

Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace

(1999, PG, 133 minutes. Live Action. Starring Liam Neeson, Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, and Jake Lloyd)

The Plot

The Trade Federation has created a blockade of ships around the planet Naboo. The galactic peacekeepers called Jedi have sent two representatives, Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi, to negotiate an end to the blockade.

Unbeknownst to them, the Trade Federation is under the advisement of a Sith Lord. The Sith are the antithesis of the Jedi. Both tap into a universal life force, but while the Jedi are selfless, the Sith are driven by personal ambition and tap into the Dark Side of the Force. The Sith Lord advises the Trade Federation to kill the Jedi.

The Jedi manage to escape along with Naboo's teenage Queen Amidala, but damage to their ship requires them to stop for repairs on the desert planet of Tatooine. There, they meet nine-year-old Anakin Skywalker, a slave in whom Qui-Gon senses a strong connection to the Force. Qui-Gon believes that Anakin is intended to fulfill a prophecy about bringing the Force into balance.

Qui-Gon wins Anakin's freedom in a game of chance and intends to take Anakin away from Tatooine in order to train him and develop his potential as a Jedi. Qui-Gon is mortally wounded by an adversary and so asks his apprentice, Obi-Wan, to train Anakin in his stead.

The Adoption Connection

Anakin only knows his mother; she says that Anakin was born of the Force, and that there was no father. Anakin must

choose to leave his mother in order to train to be a Jedi, although he promises to come back to rescue her.

Qui-Gon and, later, Obi-Wan develop a master-apprentice relationship with Anakin, which is at least somewhat familial.

Some kids—perhaps those who have been adopted into one home after having a positive foster care experience in another—will resonate with Anakin’s experience of being transferred from one nurturing parent figure to another. In Anakin’s case, he voluntarily leaves his mother. Anakin’s choice in leaving his mother will be atypical of many viewers’ own experiences.

Some adoption stories will resemble the fact that Anakin leaves a very difficult situation, with the blessing of his mother, in the hope of finding a better life far away with other caretakers.

Strong Points

The *Star Wars* saga is, in many ways, the story of Anakin Skywalker. Although he will later become known under another name, here we see his roots—as the loved son of a caring mother.

Challenges

Anakin and his mother are slaves and his mother is not able to prevent Anakin’s owner from subjecting him to dangerous activities. She explains that it pains her deeply each time it happens.

Some viewers might find it hard to see Anakin choose to leave his mother, his friends, and his home-world, even though he intends to come back eventually to make things

better for his mother. He asks whether he'll ever see her again, and neither he nor his mother are able to give a definite answer to the question.

One Jedi Master tells Anakin, in a roundabout way, that fear of losing his mother can lead to hate and suffering. It might be true, but it does not make room for Anakin's real and understandable feelings of sadness at leaving his mother. Young viewers who mourn the loss of a parent might find this Jedi Master's advice unhelpful.

Nine-year-old Anakin takes responsibility for his mom's safety. Some kids who have been neglected prior to entering foster care feel an adult-level sense of responsibility for their siblings and even their parents; Anakin's resolve might resonate with them, even if it is unfair for Anakin to feel responsible for his mom.

The death and subsequent funeral pyre of a Jedi might be disturbing to some young viewers.

Recommendations

The Phantom Menace introduces Anakin Skywalker as a nine-year-old boy who leaves a difficult life for the potential of a better life far from where he was born.

The *Star Wars* series follows Anakin's story and the stories of his children. On its own, this movie is a story about Anakin leaving one family and acclimating to another sort of family, but it is best viewed as the first of six movies that together tell a story of loss, identity formation, and multiple instances of family reunification. There are many adoption themes throughout the series to explore with your kids.

This film, and most of the series in general, seems best suited to kids of ages 10 and up and their parents.

Questions for Discussion

- What range of feelings did Anakin have as he left Tatooine?
- What range of feelings might Anakin's mom have had when Anakin chose to leave Tatooine to become a Jedi?
- What do you think it would have been like to drive a Pod Racer?
- Why were the Jedi scared to train Anakin? Do you think they were right or wrong to be so reluctant to train him?

Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones

(2002, PG, 142 minutes. Live Action. Starring Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, Hayden Christensen, Samuel L. Jackson, Ian McDiarmid, and Christopher Lee)

The Plot

Ten years after the events of *The Phantom Menace*, Anakin Skywalker is a teenage prodigy, still under the tutelage of Obi-Wan Kenobi.

