

Session 7

Love Changes Everything!

The objectives of this session are:

- to examine and explore the healing power of love
- to consider how the effects of a person's upbringing can influence their choices in life
- to examine the idea of rebirth or re-creation as it applies to every person
- to consider the idea of transformative love and how it can bring about wholeness, healing and salvation
- to explore the link between praise and encouragement and positive self-image
- to explore the concept that when you give to others, what you receive in return is absolutely incredible.

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD of the movie, *Despicable Me*
- DVD player (or VCR) and TV monitor
- a chalice and matches or lighter
- pencils or pens
- writing paper
- One copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole movie, before class starts, use the DVD disc menu to cue up the opening scene of the selection (Scene 12)
- Watch the movie in its entirety prior to the session (even if you have seen it before), paying particular attention to scenes 12 through 19 (the end of the movie). Watch for the scenes that portray the healing power of love, redemption, trust and the transforming power love that leads to healing, wholeness and salvation - not just for Gru but for his mother and the girls, especially Margo.

Session Outline

Opening Activity: Chalice lighting, reading, and check-in (10 min)

Premiere: Introduction and watching an excerpt of the movie *Despicable Me* (46 min)

Reflection: "The Heart of the Matter"

Discussion and reflection questions (10 min)

Processing: "Light Bulb!" – Wrap up (5 min)

Closing: Closing reading (2 min)

Opening Activity (10 min.)

Ask for a volunteer to light the chalice and share with the group (or ask for a volunteer to read) the opening words by Samuel A. Trumbore:

"Teach my heart healing words.
Sow me the words that help rather than harm.
Instruct me in the verbs that bring energy,
the nouns pointing to the real, the
adjectives that describe your subtleties.
Reveal to me how words can be offered in
a way that connects rather than separates,
that develops trust and eschews suspicion,
that opens the heart and relaxes the mind.
Amen."

Begin the session with a brief check-in: ask participants to check-in with their names what they think is the best thing about their family.

Premiere

Watching Despicable Me (46 min.)

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie, *Despicable Me*. Ask if anyone has ever seen the movie. If anyone has, ask them if they would

be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something along these lines:

The film begins with the news revealing that an Egyptian pyramid was stolen. When supervillain Gru hears of this, his pride is wounded and he plans to pull the biggest heist of the century by stealing the Moon.

Gru tries to get a loan from the Bank of Evil and meets a young super-villain, Vector who greatly annoys him. The bank president refuses to grant Gru the loan until he obtains the shrink ray necessary for his plan.

Gru and his minions steal the shrink ray from a remote facility somewhere in Asia, but Vector steals it from him and shrinks his ship. Gru attempts to get the shrink ray back from Vector's lair, but all his attempts to enter the lair prove futile. After seeing three orphaned girls, Margo, Edith and Agnes enter the lair to sell cookies to Vector, Gru decides to adopt the girls and use them to steal back the shrink ray. Gru has his assistant Dr. Nefario build robots disguised as cookies. He puts the "cookiebots" into the boxes that the girls sold to Vector, and the robots help Gru get back the shrink ray. On the way home the girls ask to go to an amusement park. Gru agrees, intending to leave the girls there but ends up having fun and bonding with the girls. When they get back home, Gru contacts the bank president again. Mr. Perkins again refuses to give him the loan, claiming that although he doesn't have a problem with the plan, he just wants a younger villain to do it instead. Gru has a flashback of his childhood; whenever he tried to impress his mother, she just ignored him. However, even without the bank loan, everyone pitches in and Gru builds his rocket.

Gru has to make a choice, because the moon will be in the optimal position for the heist on the same day as the girls' ballet recital. Dr. Nefario, seeing the girls as a distraction, contacts Miss Hattie, who arrives to take the girls back. Gru, the Minions, and the girls are heartbroken. Gru goes on with his plan and flies to the moon.

Gru successfully shrinks and pockets the Moon. Gru remembers the ballet recital and rushes to it. However, it has ended by the time he arrived. There, he finds a ransom note from Vector demanding the moon in exchange for the girls. After Gru hands over the moon, Vector reneges on the deal, keeping the girls and the moon. This enrages Gru, who storms Vector's lair, this time successfully breaching the defenses. Vector flies off in an escape pod with the girls with Gru holding on to the exterior of the ship. He nearly falls to his death, but is rescued by Dr. Nefario piloting the same ship that Vector shrunk before. Nefario reveals that the bigger the object, the quicker the effects of the shrink ray wear off. Very soon, the moon begins to grow and roll around inside Vector's ship, hurting him and freeing the girls. The girls see Gru outside of the ship, and Gru tells them to jump over to him. Edith and Agnes successfully make it onto the ship, but before Margo can jump, Vector grabs her. The moon rolls again and knocks Vector over, and Margo grabs onto Gru's grappling hook. Gru rescues her with the help of his minions, while the rapidly-expanding Moon wrecks Vector's controls, causing his ship to carry it back into orbit.

