READY TO USE MOVIE

# West Side Story (12A)

Watch the whole film together or concentrate on the clip from 01:20:21 to 01:26:37.

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## Synopsis

Manhattan, Upper West Side, 1957. Against the backdrop of the decaying tenements in the San Juan Hill neighbourhood and the constant threat of the wrecking ball, two warring gangs – tough Riff’s Jets and swaggering Bernardo’s Puerto Rican Sharks – fight for supremacy. Now, with a once-and-for-all, winner-takes-all rumble on the cards, an unexpected whirlwind romance at the high-school dance between former Jet brawler Tony and Bernardo’s delicate little sister María sets the stage for an all-out turf war. But what’s a gang without its territory? Above all, when the future is uncertain, what’s hope without love?

*West Side Story*, directed by the legendary Stephen Spielberg, is an excellent remake of the classic musical. With a cast of up-and-coming Hollywood stars, it is an impressive homage to the original while making a timeless story feel relevant and important as ever.

## The movie

This session is aimed at a group aged 12-plus, with that in mind, chat through the following questions to help settle them into the discussion format:

* What do they know of the 1950s and America (and in particular New York) in the context in which *West Side Story* is set?
* Knowing that *West Side Story* is based on *Romeo and Juliet*, what do they think the plot of the film will be?
* Do they know any biblical teaching on equality and acceptance of other races?

The clip for this session takes place in the middle of the film. After meeting and almost instantly falling head over heels in love with one another, Tony and Maria have discussed how they could possibly make their romance work when their families are at war with one another. Tony reveals to Maria that he has spent time in prison for his role in a gang fight that left another person hospitalised. Tony confides his shame for his past and his desire to change for the better. They make their way down into a chapel where they confess their love through reciting wedding vows to one another. Before departing, Tony promises to defuse any potential fight between the rival gangs.

* After hearing what Tony did in his past, does he deserve a second chance?
* Tony and Maria go through a mock wedding service during this scene. Why do you think they recite wedding vows to each other?
* “Make of our lives one life” is sung during the scene. What problems would Tony and Maria face if they were to choose to be together?
* Are Tony and Maria being naive to think that they could live together forever?

## The Bible

*West Side Story* is a timeless story that challenges us to consider themes such as racism, love, loyalty, family and heritage. For this session we are looking at the parable of the good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. Read it together as a group and chat through the following questions:

* What is the answer that Jesus gives to the man’s question: “Who is my neighbour?”?
* Why do you think that Jesus picks a priest to be the first to walk on by and not help?
* Do you think that this is the most important parable that Jesus tells his followers? (Depending on your group, you may wish to have some other examples ready.)
* How could we “go and do likewise” in our community?

*West Side Story* is available to stream on Disney+.

**TOM WADE**

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