

Twilight

Forever love, dying love, there will be blood.

OVERVIEW

There must be something in Twilight the [novel](#), and now Twilight the [movie](#), that parents and youth leaders need to investigate. It has been tremendously popular and powerful in the lives of girls with whom I've talked, in two countries, regarding their feelings and opinions about the series and its impact on their lives. I can't remember getting so close and deep to youth so quickly than in these conversations.

Twilight is a 2008 romantic-fantasy, vampiric film drawn from the first of a series of novels by Stephanie Meyer. They've proved amazingly popular with young teenage and pre-teen girls. Twilight, the novel, was followed by [New Moon](#), [Eclipse](#), and [Breaking Dawn](#).

These stories trace the romance of Bella Swan and Edward Cullen, with antagonist Jacob Black becoming more important in New Moon. (A sequel's first 12 chapters, from the standpoint of Edward rather than Bella, called *Midnight Sun*, was illegally posted on the Internet, which Meyer has now posted herself, unable to continue its writing right now because of its premature posting.)

In Twilight, Bella has been living with her mother, whose relationship with a new traveling husband, now sends Bella from Phoenix, Arizona to live with her father in the small town of Forks, Washington. Bella feels the emotions brought on by divorce, parents who don't understand, and the awkward move to a new town and school. These, of course, are feelings shared by most students entering adolescence. Although Bella seems to be accepted by an outgoing, rather immature group of friends, her attention is drawn to a mysterious group of siblings who keep to themselves, move slowly and deliberately, and never come to school on sunny days. Among them, Bella is strangely attractive to Edward Cullen, who might be described as "a hunk" or "hot". His is a mysterious and attractive aura.

This is the story of a first high school crush, it incorporates the conflicted feelings and sense of power in knowing some else's secret-self that friends

and peers don't share. It is a story of self-sacrifice in the name of love. And it contains the strange attraction of vampires to women and many young girls. Describing the novels, Ty Burr (The Boston Globe, 21Nov08, G6) says, "... it hit 14-year-old girls of all ages (and genders) like a hormone bomb."

Vampires Edward Cullen and family are among the undead or living dead. Edward himself is, or has been, 108 years old, but now appears in the body of a seventeen-year-old. The Cullens are good, vegetarian vampires who drink animal rather than human blood—in contrast to Jacob Black and the Quileute tribe.

Catherine Hardwicke took on the challenge of adapting this story to film (she's directed [Thirteen](#), [Lords of Dogtown](#), [The Nativity Story: I was a Teenage Virgin Mary](#)). Critical reviews of the movie are mixed. The movie runs 120 minutes and was distributed by Summit Entertainment.

Describing the film, Ty Burr (above) concludes:

Twilight is at its best when dealing with intimacy rather than plot; the love scenes are filmed in close-ups that are purposely too close, and when Edward and Bella finally kiss, the moment is as cold as it should be and as hot as it needs to be.

Hardwicke understands the dirty little secret of Twilight, which is that it's all about sex without sex at all. In this story a teenage girl falls for a gorgeous, tormented boy who could overpower and ravage her—could annihilate her—anytime he chooses. Instead, he holds back for her own protection until being annihilated is all she can think about.

We don't want, however to be overly influenced by critical reviews or our own judgments about this film. We need to consult the experts on the movie's messages and impact, its young readers and viewers. That's part of the adventure of parenting and youth ministry.

LEADERS PREPARATION

- See the movie and discuss it with teenagers.
- Read up on critical reviews and blogs about this film.
- Find and download its trailer.

- Once the films in DVD, decide if there are clips you can show from it for discussions of different kinds.
- Have articulate students prime the pump for these discussions.

QUESTIONS

- What do you like most about this movie? Is there anything you don't like about it... or question? How many times would you see it? Do you think it's a good date movie?
- What kind of parental and adult behaviors affect young people, and how so?
- What's it like to move into a new high school or middle school?
- What are some of the things parents can't understand?
- What are some of the difficulties of falling in love or having a crush on someone?
- What's it like to have someone in your group preoccupied with a romance when the rest of you don't have anyone special in your life? What's it like to be the only one in your group without a special love interest?
- What would you sacrifice for true, powerful love? Would you be willing to die for it?
- How do you, or would you, balance your moral standards or religious faith against powerful romantic, sexual drives?
- In such situations as Bella's, at what age would you have sex with a romantic partner?
- At what age would you take a younger sister or brother, niece or nephew, or your own future children, to see this movie?
- How do you recommend this movie to others?

WRAP UP

- This will depend, of course, upon your group and the direction of your discussion. It's better not "to plan" the direction of discussion but to let it come from them—and the many times they've read the book, seen the movie, and discussed it with friends. The more you've already talked with them about it, the better sense you'll have as to where the discussion might go.
- Depending upon the direction of your discussion (about teen troubles and anxieties, about peer relations, about core values, or about love

and sex, perhaps even death and the vampire tradition) be ready to encourage longer-range thinking and life planning than being caught up in the moment of young passion. What is it you really want in life? What kind of love do you really want to find? What kind of relationships are most helpful for you? What kind of a family do you want to have someday?

IMPLICATIONS

- These books and this movie have had tremendous impact on many. We should not miss such exceptionally teachable moments.
- Where passion seems to obscure teachable moments, we must be creative. A loving and deeply caring attitude toward young girls, with some insight as to all they are going through (Mary Pipher, etc.), will bring us to patient acceptance of their euphoria and strong opinions, and finally to teachable moments.
- There are many obvious and other hidden issues to be explored in these books and movie.

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