

**“Oliver Twist” starring Barney Clark, Ben Kingsley, Jeremy Swift, 2005,
PG-13, 130 minutes**

Major themes:

- Orphans
- Poverty
- Abuse
- Exploitation
- Organized Crime
- Social Classes
- Deception
- Overcoming
- Inheritance
- New Beginnings

Major characters:

- Fagin
- Bill Sykes
- Oliver Twist
- Nancy
- Mr. Brownlow
- The Artful Dodger
- Charley Bates
- Mr. Bumble
- Mr. Limbkins
- Mr. & Mrs. Sowerberry
- Mr. Grimwig
- Toby Crackit
- Noah Claypole
- Magistrate Fang
- Mrs. Bedwin

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- This film is based on the second novel by English author Charles Dickens, known as *“Oliver Twist”*, or *“The Parish Boy’s Progress.”* It was first published as a serial in 1837–39. The alternate title alludes to Bunyan’s, *“The Pilgrim’s Progress,”* begging the question of whether Oliver can successfully resist temptation and corruption.
- The sinister villain Fagin was also the name of Charles Dickens’s best friend, Bob Fagin.
- Mr. Brownlow’s character was based on a real Mr. Brownlow who was secretary of the Foundling Hospital for 58 years.
- Charles Dickens made the first ever reference to fried fish when he referred to a *“fried fish warehouse”* in the novel.
- Director Roman Polanski made this film as he and his wife sought to find a plot that their children would find interesting. They ended up having parts in the film: their daughter Morgane plays the farmer’s daughter; their son Elvis plays the boy with the hoop.
- To keep child actors of the Fagin’s gang in character, Ben Kingsley retained his mannerisms and physical appearance as Fagin even off the set.
- Most of the sets designed were inspired by the work of the famous illustrator Gustave Doré (although Doré never did actually illustrate any of Charles Dickens’ novels).

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Scriptures:

Exodus 22:22 – 23 (NLT) – *“You must not exploit a widow or an orphan. If you exploit them in any way and they cry out to me, then I will certainly hear their cry.”*

Psalms 10:12 – 14 (The Message) – *“Time to get up, God—get moving. The luckless think they’re Godforsaken. They wonder why the wicked scorn God and get away with it, Why the wicked are so cocksure they’ll never come up for audit. But you know all about it—the contempt, the abuse. I dare to believe that the luckless will get lucky someday in you. You won’t let them down: orphans won’t be orphans forever.”*

Proverbs 22:22 – 23 (NIV) – *“Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life.”*

Proverbs 29:16 (The Message) – *“When degenerates take charge, crime runs wild, but the righteous will eventually observe their collapse.”*

Romans 12:14 – 21 (NLT) – *“Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all! Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the Lord. Instead, ‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.’ Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.”*

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Discussion points:

1. One Dickens biographer referred to his plots as *“streaked bacon.”* In this film, where do you see the fat, the meat, and the gristle?
2. What connections do you see between poverty and crime in this film?
3. When Mr. Brownlow says of Oliver, *“I know there is good in him,”* Oliver is able to hope for the first time that he is not doomed to a life of crime with Fagin. Who do you know (or know of) that most needs to hear words of hope today?
4. Which character do you care for the least, and why?
5. Which character is the most memorable for you, and why?
6. One film reviewer wrote that director Polanski *“does justice to Dickens' moral universe, in which the motives and worldview of even the worst people are made comprehensible.”* Discuss.
7. What does the final scene with Oliver and Fagin show us about the source of Oliver's uncompromising morality?