

Wall-E

Film length: 98 min.

Film rating: G

Director: Andrew Stanton

Genre: Animation/Adventure/Sci-Fi

Synopsis & Central Plot:

WALL-E, named the best movie of 2008 by *Time* Magazine and winner of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film, takes us on a computer-animated journey more than seven centuries into the future, when humans have abandoned Earth, leaving behind trash and a personable little robot named WALL-E. WALL-E is content to carry on his work, compacting trash into cubes and stacking them into building-like towers of garbage, all the while collecting a few choice souvenirs. WALL-E's home is replete with treasured knick-knacks, from a Rubik's cube he cannot seem to solve, to a beloved musical he watches over and over again.

The sweet simplicity of WALL-E's life comes to a screeching halt when EVE lands and begins trying to fulfill her directive: find evidence of sustainable life on Earth. Instantly infatuated, WALL-E must brave EVE's tendency to shoot her canon/arm at anything that moves. But just as the friendship that WALL-E had hoped for starts to blossom, EVE completes her mission when WALL-E shows her a small plant that he had found. With EVE's directive fulfilled, she automatically shuts down, leaving WALL-E confused but determined to stay close to his new love. Eventually, the ship that dropped EVE off returns to take her (and WALL-E, as a stowaway) back to the gigantic spaceship that is the home of all of humanity.

On board the Axiom, WALL-E encounters a new type of human, one relegated to a floating recliner, constantly transfixed by a floating media screen and immune to the sights and sounds around them. EVE and WALL-E must fight to stay together, as they team up with a band of broken robots and the ship's captain to return to Earth and rebuild the planet with the help of one tiny plant.



Main themes to engage through the film:

- The difference between simply surviving and truly living
- The need for solidarity and human connections for life
- Differences and similarities between things, people, and machines
- How we find and define "value"
- The obsession with constant stimulation as a distraction from reality
- The consequences of abusing our natural resources
- Irony in the lack of humanity that we see displayed by the humans vs. the incredible humanity we see in WALL-E
- The sustainability of Earth in the face of consumerism

"I don't want to survive. I want to live."

-Captain of the Axiom

Catholic Social Teaching Themes and Connections:

In *WALL-E*, we see a new “breed” of humans living in a time where caring for creation has been forgotten, human dignity is neglected and there is a total lack of solidarity. As we witness the joy and emotion of the non-humans in the film, we may reflect on the prospects for God’s people if we neglect these principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

- As humans, it is our duty to **care for God’s creation**. People are inextricably bound up with all of God’s creation, his expression of love for humanity. It is our duty to respect and care for the wonders He created.
- Human life is sacred because we are the clearest reflection of God among us. We respect **human dignity** by treating all people and all of God’s creation with care and respect.
- We belong to one human community. Our call to **solidarity** requires us to work for and foster mutual respect, love, justice, and peace. Even though we are often tempted to turn inwards, we must not forget each other, despite borders, boundaries, and differences.

“To care for creation is a moral duty for all men, as the will of the Creator is that man be worthy of his vocation, governing nature as a responsible administrator and not as a merciless exploiter...It also means to leave a habitable earth to future generations.”

-Pope John Paul II



Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- *WALL-E* presents an almost apocalyptic view of the Earth. Do you see any signs that *WALL-E*’s world is becoming more of a reality today?
- We see *WALL-E* and the other robots seemingly expressing a wide range of human emotions. What is it that makes humans different from robots, or computers? Do you see those differences eroding as technology develops?
- The humans portrayed in *WALL-E* are constantly absorbed by media, unaware of their surroundings. In what ways do we see this same obsession with media in our society? How can constant media entertainment be an obstacle to working for solidarity? Are there ways that media can *contribute* to solidarity?
- What does *WALL-E* say about homogeneity? How is diversity devalued in *WALL-E*’s world? Do new media and technology encourage individualism or conformity?
- Do you see any parallels between the broken robots and certain members of our society? Who might those robots represent?
- What do you think Earth will look like in 700 years? What steps can you take to prevent it from becoming the wasteland portrayed in *WALL-E*?



