans in the first place?
7. Describe what happens when Neytiri first encounters Jake. Why is this encounter an essential touchstone in the film? What do the seeds of Eywa reveal?
8. Discuss some of the key quotes about human freedom? How ought we use our freedom and what is it ultimately for?
9. The role of choice and the act of choosing are both significant activities for the Na'vi people. Why is choice so critical and what is its significance for the moral life?
10. The planet, Pandora, is a garden of eden of sorts where aggression is unnecessary. What does this reveal about the way "humans" view the created world and the resources of the planet? What must humans "unlearn" to live in harmony?
11. The Na'vi people greet one another with the designation, "I see you" What is the significance of this greeting? What parallels and comparisons can you draw?
12. In the end, what do you think about the decisions and choices Jake made? In your opinion did he fulfill his mission? If so, how? If not, why not?
13. How would you describe Colonel Quaritch and the values that he holds? Had his approach to the Na'vi people been different, how might he have gone about his mission and still succeeded? Why was the use of force doomed to fail?
14. How was the exercise of leadership a spiritual dynamic for the Na'vi people? Where did you see this in the film?
15. How would you describe the key roles that women play in the film? What portrayals struck you?
16. What was your favorite scene in the movie? What would you say is the main point or message of the film?

