

# Children of Men Study Guide

## Pre-Reading Discussion

**dys·to·pia** *noun* \(\,)dis- 'tō-pē-ə\

1: an imaginary place where people are unhappy and usually afraid because they are not treated fairly, where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives

2: ANTI-UTOPIA

— dys·to·pi·an \-pē-ən\ *adjective*

**di·e·ge·sis** *noun, pl. di·e·ge·ses* (in literature, film, etc.)

1. the telling of a story by a narrator who summarizes events in the plot and comments on the conversations, thoughts, etc., of the characters.

2. the sphere or world in which these narrated events and other elements occur.

1. How important is human dignity? How is taken away or undermined within our world?
2. The advertising we see in *Children of Men* concerns illegal immigrants, Bliss pills and Quietus – a suicide pack 'for when you choose'. How far do these reflect concerns which are already present within our society?
3. “Everything is a mythical cosmic battle between faith and chance. . . . Theo’s faith lost out to chance. So, why bother if life’s going to make its own choices?” (Jasper) What do you think Jasper means by this? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*Children of Men* Director: Alfonso Cuarón based on the P.D. James novel of the same name.

In 2027, in a chaotic world in which women have become somehow infertile, a former activist agrees to help transport a miraculously pregnant woman to a sanctuary at sea. The world's youngest citizen has just died at 18, and humankind is facing the likelihood of its own extinction. Set in and around a dystopian London fractious with violence and warring nationalistic sects, *Children of Men* follows the unexpected discovery of a lone pregnant woman and the desperate journey to deliver her to safety and restore faith for a future beyond those presently on Earth.

## STAGE ONE <sup>2</sup> SEQUENCE 1: A DAY IN THE LIFE

How does this film open? List the news headlines.

What is the lead story? What kind of a world is being presented to us?

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.film-studies.net/study-guides/children-of-men>

Why are the customers in the café so interested in the news broadcast?

How is Theo Faron, the man who orders the coffee, presented to us?

When is the musical score introduced? What dates appear on the television monitor?

What is the logo of the broadcasting company?

At what point does the camera move? What might this suggest to the audience?

### Questions for Post-Viewing Discussion<sup>3</sup>

1. 'There's nothing more beautiful than elusiveness in cinema.' (Alfonso Cuarón)

In what ways was *Children of Men* elusive – what did it imply or hint at without ever addressing explicitly? What do you think of this approach to film-making?

2. How plausible a view of the future did you find the setting of *Children of Men*? What made it believable? What kind of emotional impact did this have on you?
3. To what extent could you understand the global grief over the death of Baby Diego? How do you think attitudes to young people would change in such a world?
4. Why do you think the Government is dealing with refugees in such a brutal fashion? What do you think it would take to bring us to such a situation?
5. 'Julian was wrong. They thought it could be peaceful. But how can it be peaceful when they try to take away your dignity?' (Luke)

Why do you think Luke sees violence as the only response to the treatment of refugees? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.damaris.org/content/content.php?type=1&id=371>

6. “At the end I cannot dictate a sense of hope for anybody because a sense of hope is something that’s very internal. We wanted the end to be a glimpse of a possibility of hope, for the audience to invest their own sense of hope into that ending. So if you’re a hopeful person you’ll see a lot of hope, and if you’re a bleak person you’ll see a complete hopelessness at the end.” (Alfonso Cuarón)

Do you see hope or hopelessness at the end of *Children of Men*? Why? Where do you see signs of hope in our world?

### **Theme in Children of Men<sup>4</sup>**

#### **A. Consensus Discussion**

**Rank these ideas in order of their importance in the film.**

1. There is a risk, because of how we are living now, that the human race will become infertile.
2. This film isn’t about the future. It’s about right now.
3. This film is about how our civilisation has become desperate and dangerous.
4. We should place our hope in the next generation.
5. We are on our own to fix the world we have broken.
6. Hope shines brighter in a disintegrating world.
7. This is a film about politics, not faith.
8. This is a film about the battle between faith and chance.
9. The theme is hope: how we thrive in its presence and wither in its absence.
10. Human society in crisis will lose its principles and shared humanity.

#### **B. Questions to Consider**

1. What do you think of “the Fishes”’ intentions and methods?
2. How plausible a view of the future do you find *Children of Men*?
3. What does the film suggest about the role of men and women? Is it a sexist film?
4. Who is the primary audience for this film?
5. How is this film about good and evil?
6. Is Theo a hero?

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<sup>4</sup> S:\English\Teaching materials\Level 2\Film\Children of Men\Children of Men teaching plan.docx

**Character Analysis** Read the character guide below. Add a quote or scene from the film that demonstrates the characteristics/personality traits of the character.

### **THEO FARON PLAYED BY: CLIVE OWEN**

Theo Faron is the disillusioned government drone who has lost any hope in the future, until he becomes the unexpected guardian to the mother of the last baby on Earth. That hope lies in getting her out of a heavily militarized and fortified country and into the hands of The Human Project, a shadowy organization for good that may not even exist.