When Senator Padmé Amidala (formerly Queen Amidala) arrives at Coruscant to cast a vote against a separatist movement she narrowly avoids two assassination attempts. The Jedi send Obi-Wan to attempt to discover the identity of those trying to kill Padmé while Anakin is assigned to take Padmé back to her home planet and keep her safe.

While hunting down Padmé's secret enemy, Obi-Wan discovers that an army is being secretly constructed for the Galactic Republic. The army is comprised of clones of a bounty hunter named Jango Fett. Obi-Wan tracks Jango and his young son to a desert world where Obi-Wan is captured.

Anakin and Padmé have left Padmé's home planet of Naboo in response to a premonition Anakin had about his mother suffering. Anakin finds his mother, but she has been tortured by kidnappers and she dies just after Anakin finds her. In a fit of rage, Anakin slays all people in the community where he found his mother. He confesses this to Padmé, then buries his mother at the homestead of the Lars family, into which she had recently married.

Anakin and Padmé receive a message showing that Obi-Wan is in distress. They set off to rescue him against overwhelming odds.

Meanwhile, the Sith Lord Darth Sidious continues to manipulate the events of the galaxy while working himself into a position of advantage.

Anakin and Padmé have fallen in love, and after completing their rescue mission, they secretly marry.

The Adoption Connection

After leaving his mother and his home-world at nine years of age, Anakin has been raised by Jedi. He remembers the promise that he made his mother when he left—that he would return to free her from slavery.

When he has a troubling vision, he returns to his home-world to save her, but finds that she has been kidnapped and tortured. She dies in his arms, making permanent a loss that Anakin had expected to be temporary. Anakin's grief at his loss causes him to act out violently.

Later, Anakin expresses that he blames himself for the loss of his mother; he pledges to do whatever it takes to ensure that he never experiences the loss of another loved one.

Anakin is not the only character to experience the traumatic death of a parent; Jango Fett dies while his young son Boba looks on helplessly.

Anakin had no father and the Republic has created an army of clones who have no mother. Jango Fett has claimed one of the clones as his son and has raised him for several years.

Strong Points

When Anakin blames himself for the death of his mother, Padmé tries to comfort him by saying that it was not his responsibility because no one can fix everything.

When Anakin sees his mother before she dies, she communicates that she loves him.

Challenges

When Anakin finds his mother, she is bound and wounded. She shares a few brief words with Anakin before dying in his arms. Although she is at peace, he is in torment. It could be a hard scene for young viewers.

Young Boba Fett sees his villainous father decapitated in a battle. He holds his father's helmet to his own head in a moment of mourning.

Recommendations

Some people who have been adopted—perhaps especially those adopted from foster care—may feel as though they are responsible for the circumstances that led to their adoption. Anakin blames himself for not preventing the death of his mother. In neither case is the blame healthy. As you watch this film, consider the role of false blame in the lives of those who have lost connections with loved ones. As you continue through the *Star Wars* movies, notice how Anakin's reaction to this painful loss shapes his approach to life.

Like most of the other *Star Wars* films, *Attack of the Clones* seems best suited to kids of ages 10 and up and their parents, although the scene in which Anakin finds his mother might be hard for the younger kids in this age group.

Questions for Discussion

- Anakin blamed himself for not being able to save his mother; was his blame fairly placed?
- Anakin is hurting, and he wants to ensure that no one he loves will ever die again. Is his goal possible? Can you think of a better goal for him?
- Have you ever blamed yourself for something that really wasn't your fault?
- Is there anyone who you miss? How do you feel about missing them? How do you deal with those feelings?

Star Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

(2005, PG-13, 140 minutes. Live Action. Starring Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, and Hayden Christensen)

The Plot

Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi continue to represent the Jedi as they try to help the Galactic Senate fend off threats from a separatist movement. They save the Supreme Chancellor Palpatine and kill two of the leaders of the separatists.

Anakin also learns that his secret wife, Padmé, is pregnant. Anakin is initially excited, but begins having visions of Padmé dying during childbirth. Previously, Anakin had visions of his mother suffering, and those came true. He is desperate to find a way to prevent Padmé's death. Sensing this, Palpatine confides to Anakin that Palpatine understands the Dark Side of the Force and promises that he can help Anakin stop Padmé from dying. Anakin initially refuses to follow Palpatine's evil ways but eventually gives in.

