

Hairspray: To Sit Still Would Be A Sin

Purpose

Using a clip from the movie “Hairspray” this session asks participants to look at times in their lives when it’s a sin to remain quiet in the face of conflict or injustice. Like the heroes in the movie, the participants will be challenged to do what they can in their families, parishes, and communities to stand up and make a difference. This session is appropriate for middle school and high school youth. Groups of any size, depending on materials available, may participate.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m. Welcome and Introductions

7:05 p.m. Opening Prayer

7:15 p.m. Injustice All Around

7:50 p.m. Righting a Wrong

8:25 p.m. Closing Prayer

8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session (15 minutes)

Play the end of the movie. Start the clip at Chapter 18, 1:35:00 into the movie. Let the scene play until the end of the movie (1:46:00).

In real life, how do you think people reacted when someone “pulled” an African American into the “white” world, like Link did to Little Inez?

Does this “pulling” still happen? How do people react?

Materials Needed

- Movie, “Hairspray” (New Line Home Video, rated PG, 2007)
- Television or projector and VCR or DVD player

Note to Leader: Your audio visual set up needs to be adequate for everyone to be able to hear/see the movie clips.

- **Handout 1, Injustice All Around**, one for each participant
- **Handout 2, Time to Stand Up**, one for each participant
- **Handout 3, Catholic Social Teaching and Me**, one for each participant
- Pens or pencils, one for each participant
- Post it notes or small slips of paper
- Newsprint and markers if you want to write down the shared answers
- A Bible

Prepare in Advance

1. Review the entire session plan and gather necessary supplies. Watch the entire movie before using this session so that you are familiar with the story line.

2. Set up tables for refreshments (if you are serving any) and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and nametags. *(Skip the nametags if participants know each other and you know them. However, if they wear nametags, you wear one, too.)* **Hospitality is important:** As the facilitator, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

3. Set up your meeting space so that everyone can enjoy the movie clip. Cue the videotape or DVD to the appropriate starting point.

4. Consider providing simple refreshments during “Injustice All Around” while participants are watching the movie clip.
5. Invite a participant to read Matthew 7:1-8 for the opening prayer.
6. If possible, have a small group facilitator (youth or adult) available for every four or five participants.

Session Outline

Welcome (5 minutes)

Greet the participants and provide a simple explanation of the session. If necessary, ask the participants to introduce themselves to each other.

Note to Leader: If there are several new faces in the crowd, ask everyone to meet someone they don’t know and then introduce each other to the larger group.

Prayer (10 minutes)

Gather and Listen

Invite the participants to spend a few moments in silence. Play soft music (instrumental) in the background. When appropriate, have the reader proclaim Matthew 7:1-8.

Reflect

Invite the participants to share their answers to these questions.

Can you name a person or group of people in your life who are judged unfairly by others?

Has anyone ever misjudged you? How?

Listen

Invite the same participant to read Matthew 7:1-8 again. Then invite the group to reflect quietly on these questions:

What are the “splinters” in our own eyes that keep us from seeing clearly?

Can you think of a time in history—or in the present day—when we “give what is holy to dogs or throw (our) pearls before swine”? (One example might be the use of some foods for bio-fuels while some are starving in the world.)

Can you think of a time in history—or in the present day—when the world sat still while injustices continued?

Go Forth

Ask participants to share their intentions (simply ask, “*For what shall we pray?*”) and then allow participants to share their petitions aloud.

After a short period of reflective silence, conclude that prayer by praying the “Our Father” together.

Injustice All Around (35 minutes)

Note to Leader: This movie, *Hairspray*, is a remake of the 1988 John Waters’ film of the same name. Set in 1962, the movie follows the dreams of one teenage girl who wants to dance on television. The original movie boasted the tagline “Baltimore, 1962. The heyday of hair-dos and hair-don’ts,

Heartthrobs and hefty girls, hot dates and hip talkers, beatniks and hair hoppers, and one magical potion that keeps it all together.” In the meantime, the story’s main character teaches the city – and the viewers – a thing or two about integration, which was not permitted in many places in 1962. While the movie exaggerates its generalizations or over-stereotypes everything from hairdos to race relations, it still proves to be a film worth watching if only for those particular scenes.

