

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Annie

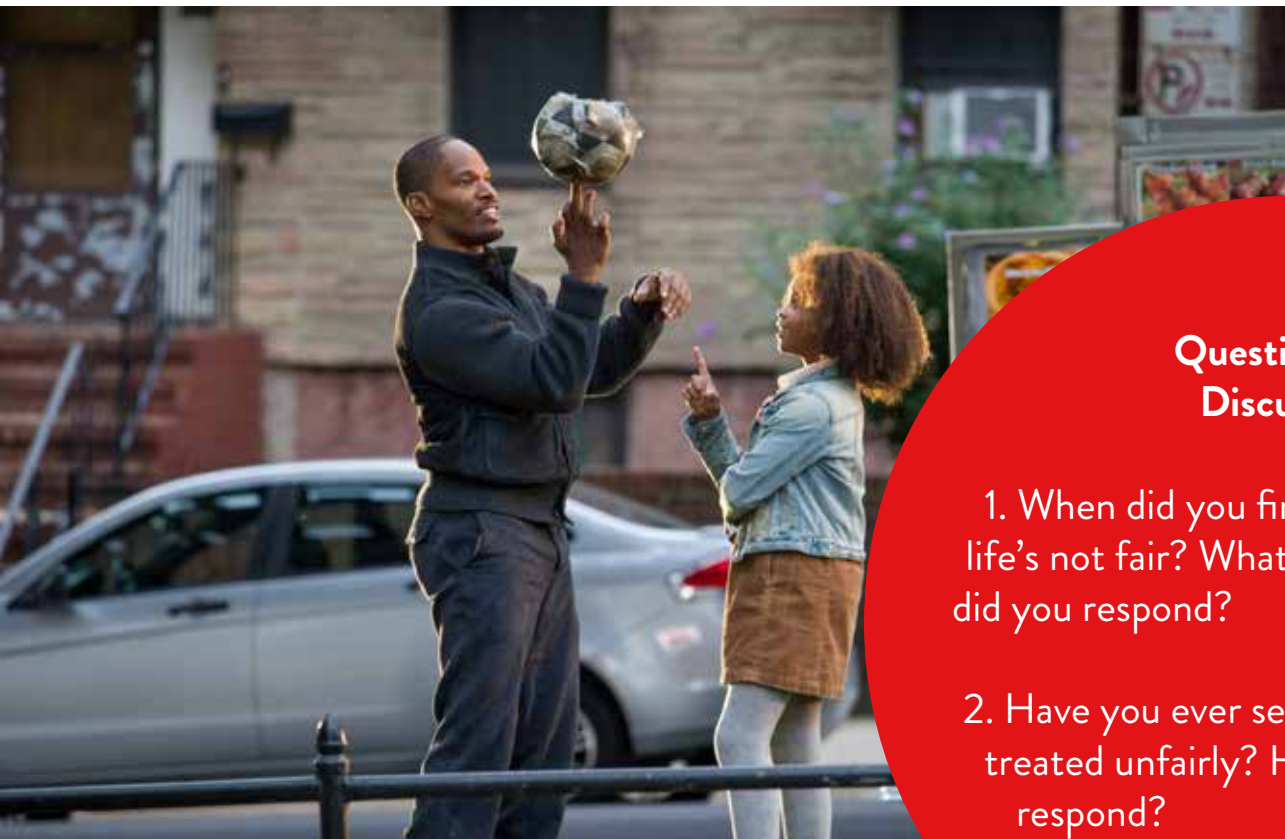


It's a Hard-Knock Life...Or Life's Not Fair

Perhaps one of the most iconic movie musical songs is “It’s a Hard Knock Life.” It’s not only popular because it’s a catchy tune, but because it expresses a fundamental truth: life’s not fair.

Annie and her fellow foster kids know this better than anyone else. What did Annie do to deserve being abandoned as a young child? What did the girls do to deserve such a mean foster mom as Miss Hannigan? Nothing. But this is the life that they have been given. Or, as Mr. Stacks tells Annie, “You gotta play the cards you’ve been dealt.” But Annie’s smarter than that. She knows some people are forced to play a different game. She asks Mr. Stacks, “But what if you don’t get any cards?”