Palpatine takes Anakin as a Sith apprentice and renames him Darth Vader. His first order is for Vader to participate in an effort to kill all of the Jedi. Out of a fear of losing Padmé, Anakin betrays the Jedi, and starts by slaughtering everyone at the Jedi temple, including all the children in training.

When Padmé learns of this, she begs Anakin to return to her, but she has also brought Obi-Wan Kenobi with her. Anakin is enraged, believing that she has betrayed him. He uses the Force to choke her into unconsciousness and begins to battle his former master, Obi-Wan. Obi-Wan wins the fight, severing Anakin's limbs and leaving Anakin for dead.

Obi-Wan escapes with Padmé while Palpatine, who has declared himself Emperor of the Galactic Empire, collects Anakin. Obi-Wan takes Padmé to a secret place where she gives birth to twins whom she names Luke and Leia. Padmé then dies.

Obi-Wan and others decide that, for the safety of the children, they must be hidden from the Emperor and from their father Anakin, who has now become the evil Darth Vader. Luke is taken to live with his grandmother's husband's son's family on Tatooine, and Leia is adopted by a senator and his wife, who live on another world. Leia's new father shares that he and his wife have always considered adopting.

Meanwhile, the Emperor crafts a new armored suit to allow Anakin to live as Darth Vader, but tells Vader that, in a fit of rage, Vader himself killed Padmé.

The Adoption Connection

Revenge of the Sith continues the story of Anakin Skywalker. Anakin left his mother in the first film, and watched her die in the second. Now, his wife has died, and he is unaware that his children survived. His children will be raised in secrecy, outside of his knowledge and away from his dangerous involvement with the evil Emperor. They will be raised separately from each other, and without knowledge of each other.

Anakin's rage all flows from his grief and anger at the loss of his mother and his fear of the loss of Padmé.

Strong Points

Although their history is tragic, Luke and Leia have people who will love and support them.

It would be easy for people to consider Darth Vader a pure villain but the first three movies let us see his fears and hopes and the way that he was manipulated by the evil Palpatine. Most behaviors make sense within a certain context, and if we understand the context of those behaviors we are less likely to vilify even the people of whom we are afraid. This could be a helpful skill for foster parents whose children have birth parents who have a history of violence or abuse. It might be reasonable to be afraid and cautious around them, but it is not helpful to vilify them. Seeing the humanity of your child's birth parents can help you help your child avoid a one-sided view of their birth parents, which in turn can help them have a healthier view of themselves.

Challenges

This film struck me as more violent than the other *Star Wars* films; Anakin's limbs are cut off and he is burned by lava. Anakin decapitates a helpless foe. Although it is not shown on film, Anakin slays a room full of children.

Yoda wisely tells Anakin that death is a natural part of life. However, he also tells Anakin that attachment can develop into jealousy, and he advises Anakin to be detached. Better advice would be to accept that loss and pain are inevitable, but still to attach to those you love.

Recommendations

Unlike the rest of the *Star Wars* films, *Revenge of the Sith* is a bit more violent, and might be best reserved for kids of ages 13 and up and their parents.

As you watch it, notice how loss and the fear of more loss affected Anakin's behaviors and left him vulnerable to

manipulation. Also, imagine how you might describe Anakin if you were called upon to raise Luke or Leia.

Questions for Discussion

- What caused Anakin to respond so negatively to the losses he experienced?
- Was it important for Luke and Leia to be kept secret from Darth Vader?
- Was it important for Luke and Leia to be kept secret from each other?
- How can we experience loss without being consumed by it?
- If you were raising Luke or Leia, how would you explain their birth father to them? Can you find an honest way to explain him that does not paint him as purely evil?

Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope

(1977, PG, 121 minutes. Live Action. Starring Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, and Carrie Fisher)

The Plot

Almost two decades ago, Obi-Wan Kenobi made the hard decision to hide Anakin Skywalker's twin children from him and, as a result, the children are also unknown to each other. Anakin is now the feared Sith lord Darth Vader, and he is unaware that his children are alive.

Luke Skywalker, who still bears his father's original last name, is living with an aunt and an uncle on the desert planet