A rarity for these sessions, there is only one clip used. It requires you, the leader, to set the scene carefully (which can be accomplished by watching the entire movie before leading the session). The scene used is the march scene, after Tracy begins dancing on the “Corny Collins Show” and realizes the African Americans she has befriended in detention are not permitted on the show, save for one day a month (termed “Negro Day”). Tracy knows in her heart that the injustice needs to be fought, but does not quite know how. The turning point for her comes when she puts her own dreams on the line and joins the march. Pay close attention to the conversation between Tracy and Motormouth Maybelle as well as the words to the song Maybelle sings.

To extend the session, show the participants how it all comes together in the end by watching the last ten minutes of the movie.

Step 1: (15 minutes) Note to Leader: This first activity will help expand on the conversation started during the prayer.

Distribute **Handout 1, Injustice All Around**, and a pen to each participant. Ask them to take five minutes to work on the handout. Create small groups of four or five participants, and invite them to share their answers for each question. If possible, have a small group facilitator (youth or adult) in each group to help the group share their answers and ask questions that will help the group members share more about their observations of injustice.

Step 2: (10 minutes) Set up the clip in the movie by explaining what has come before the clip in the movie. Be sure to include Tracy’s great desire to be on the TV show, her experience with the African American dancers in detention, and how she has come to a point of recognizing the injustice of discrimination. Show participants the clip from *Hairspray*. Begin as Tracy’s mother comes into the room telling her everything is good again. End as the crowd approaches the line of policemen. The scene is Chapter 14, “I Know Where I’ve Been” 1:13:25; end at 1:18:27, just after Tracy’s mother joins the march.

Step 3: (10 minutes) Use some or all of the following reflection questions to unpack the scene:

Do you think Tracy realized what she would have to give up if she joined the march?

Do you think you would have done the same thing?

Why do you think Maybelle was surprised to see Tracy?

Though it’s a bit of an exaggeration, Tracy’s mother is more concerned with her appearance. After joining the march and trying to convince Tracy to come home, she becomes concerned that there are television cameras and doesn’t want to be seen on television “at this present weight.” Do you know people who really act like this?

Why do you think it took so long for our country—and some cities—to recognize the rights of African Americans?

Maybelle sings about knowing where she’s been? What do you think she is talking about? Speaking historically, where has the world been?

What do you know about race relations in the 1960s? What experiences have your parents or grandparents shared with you?

Righting a Wrong (35 minutes)

Step 4: (15 minutes) This activity challenges young people to think creatively about ways they can combat the injustices they listed on **Handout 1**. Distribute **Handout 2, Time to Stand Up**, and a pen. Ask participants to spend five minutes completing the handout. Invite the participants to return to their small groups and share their answers and to also come up with additional creative responses to the injustices that were highlighted. If desired, ask each group to share one idea that they are excited about with the entire group.

Note to Leader: Don't let the participants off too easily. When starvation in Africa or genocide in Darfur is listed as an injustice, the young people might be hard pressed to come up with a way they can stand up to that. One answer might be simply to pray. Another answer might be to host a movie night where other young people can learn about the realities faced by those who are treated unjustly. The point of the exercise is to have a conversation about the sinfulness of sitting still and doing nothing.

Step 5: (20 minutes) Gather the group in a way that they can have a good large group discussion. Distribute **Handout 3, Catholic Social Teaching and Me**, to each participant. Using this handout, review each of the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching with them. Ask them to name how the theme is related or connected to something they saw in the clip from the movie. Also invite the participants to make connections to something they talked about in their small group

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Conclude the session by asking participants to name some of the people for whom they would like to pray, based on the conversations that were shared during the session. Say a simple, spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving for these gifts and asking that God continue to give us the power to move... not to sit still.

