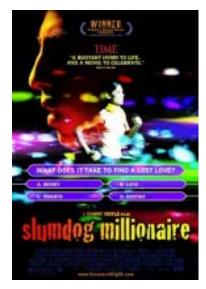
# Slumdog Millionaire

Film length: 120 min Film rating: **R** for some violence, disturbing images and language Director: Danny Boyle Genre: Drama, Romance, Crime

### Synopsis & Central Plot:

Slumdog Millionaire is a gripping and fast-paced story centered on 18-year old Jamal who was born and raised in the slums of Mumbai. As the film opens, Jamal is being tortured in a Mumbai police station when he is suspected of cheating on the gameshow, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?." His crime: knowing too much. The plot unfolds in the present day with the game show questions providing the links to the story that unfolds from his past.



This movie is one of contrasts and extremes, as the title suggests. Jamal's life was difficult from the start and becomes more so when he and his brother are orphaned at a very young age. Together they have to fend for themselves and make choices that will shape their destinies. Jamal's tragic youth and subsequent suffering are his lifeline - they provide the answers to the questions in his quest.

The film is an overwhelming sensory experience which weaves into a seamless whole poverty and wealth, despair and hope, greed and generosity, blindness and vision. It is part crime movie, part dramatic cliff-hanger, part romance. Put them all together and it is one engrossing, gritty, passionate, uplifting exuberant film that catches your attention from the opening scenes and does not let go.

### Main Themes to Engage through the Film:

- The resiliency of the human spirit in the midst of grinding poverty and the dignity of the human person
- Trust and betrayal; corruption and integrity
- The power of truth to set one free
- Moral decision making and the choices that define one's life and reveal one's core values
- Urbanization, slums, development and dislocation of the poor; Globalization and its unequal effects
- Family bonds of loyalty and duty
- The affective, moral and spiritual consequences of poverty
- The role of a caste system as a form of social and economic control
- The misuse of power by those in authority
- The role of media on Indian culture and meaningless competition in a world with harsh inequalities
- Social, political and economic exclusion and isolation due to poverty
- Hope and destiny; the unparalleled power of love





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## **Catholic Social Teaching Themes and Ethical Connections:**

ne of the most challenging and potentially dangerous realities about this film is its ability to entertain even through the lens of absolute poverty and destitution. It's pace and energy can easily distract one long enough to forget to ask critical questions about the gritty and dehumanizing realities used as a backdrop to entertain in the film. Several of these dynamics need closer examination and analysis:

- The prevalence of greed and corruption depicted in several different ways including the power leveraged by organized crime syndicates in Mumbai.
- The growing trend of urbanization and the rising population of slums worldwide
- The trafficking of young girls and the exploitation of children by adults. The vulnerability of orphans who are preyed upon in countless ways.
- The misuse of power as seen in the torture scene and recurring police brutality with little or no regard for human dignity or rights.
- The prevalent but unexamined nature and consequence of religious violence.
- The role and globalization of media which serves to deform human desires and promote empty aspirations.
- The ethics of a caste system

Use the film to break open discussions about the ethics behind these real-world realities and you have a powerful tool. Miss the opportunity, and count yourself among those box office casualties whose profits will only

"...Fighting poverty requires attentive consideration of the complex phenomenon of globalization. This is important from a methodological standpoint, because it suggests drawing upon the fruits of economic and sociological research into the many different aspects of poverty. Yet the reference to globalization should also alert us to the spiritual and moral implications of the question, urging us, in our dealings with the poor, to set out from the clear recognition that we all share in a single divine plan: we are called to form one family in which all – individuals, peoples and nations – model their behavior according to the principles of fraternity and responsibility."

> -Pope Benedict XVI World Day of Peace Message, 2009, #2.

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continue to manipulate and exploit in the name of entertainment. The themes of Catholic social teaching that can be explored through this film include human dignity, solidarity, the option for the poor, globalization and economic justice, and the common good.

#### Suggestion:

Use the content and themes of this film to engage and reflect on Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 World Day of Peace Message.

- Go to http://www.vatican.va/holy father/benedict xvi/messages/peace/index en.htm to download the document.
- Read this message dealing with global poverty and highlight places where the film needs to be in dialogue with the Pope's statement.
- <u>Two examples:</u>
  - 1). In Pope Benedict's World Day of Peace Message, he talks about two effects evident in wealthy society. "On the one hand, I have in mind what is known as "moral underdevelopment"[2], and on the other hand the negative consequences of "superdevelopment"[3]. Where do you see this evident in the film?
  - 2). "Every form of externally imposed poverty has at its root a lack of respect for the transcendent dignity of the human person."(#2) How is this lack of respect respect evident in the film? What are some of the root causes of this lack of respect?

