

## USING FILM IN UNIVERSITY EVANGELISM

**Discuss:** What are your experiences of using film in evangelism (both good and bad)?

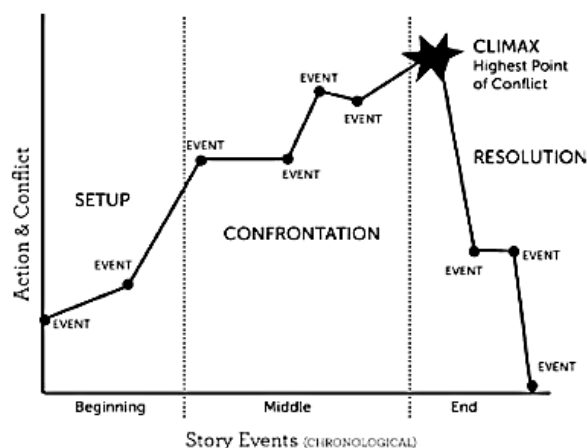
### Stories

“Is it a good thing to go along with the fantasies of childhood, magical as they are? Or should we be fostering a spirit of scepticism? I think it's rather pernicious to inculcate into a child a view of the world which includes supernaturalism - we get enough of that anyway. Even fairy tales, the ones we all love, with wizards or princesses turning into frogs or whatever it was. There's a very interesting reason why a prince could not turn into a frog - it's statistically too improbable.” (Richard Dawkins, speaking at the Cheltenham Science Festival, June 2014)

“Story is the most natural way of enlarging and deepening our sense of reality, and then enlisting us as participants in it. Stories open doors to areas or aspects of life that we didn't know were there, or had stopped noticing out of over-familiarity, or supposed were out-of-bounds to us. They then welcome us in. Stories are verbal acts of hospitality.” (Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*)

### Stories *do things* in us

- They provoke interest and curiosity
- They invite participation
- They encourage community and laughter
- They challenge the way we think and live
- They move and shape us
- They help us remember
- They connect us with our common origins
- They link experience to facts
- They provide context and structure
- They help us understand our common struggle
- They stir our hearts toward empathy and compassion
- They spark our imaginations and encourage us to hope



### The Structure of Stories

Once upon a time...

Each day...

But one day...

Because of that...

(repeat a few times)

Until finally...

Ever since then...

## An Introduction to Human Desire

- We were made to know God through Jesus – all our desires are ultimately only satisfied in him
- Our response is twofold (c.f. Romans 1:18ff):
  - **We suppress** – deliberately writing over what God has revealed about himself
  - **We substitute** – we make idols of things, putting them in God's place, relying on them to provide what only God can give. These idols are always destructive: they don't and can't deliver what they promise.
- Thus, the gospel subverts and fulfils our desires:

<sup>22</sup> Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

- Dan Strange (of Oak Hill Theological College) speaks about demonstrating that the gospel **subversively fulfils**:
  - *Enter*: step into the world and discern what is going on
  - *Explore*: search for elements of grace and the idols attached to them
  - *Expose*: show up the idols as destructive and fraudulent
  - *Evangelise*: show off the gospel as the subversive fulfilment of what the idol promises

## Questions That Can Be Asked of Any Film

1. What was your initial reaction to the film? What prompted it?
2. What impressed you most about the film? (Anything at all!)
3. Did any part of the film stand out to you as particularly meaningful or powerful in any way? Why?
4. What is the message of the film, or view of life and the world that is presented? (Try to state this in a sentence - that this is normally seen in what the central character had discovered between the beginning and end of the film). How did the film-maker seek to make their

message compelling?

5. To what extent do you agree with the message of the film? Where do you disagree? Why?
6. What sort of people is the film seeking to encourage its watchers to be? To what extent do you think it achieves this?

## Further Reading

**For their rock is not of our Rock** (Daniel Strange) - in-depth guide to the gospel's 'subversive fulfilment'

**Hollywood Worldviews** (Brian Godawa) - helpful introduction to how film scripts are put together, and an introduction to worldview analysis

**Popogetics** (Ted Turnau) - practical guide to engaging with popular culture

**Shaped by the Story** (Michael Novelli) - good introductory guide to the power of story

## Three Ideas for Film-Based Events

### 1. Short Film Festival

- Watch two or three short films on a single theme – there's a collection of award winning films at <http://www.filmsshort.com/> (see also <http://www.cinema16.com>)
- Have a ten to fifteen minute discussion after each, based on the questions above – ideally over food.
- Close with a testimony or a short message related to the theme, perhaps over dessert.

### 2. Film Discussions (see Ted Turnau's movie night kit at [www.turnau.cz](http://www.turnau.cz)).

- You can realistically hope to do two things at a film discussion: (1) to demonstrate something of the life, warmth and generosity of the gospel, and (2) to plant questions in a person's mind that ultimately can only be satisfactorily answered in Jesus.
- There are various formats – each with strengths and weaknesses:
  - A message is given afterwards
  - Before the film, all there are encouraged to pay special attention to one theme or motif – with a related message afterwards
  - There's an open discussion afterwards
- Films that work well are:
  - High quality – something you'd happily see twice (or were sad to miss in the cinema)
  - No longer than two hours
  - Recent films (from the last two years)
- Folks will generally stay after the credits roll if:

- They knew at the beginning that there would be a talk or discussion afterwards
- There are refreshments served immediately after the film ends
- The talk or discussion starts soon (after just a short break)
- They know that the formal talk or discussion period will not last long (perhaps a ten minute talk, or a twenty minute discussion)

### 3. Film Themed Dinners

- Do a survey beforehand of the university's most popular films
- Theme the entire evening – food, décor etc.
- Theme the talk's message to the film's central desire – if the evening has a nice atmosphere you can speak for 25-30 minutes

**7pm:** Advertised start of the evening; we welcomed people into the foyer with a drinks reception.

**7.20pm:** We welcomed people into the main room and served the starter.

**7.35pm:** Starter plates were collected. I was then introduced; we showed the film trailer or a clip, and set people a couple of questions to discuss around tables as they ate their main course. (The idea here was to get people talking and start arousing thoughts and questions that I'd touch during the main talk).

**7.40pm:** Main course was served.

**8.15pm:** Main course plates were collected. I then gave my message, using more clips. At the end of the message, students were encouraged to text their thoughts, comments or questions.

**8.40pm:** Dessert was served.

**8.55pm:** I responded to the different texts we had received, and offered a prayer. Students were encouraged to stay around and ask further questions over hot drinks, and to take books. Students could also indicate interest for a follow-up course by texting in.

**9.00pm:** Formal close of the evening. In practice, many stayed around afterwards.