

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

A Different Hero

Movie Heroines Showing Some True Grit

By Paul Asay

Posted: Feb. 7, 2011

What Happened:

When 14-year-old Mattie Ross meets U.S. Marshal Rooster Cogburn—the man she hires to track down her father’s killer—she tells him he has “true grit.” As Rooster learns, whatever grit he may have can’t hold a candle to Mattie’s own.

Mattie is as tough a 14-year-old girl as you’re likely to meet. In the Oscar-nominated film *True Grit*, Mattie relentlessly pursues her father’s killer—at a time when women, particularly women as young as Mattie, were sequestered safely at home. With an unflagging sense of justice and steely pragmatism, she refuses to turn back, no matter how hard the going gets.

“You must pay for everything in this world, one way and another,” she says grimly. “There is nothing free except the grace of God.”

The character resonated so much that Hailee Steinfeld, the actress who plays her, was nominated for an Academy Award. “Most teenage girls in movies are more like Valley girls,” Steinfeld told the *Los Angeles Times*, “but Mattie, she’s driven, determined. This character is about getting the job done.”

Mattie is one of a bevy of strong, young, female protagonists invading movie theaters lately. Jennifer Lawrence—also nominated for an Oscar—plays tough-as-nails Ree Dolly in the R-rated *Winter’s Bone*—in which Ree must track down her father to save her family home.

In last year’s *Alice in Wonderland*, 19-year-old Alice must show incredible courage to face the fearsome Jabberwock and save the imaginative country.

While movies such as *Winter’s Bone* and *True Grit* might not be suitable for everyone, it doesn’t change the fact that the younger heroines in them can teach us some valuable lessons.

“People are finding these heroines charismatic, unexpected and fresh, *Winter’s Bone* director Debra Granik told the *Times*. “What a person in the business can get from that is, ‘Hey, a young female protagonist doesn’t need to have a boyfriend, get pregnant, cut herself or be naked to attract an audience.’”

Characters such as these also may help audiences redefine what it means to be a hero—that sometimes, the strongest characters aren't the ones who wear capes as does Batman or dress in tuxedos as does James Bond. Sometimes, real heroes can wear hats that are too big.

Talk About It:

Who's your favorite movie hero? What do you like best about him or her? Why do they qualify, in your mind, to be a hero? Is it their strength? Courage? Determination?

Now, think about who you know in real life. Do you know anyone whom you'd consider a hero? What makes that person a hero? Does he or she inspire you to be a little more heroic in your own life?

If you were going to make a list of heroic attributes, what would that list contain? What's important for a hero to have? Is there a trait—such as selfishness or cowardice, for example—that heroes simply can't have? Or is being a hero a matter of overcoming those traits?

What the Bible Says:

“His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes. He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor” (Ps. 112:8-9).

“If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength” (Prov. 24:10).

“Then the leader of Judah will say in their hearts, ‘The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God’ (Zech. 12:5).

“Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame” (Isa. 50:7).