

**“Waste Land” starring Vik Muniz & others, 2010, NR, 99 minutes**

**Major themes:**

- Poverty
- Garbage
- Recycling
- Environment
- Dignity
- Art
- Transformation
- Hope

## Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

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### Major characters:

- Vik Muniz (artist)
- Diego (Vik's assistant)
- Tiaõ (president of the *Association for the Pickers of Jardim Gramacho*)
- Irma (chef)
- Zumbi (book collector)
- Suelem (teen mother with two young children)
- Isis (loves fashion)
- Valter (elder statesman)
- Magna (bus commuting woman)

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### Background info:

- The film's tagline is, *"What happens in the world's largest trash city will transform you."*
- The Portuguese-language title for this film is *Lixo Extraordinário*, literally meaning *"extraordinary garbage,"* which is a pun referring to the labels on Brazilian sanitation trucks containing special waste. The English title of this film comes from the T. S. Eliot poem of the same name.
- Jardim Gramacho (Gramacho Gardens), on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was one of the world's largest landfills (approximately the same size as 244 American football fields). At the time of the making of this film, 1300 catadores removed about 200 tons of recyclable materials each day. The landfill was closed in June 2012 after 34 years of operation. There are an estimated 60,000,000 tons of trash there. There is now a plan to collect approximately 75,000,000 cubic meters of methane gas over the next 15 years, in addition to treating sludge to be used as recycled water. After that, the landfill is slated to be turned into a park.
- *"Catadore"* is a Brazilian word that roughly translates to *"garbage collector"* or *"collector of recyclable materials."* At its peak, Jardim Gramacho had 5000 catadores, ranging in age from 16 to 87. There are approximately 1 million catadores in Brazil (out of a national population of 200 million).
- Tião dos Santos, the president of the *Association for Pickers of Jardim Gramacho*, is one of four Brazilian citizens who was invited to carry the torch at the 2012 Olympic Games in London.
- Director Lucy Walker explained her motivation for making this film: *"I have always been interested in garbage: What it says about us. What in there embarrasses us, and what we can't bear to part with. Where it goes and how much of it there is. How it endures. What it might be like to work with it every day. I read about one woman's crusade to show her appreciation for all the sanitation workers in New York . . . there had to be some way for me to show my appreciation."*
- Vik Muniz has a website with photos of the art he has created:  
<http://vikmuniz.net/gallery/garbage>

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### Scriptures:

Mark 12:41 – 44 (NIV) – *“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’”*

Psalms 113:5 – 7 (NLT) – *“Who can be compared with the LORD our God, who is enthroned on high? He stoops to look down on heaven and on earth. He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump.”*

1 Timothy 2:1 – 4 (NLT) – *“I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.”*

Hebrews 6:1 (The Message) – *“So come on, let’s leave the preschool fingerpainting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ.”*

Romans 12:2 (NLT) – *“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”*

Romans 15:13 (NLT) – *“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

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### Discussion points:

1. What are the qualities that make something art? What distinguishes transformative from non-transformative art?
2. What made the most difference to each person in this film?
3. Discuss this quote from artist Vik Muniz: *“The beautiful thing about garbage is that it’s negative; it’s something that you don’t use anymore; it’s what you don’t want to see . . . You are working with something that you usually try to hide.”*
4. It’s possible to pass by people without noticing who they are. What can help us to see and appreciate the beauty in each individual?
5. Isis said, *“I don’t see myself in the trash any more.”* What gifts from God can we use to help people to see themselves as He sees them, as treasures and not trash? How does knowing what something or someone used to be help us to appreciate the treasure and beauty even more?
6. The artist also said, *“The moment where one thing turns into another is the most beautiful moment.”* Where do we see transformation in this film? In life?
7. What are some practical steps we can take in our community to help others make the journey from despair to dignity?