Annie embraces the life she’s been given and lives it to the fullest. She realizes that there are people who look out for her from the waiter at the Italian restaurant to Lou, the guy that runs the local market. She knows she has a tough life, but she makes the best of it.



Questions for Discussion

1. When did you first realize that life’s not fair? What happened? How did you respond?
2. Have you ever seen someone being treated unfairly? How did you respond?

Hard Work...And a Helping Hand

On the surface, Mr. Stacks is the epitome of a self-made man. He comes from a more challenging environment and rises to become one of the wealthiest businessmen in the city and even a promising candidate for mayor. Despite what he claims about the necessity of hard work--which is true--no one gets to his position alone. He even has a two person team working for him full-time.

Annie knows what Mr. Stacks seems to have forgotten. We all need each other to make it through life. Annie knows she needs a family, and she eagerly seeks them out even as she loves the other foster kids around her. Annie is open to working hard, not only for herself, but for others too. Mr. Stacks, through his relationship with Annie, slowly remembers this too.



Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever achieved a goal all by yourself? What was it? How did that achievement make you feel?
2. Has anyone ever helped you achieve a goal? Have you ever helped anyone else achieve their goals? How was it different from working alone? Which do you prefer?

A Larger-Than-Life Family

Who is your family? That's kind of a simple question really. You probably think about your parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. But kids like Annie have a different--and broader--understanding of family. They know that family is bigger than blood. Family for Annie is built around who she loves and who loves her.

Annie is full of love and, as a result, has a larger-than-life family. Everyone she meets--from Miss Hannigan to Lou the grocer--is a potential member of her family, whether they want to be or not. Annie's love for other people is so strong that it breaks down the barriers that people try to put up around her.



Questions for Discussion

1. Outside of your “real” family members, do you consider anyone else family? Who is it?
2. When have people outside of your “real” family treated you like family?

Bittersweet People

Lou has a thing for Miss Hannigan. Unfortunately, she doesn't feel the same way about him, but this doesn't stop Lou from being nice to her and asking her out on dates. Finally, Miss Hannigan asks Lou why he continues to be so nice to her when she is so mean to him. Lou tells her, "Under all that bitter is a sweet woman."

Like Annie, Lou tries to see the best in people. They know that people can often be mean because they have been mistreated in life. As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people. It can be hard to remember this when people are being mean to us, but this is when we need to remember it and act with kindness. When Mr. Stacks tells Miss Hannigan that Annie always spoke kindly about her, Miss Hannigan has a change of heart and helps rescue Annie. If we can try to find the best in others, who knows how much good will result.



