

chris
evans

mckenna
grace

lindsay
duncan

jenny
slate

+ octavia
spencer

gifted

from the director of
'(500) Days of Summer'

Discussion Guide

Frank Adler (Chris Evans) is a single man raising a child prodigy—his spirited young niece Mary (Mckenna Grace)—in a coastal town in Florida, with the help of his friend and neighbor, Roberta (Octavia Spencer). Frank's plans for a normal school life for Mary are foiled when the 7-year-old's mathematical abilities come to the attention of Frank's formidable mother, Evelyn (Lindsay Duncan), whose plans for her granddaughter threaten to separate Frank and Mary. Gifted is a funny and thoughtful film for the entire family. Below are a series of conversation starters for discussions around the film.





Sharing Our Gifts

There are many avenues into a discussion of a film like *Gifted*, but perhaps the best place to start is with its title. Gifted refers to Mary, who is a mathematical prodigy. She is bored by school because it isn't challenging enough for her. She has the potential to follow in her brilliant mother's footsteps to become a mathematician that could change the entire field of study. Of course, her uncle Frank and grandmother Evelyn have different ideas about how she should develop and use her gifts.

Most of us are not intellectual prodigies like Mary. We won't solve unsolvable equations or alter a course of study in our lifetimes. However, we all—every single one of us—possess a collection of gifts and talents that make us unique. We might be athletic, artistic, musical, or even intellectual. Or we might be extremely compassionate, empathetic, or self-sacrificial. Whatever the case may be, we have countless opportunities to put these gifts and talents to use to serve our communities both near and far. Or, to put it in the words of Aristotle, "Where your talents and the needs of the world cross; there lies your vocation."

Questions for Consideration

1. Have you found your gift(s)? If so, how are you putting it to use to serve those around you?
2. Where do you see people using their gifts to benefit others? How do they inspire you?



Girl Power

We live in a divided and stratified world. One of the main points of division is around gender. Women and girls are often at a competitive disadvantage: from an early age, they aren't automatically encouraged to pursue every course of study or vocation, and, once they choose a profession, they are often paid less than their male counterparts. Thankfully, there are women (and men), as individuals and organizations, who are speaking up and fighting for change to address this injustice.

Gifted is an important film because it celebrates the contributions that women and girls have made in all walks of life. Mary (like her mother) has the potential to break barriers and make paths for other girls to follow. Like all good films about unique individuals, *Gifted* should inspire us to seek out stories of other women that have changed the world and to share and celebrate them in the process.

Questions for Consideration

1. Where do you see young women contributing to the life of your community?
2. Who are the women pioneers that inspire you?





Priceless Teachers

Another strength of *Gifted* is its portrayal of teachers. It reminds us of how important and valuable (virtually priceless) great teachers are. In the film, Mary's teacher Bonnie sees beyond her frustrations and lack of focus in the classroom. She doesn't see an unruly, disruptive child, but rather a student with unlimited potential that needs guidance and opportunities to grow.

We entrust our children, for a great portion of their lives, to teachers. They have an immeasurable impact on their lives. No matter how old you are or how long you've been out of school, you likely remember a favorite elementary school teacher. Perhaps this was someone who sparked an interest in a particular subject that set you on your career path. Or maybe it was someone who was simply kind and compassionate at a difficult point in your life. We should honor and thank those teachers, who saw us for who we could be. More importantly, we should be those teachers for younger generations, both inside and outside the classroom.

Questions for Consideration

1. Who were the influential teachers in your life? What lasting impression did they leave on you?
2. In your own ways, how do you teach younger generations? Or are there ways you can interact with them if you don't?



It Takes a Village

There's a little bit of ancient wisdom in *Gifted*. It reminds us of that old saying, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Families come in all shapes and sizes, but one thing is true, parents (whether single or partnered) can't do it alone. They need help from grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, teachers, neighbors, and the list goes on and on.

In *Gifted*, Roberta sees a need and steps in to address it. She knows that Frank is an overwhelmed single parent. She sees the potential in Mary. But as Frank and Evelyn begin to fight over Mary's future, she also knows that what Mary really needs is a friend, someone with whom she can dance and sing and just be silly. Her care for Mary reminds us that family (whether we are explicitly related to them or not) are those people that have our best interests at heart and who challenge us to be the best version of ourselves that we can be.

Questions for Consideration

1. Who were the "villagers" that helped care for you as a child?
2. In what ways have you helped raised children that aren't your own?



Family Cycles

Gifted is an uplifting film for the entire family, but it isn't all joy all the time. It embodies a difficult reality that many of us know all too well. Our relationships—and especially those within our family units—are always affected by forces beyond our control. Often, these forces are cyclical in nature. The same issues and disagreements and problems pop up time and time again to frustrate us.

In the film, Frank is plagued by the relationship between his sister and their mother, interactions that had little, if anything, to do with him in the first place. His sister's decision to leave Mary in his care sets off a chain of events that threatens to break them apart. It's a decision that both he and Mary had no part in making, yet they are left to deal with the consequences.

While our struggles might not be so dramatic, we know family tension. We know when parents have conflicting opinions of what's best for us. We know what it feels like to fight with our parents and siblings over the smallest of issues. Of course, in many cases, the real issues often run deeper. Do we have the wisdom to see below the surface and to be better for one another, breaking those cycles that haunt us?

Questions for Consideration

1. How have family cycles—or tensions within them—shaped your life?
2. Where have you seen broken families healed? What was a defining factor in bringing about this change?



Is There Something More?

There's a beautiful moment in *Gifted* in which Frank and Mary play on the beach. Their conversation turns serious when Mary asks Frank if he believes in God. It's one of the more honest and realistic portrayals of a conversation like this that we've seen in a film in quite some time. Most importantly, Frank's response reflects a humility that we need so much in the world right now.

But this brief conversation also reflects a deeper truth about what it is to be human: our longing to know if there's more to or beyond this world. This is a universal question, and individuals respond to it differently, pursuing knowledge and meaning through science, mathematics, literature, art, and religion...and often a mixture of all of these. No matter what path we take, we should all follow in Frank's footsteps and hold our beliefs with open hands and hearts rather than a clenched fist.

Questions for Consideration

1. What are the big questions that motivate and challenge you? How do you pursue answers to them?
2. Who inspires you to search for more?