- What is community? What do we need to be fully human in community? Do the humans on board the Axiom have a true community? Why or why not?
- In *WALL-E*, all that humans have left behind on Earth is trash. What kind of commentary does this provide about reckless consumerism and consumption? How do our actions of today affect tomorrow's world?
- What kind of changes to our patterns of consumption and our ways of living do we need to make now in order to prevent the scenario illuminated in *WALL-E* from coming true?
- Are the humans in *WALL-E* autonomous (Are they actively living and making choices out of their own free will)? How does this change over the course of the film? How do consumption and technology compromise their freedom? Do you see similarities/differences in people today?
- What do you see as the most essential message of the film? What is *WALL-E* trying to say to our society and culture today?



- *In 1950, computer scientist Alan Turing proposed a test for determining whether or not a machine could reproduce human intelligence. In the so-called "Turing test", a human would ask questions of a computer and a human, each of which would be hidden behind a curtain and answering via text on a screen. If the human questioner were unable to distinguish the computer's responses from the human's, the computer would have "passed" the test. Do you think WALL-E could pass the Turing test?*



Other Resources:

The Principle of Stewardship: Care for God's Creation (Backgrounder)

<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/610>

Our Sacred Earth (Visual Reflection):

<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/3954>

Climate Change: Theological Reflections (PowerPoint):

<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/3708>

The Story of Stuff:

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

- *In 1950, Americans consumed 144 lbs of meat and poultry per person. In 2007, that had risen to 222 lbs.*
- *The consumption of resources of one American is equal to that of 35 persons from India.*
- *The food we eat generally travels between 1,500 and 3,000 miles to get to our plates, an increase of 25% from 1980 to 2001. Our food is more well traveled than we are.*
- *The average American watches 4 hours of TV per day. During that amount of time, viewers are exposed to more than 300 advertisements with at least 200 of those being for junk foods.*



Activity After Watching the Film:

The soundtrack from the film includes the song below by Peter Gabriel.

- 1). Listen to the mp3 version of the song online as you read the lyrics below.
- 2). Discuss the following:
 - What is the message of the song?
 - How does the song connects to the film.
 - Why do you think this song was selected as the theme song for the movie

Song Lyrics: “Down to Earth” by Peter Gabriel, featuring the Soweto Gospel Choir)

Did you think that your feet had been bound
By what gravity brings to the ground?
Did you feel you were tricked
By the future you picked?
Well come on down

All these rules don't apply
When you're high in the sky
So come on down
Come on down

We're coming down to the ground
There's no better place to go
We've got snow upon the mountains
We've got rivers down below
We're coming down to the ground
To hear the birds sing in the trees
And the land will be looked after
(Come) send the seeds out in (the deep?)

Did you think you'd escaped from routine
By changing the script and the scene?
Despite all you made of it
you're always afraid of the change

You've got a lot on your chest
Well you can come as my guest
So come on down
Come on down

We're coming down to the ground
There's no better place to go
We've got snow upon the mountains
We've got rivers down below
We're coming down to the ground
We'll hear the birds sing in the trees
And the land will be looked after
(Come?) send the seeds out in (the deep?)

Like the fish in the ocean
We felt at home in the sea
We learned to live off the good land
We learned to climb up a tree



then we got up on two legs
But we wanted to fly
When we messed up our homeland
and set sail for the sky

We're coming down to the ground
There's no better place to go
We've got snow upon the mountains
We got rivers down below
We're coming down to the ground
We'll hear the birds sing in the trees
And the land will be looked after
send the seeds out in th

We're coming down
Comin' down to earth
Like babies at birth
Comin' down to earth

Redefine your priorities
These are extraordinary qualities

We're coming down to the ground
There's no better place to go
We've got snow upon the mountains
We've got rivers down below
We're coming down to the ground
We'll hear the birds sing in the trees
And the land will be looked after
(Come) send the seeds out in (The deep?)

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