

Asset-Building Ideas for Choosing and Talking about Movies and TV Shows

We live in a media-saturated society. We spend huge amounts of money creating, advertising, and seeing movies and TV shows. They influence and reflect fashion, music, cultural and social trends, and sales of toys and other merchandise. Advances in technology have ensured that favorites can be watched over and over again, thus magnifying their impact.

With all of the choices and messages about which movies and TV shows are worth seeing (advertisements, reviews, awards shows, word of mouth), it can be hard to decide what to see and what to avoid. These choices are even more difficult to make regarding what is appropriate for children and young people.

Below are some ideas for how to select movies and TV shows with asset-building themes. In addition, there are suggestions for how to learn from movies and TV shows, use them to spark discussions about assets, and critique them in ways that focus on asset-building themes and messages.

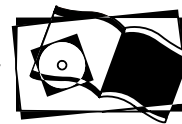
Choosing Movies

- ♥ Find a good book or Web site that reviews movies with young people in mind. Some parenting Web sites include movie reviews. (One such Web site is www.mediafamily.org.) There are also printed guides available with information about nonviolent, nonracist, nonsexist movies and videos. Check with your local librarian for help in locating these resources.
- ♥ Do not go to movies when they are first released. Wait and get opinions from others before deciding what to see.
- ♥ Ask for suggestions of what to rent at your local video store. Tell them the kinds of things you like and do not like. They may have seen a lot of videos themselves or heard reviews from other renters. Be sure to ask about violence and vulgarity, which often go unnoticed because they are so common in movies and videos.
- ♥ Choose movies for children that are developmentally appropriate. For example, toddlers have relatively short attention spans and may only watch for a few minutes; an ideal length for preschoolers and elementary-age children is about 30 minutes.

- ♥ Preview all movies before allowing young people to watch them. If you censor a movie, be sure to explain your reasons.

Choosing TV Shows

- ♥ Know the rating of the TV show before you watch it. The television industry has created a TV rating system similar to the ratings for movies. For a list of the ratings and their definitions, go to www.tvguidelines.org/ratings.asp.
- ♥ See what the Parents Television Council says about a specific TV show. Visit www.parentstv.org. Find the show you're interested in under "Look Up a TV Show Rating." Each show has detailed information that will help you decide whether or not it's worth watching.
- ♥ Talk with others about their favorite TV shows and what they like about them.
- ♥ Encourage individuals to be intentional about their TV viewing. Rather than "grazing" for hours (turning on the television and clicking the remote control to find out what's on), check the listings first to choose specific shows you'd like to watch. Record them if you're not home when they come on.



♥ Choose TV shows that have asset-building themes. Watch TV shows that develop well-rounded characters, have interesting plots, and show characters wrestling with values and ethics.

Talking about Movies and TV Shows

♥ When watching TV or movies on DVD, make it a special family time by snuggling, having snacks, laughing together, and talking about the show afterward.

♥ Use the following questions to help you reflect on a movie or TV show you have seen, or start a conversation about a movie or TV show with family or friends:*

1. Who were the role models in the show? Who were the “villains”? Did those roles reflect stereotypes or generalizations about what certain races, cultures, or other groups are like? Were females and males equally represented?
2. Which scene best showed people building assets for other people? Which scene showed the least amount of asset building?

3. Which characters seemed to have the most assets? Which had the least? What difference did that make in the things they did and the choices they made?
4. Which values did different characters have? How did those values impact their actions?
5. Which characters seemed most empowered and in control of their lives? What helped them be that way?
6. Which character would you most like to be? Why? Which character would you least like to be? Why?
7. What are the messages about sex, alcohol and other drugs, conflict resolution, money, gender, race, class, and other issues?
8. Who were the characters who would support you the most if they were real people? Why? Who were the people you think would support you the least? Why?
9. What would you change about the show to give it a strong message about asset building?

* Note: These questions may need to be adapted depending on the type of movie and the maturity of the people having the discussion.