Crash Viewing Guide and Discussion Questions

*Crash* is a post 9/11 film set in Los Angeles; it takes place over the course of a day and half. During this time the stories of several characters interweave, interconnect, and crash into one another as each grapples with matters of race, class, family, and gender. While the characters clash with one another, they are also forced to contend with their own limiting views of the other, and the viewer is pressed to overcome first impressions of characters who are more complex than they first appear.

Far from a perfect film, *Crash* has garnered its fair share of criticism as a somewhat overwrought morality tale. In the Hollywood mainstream, however, it was widely acclaimed, with six Oscar nominations and the win for Best Picture in 2006. *The New York Times* Critic, A.O. Scott, writes that director Paul Haggis “makes a case for blunt, earnest emotion, and shows an admirable willingness to risk sentimentality and cliché in the pursuit of genuine feeling.” The risk seemed to pay off for Haggis. As you watch the film, consider whether you can see past the contrivances of a largely issue-driven plot to contemplate the lessons *Crash* has to offer.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Consider the opening line of the film spoken by Detective Graham: “It’s the sense of touch. In any real city, you walk, you kow? You brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We’re always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something.” What do you make of this? It what ways might it apply to where you live?


3. At certain points in the film our sympathies with a character are altered almost instantly. Where does this happen and how is it achieved?

4. The film presents us with a number of racial stereotypes. Consider how each of these are portrayed in terms of physical appearance and behavior. Are our expectations always challenged in the film? What stereotypes do we see? How are we made to feel about them?

5. Some have criticized the film as reinforcing racial and other stereotypes rather than dismantling them. Do you see this as an issue? How would you weigh the negative vs. positive impact of this film? What do you think this film accomplishes?

6. Anthony and Peter have a strong narrative at the opening of the movie. How do you feel about their conversation as they walk the streets of Westwood? What kinds of truths are present in the conversation?

7. What role did anger or hurt play in how the characters treated each other? What about fear?

8. Language (and the lack of it) is seen as an important factor in racial tension in the film. What incidents make use of this?

9. In the promotional commentary the produce invites us to consider three questions whilst watching the film: What this about me? Was this about the person next to me? Was this about the person I don't even want to kow? What do you think? Be honest with yourself, even if you feel unable to discuss your thoughts.

10. Think about your own assumptions. Are they useful? Are they okay? Who do you make eye contact with? Who do you feel safe around? Do our choices reinforce damaging racial or other kinds of stereotypes? Do we react differently to the person who cuts us off in traffic depending on their color, gender, age, or other observation we might make? Do we smile at one stranger and then flinch at the next?

11. What responsibility do we have for interrupting oppression? What are some of the challenges? What are some of the opportunities on this campus and in our communities?