This session was written by Patrick J. Donovan, Director of Youth Ministry, Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware.

Handout 1

Injustice All Around

For each location... think of a person or group of people that first comes to mind when you think of those who are treated unfairly or those who are persecuted simply because of who they are. Be ready to discuss your answers with the larger group.

All Around Injustice

At school...

In my neighborhood...

In my parish...

In my community...

In my country...
In a place I've never visited...

Handout 2

Time to Stand Up

For each injustice that you listed on Handout 1... think of a way you (alone or with a group of friends) could work to make a difference in that injustice. Be creative in coming up with your ideas. Be ready to discuss your answers with the larger group.

The Injustice I Listed... Standing Up...

At school...

In my neighborhood...

In my parish...

In my community...

In my country...

In a place I've never visited...

Resource 1

Catholic Social Teaching and Me Seven Principles

The Life and Dignity of the Human Person

We believe that we all are created in the image and likeness of God. Because of this fact, every single human life is sacred. There is nothing that anyone can do to take this dignity away. All of our Catholic social teaching flows from this principle. People are more important than things. All institutions are judged by how they protect or how they violate the dignity of the human person.

The Call to Family, Community, and Participation

Our God is a Trinity, three persons, one God. These three persons are in constant relationship with each other. Being created in the image of God, we too need to be in relationships. Human beings are

social. This principle reminds us that when we create social structures we must always do so in a way that protects human dignity. Family is at the center of all community, and we need to strengthen family. Our faith calls us to community in an active way. We have a responsibility to live our values in our social world. We need to stand up for the dignity of all people, especially the poor and the oppressed. When we participate in society, we must always make decisions for the common good of society.

Rights and Responsibilities

Human beings, because of our dignity, have basic human rights. These rights include access to food, affordable housing, decent healthcare, education, and a whole variety of things to ensure that we can live a full human life. These rights help us to protect our dignity in concrete ways. But these are not just our rights alone. They are the rights of every human being. Therefore, we have the responsibility to help maintain and protect these rights, not just for ourselves, but for everyone.

Preferential Option (Commitment) for the Poor and Vulnerable

We believe that God loves everyone in such a way that even our most powerful experience of love is just a taste of how much God loves us. God loves each of us equally, but Scripture reminds us that some people's needs are so urgent and so great that their needs come first. Therefore, while everyone is important, those who have no voice in our society, those whose human rights are violated, those whose dignity is not recognized, must take our first priority as Catholic Christians. Jesus' story of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) teaches us that when we enter into the lives and the struggles of the poor and vulnerable, we will experience Jesus' presence in a real and powerful way.

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

We believe that work is not just a way to make a living. Work is one of the ways that we participate in the ongoing creation of the world. That means those who are responsible for the employment of people have a special responsibility to make decisions that uphold the dignity of workers and their rights. Those rights include being able to earn fair wages, to have productive work, and to have a say in decisions that affect them.

Solidarity

We believe that every human person was created by the same God. Ultimately, we are all brothers and sisters, we are all connected. Solidarity reminds us of this connection that we have to our whole human family. This connection is greater than anything that divides us, including race, religion, and even geography.

We practice solidarity when it matters to us that people die of preventable diseases because they were born in Africa, not the United States. We practice solidarity when we drink coffee that is fair trade or buy clothing not made in a sweatshop and when we live a little more simply and waste less of Earth's resources.

Care for God's Creation

Stewards do not own; rather, they are charged with taking care of something that is not theirs. Earth belongs to God, and we are the stewards of it. When we do things that protect the Earth and care for it, we acknowledge that the Earth is not ours to do with as we please, but we also show reverence to God, the creator of all. It is very Catholic to be an environmentalist!