Evidence from film:

### **JULIAN TAYLOR PLAYED BY: JULIANNE MOORE**

Julian is the tough leader of the rebel fighters known as The Fishes. She is also the ex-wife of Theo who still trusts him enough to put the future of the world into his hands. Though the marriage ended over the bitterness and despair following the loss of their only child, Julian and Theo cannot discount the affection that they still hold for one another.

Evidence from film:

### **KEE PLAYED BY: CLAIRE-HOPE ASHTEY**

Kee carries the future inside her. She is a “foogee” prostitute who is inexplicably pregnant with the last baby on a planet that has been infertile for the past 18 years. With the help of Theo and the revolutionary group The Fishes she must keep herself alive knowing that what she holds is valued by everyone and what's valued by everyone is worth a very high price.

Evidence from film:

### **JASPER PALMER PLAYED BY: MICHAEL CAINE**

Alfonso Cuarón was stumped. Who would he get to play Jasper Palmer, the benevolent, old pot-smoking hippie who he referred to throughout the screenwriting process as "the Michael Caine character"? Well, we didn't say he was stumped for long. Jasper Palmer is a wise, old friend to Theo who, despite the nihilism around him, keeps an optimistic, humorous, but pragmatic view of the world. Caine based his performance on the speech patterns and mannerisms of an old pal of his - John Lennon.

### **LUKE PLAYED BY: CHIWETEL EJIOFOR**

Along with Julian, Luke is a leader of The Fishes. A calm, thoughtful strategist, Luke seems to be getting tired of the police blaming every bombing in London on his semi-peaceful rebel group. If the world already sees them as terrorists, then maybe they have no choice but to start

acting like them. And no terrorist has ever had as powerful a symbol as they have in Kee's unborn child.

Evidence from the film:

### **MIRIAM PLAYED BY: PAM FERRIS**

Miriam is part of Luke's revolutionary group, but rather than being a soldier her matronly ways made her ideal to play the role of midwife to Kee. A schoolteacher before there were no children left to teach, Miriam is a strong and comforting presence on the hellish road trip to find The Human Project.

Evidence from the film:

### **SYD PLAYED BY: PETER MULLAN**

Syd refers to himself in the third person, which makes his eccentricities readily apparent, but also lets you know he has no allegiances, not even to himself. What Syd wants to do, Syd does - the person talking to you is just the messenger. Unfortunately for Theo, it is in Syd's hands that he and Kee are placed as Syd escorts them through the fugee (refugee) camp to meet with The Human Project.

Evidence from the film:

### **NIGEL PLAYED BY: DANNY HUSTON**

What Nigel tries not to think about, in answer to a question from his cousin Theo, is why he bothers to race around the world to save priceless works of art when no one will be around to appreciate them in a hundred years. In his collection, we see Picasso's Guernica (a depiction of the chaos and destruction of war) and Michelangelo's David, now missing one of its legs. While a refusal to think may seem like a denial, it is also a degree of hope and a reminder to Theo that he must do the same if he is to do something for a world that seems beyond hope.

Evidence from the film:

### **You Tube Clips**

The philosopher Zizek on the film: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbgrwNP\\_gYE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbgrwNP_gYE)

Analysis: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiisVEvHHUQ>

Cast interviews: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1gTwVVCrb8&feature=fvw\>

## **Trivia!<sup>5</sup>**

Almost every shot contains an animal, usually a dog.

In the movie, the infertility crisis is the result of all women being infertile. In the original novel by P.D. James, it's the result of all men producing no sperm.

Just before the car is attacked, Miriam peels an orange in the back seat. Just before the refugee camp falls into chaos, Kee and Marichka share orange slices over the baby. In films, oranges often represent impending danger or tragedy. This motif is also prominently featured in *The Godfather*.

Theo never gets to smoke an entire cigarette.

When Theo is walking down the ramp on Battersea Power Station, a stenciled image of two policemen kissing can be seen on a wall. The image was created by "Banksy", a British "guerilla artist" who specializes in that kind of work. Other [Banksy](#) works appear in the film, including a stenciled image of a child looking down a shop.

When Miriam is taken off the bus in the refugee camp you can hear the song "Arbeit Macht Frei" by The Libertines. "Arbeit macht frei," meaning "Work shall set you free," was written above the entrance at Auschwitz, the biggest of the Nazi death/concentration camps of World War II.

Every scene in the movie is viewed from Theo's perspective.

Clive Owen's character, Theo, does not use or even touch a gun at any point throughout the entire movie.

When Miriam (Pam Ferris) is taken off the bus at Bexhill, the camera pans by several cages with prisoners inside. One of them is the infamous "hooded man" from the Abu Ghraib prison torture pictures. He is seen in the exact pose as the real pictures.

The cover of the Pink Floyd album "Animals" features a floating pig above the Battersea Power station, the "Ark of the Arts" in the film. This pig can be seen when Theo's car enters the Ark, and later when Theo speaks to his cousin. The album was released in 1977. The film is set in 2027, the LP's 50th anniversary.

Animals like Theo. The ginger cat on Jasper's sofa, the dogs at Tomasz and Emily's farm (to which he even comments the dogs don't like anyone), and the kittens in the farm house that crawl up Theo's leg.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/trivia?ref\\_=ttcc\\_sa\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/trivia?ref_=ttcc_sa_1)