Gru and the girls settle down to live a happy life as a family and Vector is stranded on the Moon. The girls give a special ballet recital for Gru, his minions, and his mother, who finally tells him she is proud of him and acknowledges him to be the better parent. The music changes from Swan Lake to You Should Be Dancing, and everyone rushes on stage to dance as the film ends.

Start the DVD at scene 12 (Cookiebots) and watch scenes 12 through 19. Stop the DVD just as the credits begin to roll.

Reflection (10 min.)

The Heart of the Matter

Begin the discussion by asking for general impressions, and thoughts which occurred to the group as they were watching the video.

Then, if no one brings it up, ask the group to consider:

Gru was only interested in adopting the girls to help him steal back the shrink ray from Vector. How does Gru's attitude toward the girls change over the course of the film. What scene in the film do you think was the turning point in the relationship between Gru and the girls? At the amusement park, Gru steps in to win the unicorn that Agnes wants, after he sees that the game is dishonest. What effect does this action have on his relationship with the girls – especially on Margo? What is Dr. Nefario's attitude toward the girls? Gru was motivated to build the rocket to the moon because his mother never supported his inventions as a child. How would you describe Gru's relationship with his mother? How do we see the human side of Gru in the scenes when he flashes back to his childhood memories? How does understanding his background allow you to have more sympathy for him? Do you think that his relationship with mother had any effect on his adult life and his career choice? Do you think that Miss Hattie really cares for the girls? Even though Dr. Nefario calls Miss Hattie to come and take the girls back, he still helps Gru rescue them from Vector. Why? What might have happened if Gru stood up to Dr. Nefario and refused to send the girls back to Miss Hattie's? What is Gru's reaction when he reads the bedtime story, "Three Sleepy Kittens" to the girls? (He realizes that he is starting to really care about the girls.)

Processing (5 min.)

Light Bulb!

This movie illustrates the transformative power of love. Is Gru the only person changed by love? What about the girls? The minions? Gru's mother? (Gru's mother is much more loving and compassionate as a grandmother than she was as a mother!)

A lot of stories and especially fables end with a short statement called a moral which sums up

the meaning of the story. (For example, in the fable of the tortoise and the hare, the moral is "Slow and steady wins the race.") What would you write for the moral of *Despicable Me*?

Give the group a brief time to ponder this and ask if anyone wants to share their moral with the group.

Closing (2 min.)

To close, ask everyone to rise and form a circle around the chalice. Read (or ask for a volunteer to read) the Closing thought by Frederick E. Gillis:

"May the love that overcomes all differences,
that heals all wounds,
that puts to flight all fears,
that reconciles all who are separated,
be in us and among us now and always."

After a moment of reflection, extinguish the chalice (or have someone else do so), and excuse the youth.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience and have some fun as a group:

More Discussion:

The beginning of the film introduces us to Gru with examples of his selfishness and cruelty. Provide two examples from the film and discuss your reaction to his behavior. What were his motives for acting in such a manner? How did you feel watching others "get hurt"? Why did Gru feel such a strong desire to out-do the villain who stole the pyramid?

Are there times that we are passionate about something for the wrong reasons? Provide an example from the movie and in real life.

More Activities:

Create a front page of a newspaper chronicling the villainous schemes of the two competing super-villains, Vector and Gru. Include text and graphics.

At the end of the movie, Gru reads the girls a bedtime book that he created which is really about him and the girls. Create a short bedtime book that Margo, Edith, and Agnes make for Gru about their relationship with their new father.

Write a final scene to the movie. What happens with Gru and the girls? Do his parenting techniques improve at all, or does he still serve them lollipops for dinner? How does Gru feel

about giving up his title as super-villain? What are his feats as a newly-minted super-hero? Explore the question of how a person can make the choice to change. Conduct an interview with a person who has made a life-altering change. How did they have the courage to do this? What was their motivation? How do they feel about their life now?