Questions for Discussion

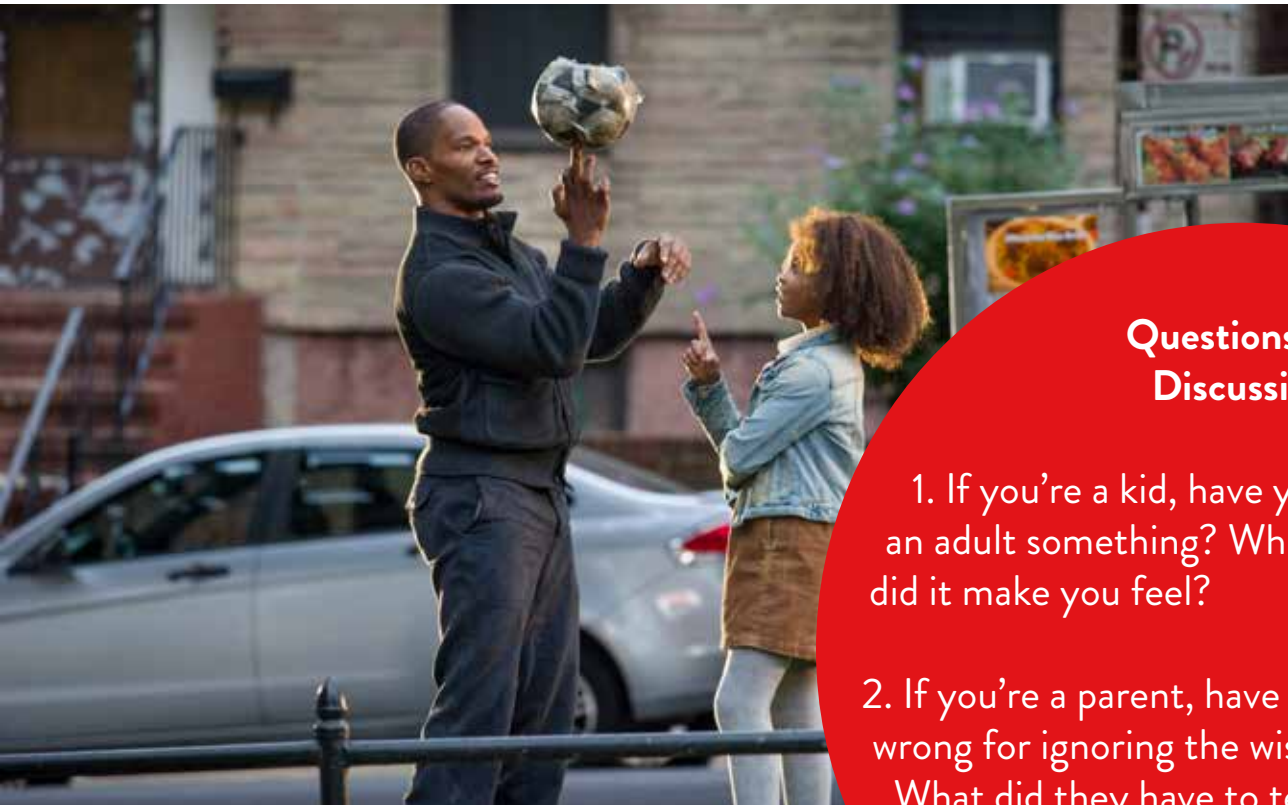
1. Have you ever mistreated someone because you were angry about something else? What happened and did you resolve it?
2. Have you ever been hurt by someone and known it was because they were upset about something else? Did this make it easier to handle?

The Wisdom of Children

Annie navigates the big city of New York with ease all on her own. She knows how to avoid Miss Hannigan's patrols and outbursts. We might say that Annie has "street smarts," but it's more than that. Annie is wise.

Annie sees into the hearts of everyone around her. She knows that, for all her bark, Miss Hannigan doesn't really have much bite. She knows that, even though he "has it all," Mr. Stacks is empty and alone. Annie even senses right away that there is something suspicious about her new "parents."

Annie reminds us that we should pay attention to the children in our lives. Adults often get distracted by the work and worries of life. Children sometimes have a clearer picture of the way things are. If we stop and listen, maybe we can learn something special.



Questions for Discussion

1. If you're a kid, have you ever taught an adult something? What was it, and how did it make you feel?
2. If you're a parent, have you ever been wrong for ignoring the wisdom of a child? What did they have to teach you in the end?

Expand Your Horizons

Mr. Stacks has the world at his fingertips, but he hides out in his penthouse apartment, shut off from everyone else. Annie lives in a dingy apartment with a bunch of foster sisters but sees all of New York as her home.

Annie's greatest gift to Mr. Stacks is helping him broaden his horizons. She takes him to a movie premiere, she cooks for him, and she shows him new parts of the city. As a result, he opens up to the possibility of new relationships and experiences and becomes a better person for it.

Although they may be frightening, new experiences can expand our horizons and make us better, wiser, kinder, and more understanding in the process. When we meet new people and try new things, all of our preconceived ideas about them disappear, and we better see people and the world the way they really are.



Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever had a preconceived idea about who someone or what something was? How did it change? What made it change?
2. Have you ever changed someone's opinion of you? Was this in a good or bad way?