

Parenting goes Hollywood with on-

By Linda Temple
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When their freckle-faced 8-year-old left his toy guns in the dust to take up flamenco dancing, Jim Frieden and Deborah Elliott knew they'd struck pay dirt.

If a movie, in this case the 1992 Australian film *Strictly Ballroom*, could spur their son to dance, why not use movies as a parenting tool?

"Parents are always searching for ways to transmit their values and views of the world to their children," says Elliott, a Pacific Palisades, Calif., writer and mother of three boys. She and husband Frieden, a lawyer, combed classic and contemporary films. "We found movies could open up all kinds of educational and developmental horizons."

They consulted psychologists and

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clergy members to pen parent guides for 150 movies. In June the couple put them on the Internet at www.teachwithmovies.org. They hope to post 300.

Elliott says the movies accurately depict historical events, have cultural or artistic content or raise character development issues. Each synopsis suggests discussion topics, links to school curricula and relevant family enrichment activities.

A few swear words or a glimpse of skin won't disqualify a film, Elliott says, but movies bristling with sex or foul language don't make the cut, and those that disparage racial or ethnic groups or substitute special effects for a thoughtful plot get a thumbs-down. Each write-up includes the couple's rationale.

Gandhi, *Amadeus* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* make the grade. Nixed are Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple* ("spousal abuse and other violence"), *The Boys From Brazil* ("Historically inaccurate... trivializes Nazis and the Holocaust") and Bernardo Bertolucci's epic *The Last Emperor* ("gratuitous violence... we see someone's brains blown out of his head").

But Elliott and Frieden urge parents to judge the films for themselves, stressing it's the family time that counts most.

"It's a magnificent idea," says psychologist Robert Simmermon, film committee chairman of the American Psychological Association. "It is a nonthreatening basis to get some communal dialogue started."

"Some parents are terrified for their children to see an R-rated movie, but you need to ask yourself what you're protecting them from. Such a movie might enable you to find out what your kids know, dispel some myths or raise difficult topics such as sex and sexuality. These kinds of discussion can literally change lives."

Movies have long played a role in college literature classrooms, but their use is expanding into other realms. John Wood, professor of theology and ethics at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, has developed a course called "Christianity in Film."

"Movies are determining what our common ground is, and thus our ideas about morality," he says. "We are what we watch."

Wood's class sees *Pale Rider*, *Nine to Five*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Star Wars*. "There is a lot of gratuitous profanity and violence, but you have to get past that and look at what the movie is saying about life." He reluctantly calls videos "today's textbooks. Those of us who teach

must acknowledge this real use it to help foster a more diverse culture."

One minister who shares is Walter Shropshire Jr. His parishioners, who include Clinton and Hillary



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