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

- What does the title mean? How does the title and the contrasts within it provide symbolic summary of the film?
- Early in the film we see the young Jamal dive into a latrine pit to steal a glimpse at a visiting movie star. How does his single-mindedness to see this movie star reveal his determination? What other examples do you see in the film of his determination?
- In the film, the theme of destiny is a central theme. What does it mean that all Jamal desires is just out of his reach? (The prized autograph, Latika, his brother, the answers, etc.)
- Compare and contrast three pivotal choices or decisions made by Jamal and Salim. How do their choices affect their respective paths in life or "destinies"?



- Is ethical decision making possible when one must make choices based on survival? Do seemingly "bad" choices make a person bad?
- What do you think the film is saying about the globalization of culture through media? We see the game show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" adapted in the Indian culture. Is this a sign of progress? Why or why not? What is this film staying about the effect of money on culture?
- In one exchange of dialogue in the film during the interrogation of Jamal, the police inspectors discuss the impossibility of what Jamal knows.
  Police Inspector: Doctors... Lawyers... never get past 60 thousand rupees. He's on 6 million. [pause]
  Police Inspector: What can our slumdog possibly know?
  Jamal Malik: [quietly] The answers.

Discuss the irony in the film that Jamal "knows too much" and is suspected of cheating. Discuss the irony that in the end, his poverty may make him rich. What point is the film making? What is real wealth?

- The game show format brings into to focus the culture of meaningless competition. What does the spectacle of the game say about what people value today? What values does the media promote? Are they humanizing values?
- Greed, corruption and the misuse of power are highlighted in the film through a variety of characters. How are those who have money and power glamorized in this film? What happens to the victims?
- In one pivotal scene, the show's host tells Jamal his own story about coming from the slums. He then gives Jamal the wrong answer written on the mirror in the rest room. Why did he give Jamal the wrong answer? What did Jamal do?
- Describe how loss, chance, luck, suffering, and street smarts are also characters behind the scenes. The film explores gain and loss side by side. Triumphs are tempered with loss. Where do you see this evident?
- The chaos and the constant noise and motion of Mumbai at the center of the film, (supported by a fabulous soundtrack) are contrasted with a deeper silent seeking. Describe what each of the main characters is seeking.
- In the final scene, we see Salim and the choice he makes filling the bathtub with money, etc. Why does he make this choice?
- This film weaves together nightmare and impossible dream. What do you take away as the most important message or impression from the film?



### The Real Slum Behind the Movie



#### Facts about Mumbai:

The city Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay) is one of the largest cities in India. The lure of jobs in the city is a huge pull on those living in rural areas. Migration into the city of Mumbai continues to grow at exponential rates each year. As a result, there has been a disproportionate rise of slums and overcrowing in the city.

- Mumbai holds the dubious record of being the slum capital of the world. Source: UN-HABITAT
- The population of Mumbai is approximately 12 million people.
- In Mumbai, almost 60% of the total population live in slums. - Source: UN Habitat
- The some of the scenes in the movie were filmed in Dharavi, the largest slum in Mumbai.-source: Director's interview
- In Mumbai, the rich own 90% of the land, while the poor are overcrowded in the remaining 10%. Source: Planet of Slums by Mike Davis

## Cities with the Largest Slums in the World:

- 1. Mumbai India
- 2. Mexico City Mexico
- 3. Dhaka Bangladesh
- 4. Lagos Nigeria
- 5. Cairo Egypt
- 6. Karachi Pakistan
- 7. Kinshasa Congo
- 8. Sao Paulo Brazil
- 9. Shanghi China
- 10. Delhi India

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Source: UN-HABITAT figures
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The gap between rich and poor has become more marked, even in the most economically developed nations. This is a problem which the conscience of humanity cannot ignore, since the conditions in which a great number of people are living are an insult to their innate dignity and as a result are a threat to the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community"

-Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1993

### **Education for Justice Resources:**

Habitat and Urbanization: Harmonious Cities http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/3435

#### Backgrounder: Human Dignity:

http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/500

Millennium Development Goals: http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/1120

Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Update http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/3477

#### Other Links:

National Geographic - Dharavi: Mumbai's shadow city Interactive

http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/05/ dharavi-mumbai-slum/dharavi-video-interactive

