



THE ARMOR *of* LIGHT

ACADEMIC FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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SYNOPSIS OF *The Armor of Light*



Film Running Time: 87 minutes

The Armor of Light follows the journey of an Evangelical minister trying to find the courage to preach about the growing toll of gun violence in America. The film tracks Reverend Rob Schenck, pro-life activist and well-known political conservative, who breaks with orthodoxy by questioning whether being pro-gun is consistent with being pro-life. Reverend Schenck is shocked and perplexed by the reactions of his long-time friends and colleagues who warn him away from this complex, politically explosive issue.

Along the way, Rev. Schenck meets Lucy McBath, the mother of Jordan Davis, an unarmed teenager who was murdered in Florida and whose story has cast a spotlight on "Stand Your Ground" laws. McBath, also a Christian, decides to work with Schenck even though she is pro-choice. Lucy is on a difficult journey of her own, trying to make sense of her devastating loss while using her grief to effect some kind of viable and effective political action—where so many before her have failed.

The Armor of Light follows these unlikely allies through trials of conscience, heartbreak, and rejection, as they bravely attempt to make others consider America's gun culture through a moral lens. The film is also an examination of our fractured political culture, and an assertion that it is, indeed, possible for people to come together across deep party lines to find common ground.

USING THIS FILM *For Class Discussion*

The documentary *The Armor of Light* has relevance for many different academic subjects and disciplines, including American history, sociology, religious studies, political science, peace studies, film theory, and more. Based on your specific area of study, you will likely have ideas about how the film can be utilized as the basis for constructive dialogue among your students. In addition to compiling any desired supplementary resources that apply to your specific focus, consider how you can use open-ended questions, such as the sample questions in this guide, designed to help students think about the way life experiences shape political views and to encourage the exploration of nuance and complexity rather than black-and-white, pro-and-con thinking. Regardless of the lens through which you approach the discussion, the main goal of this guide is to provide a framework to facilitate a thoughtful exchange of views regarding an often polarizing issue.

NOTE: Unlike other discussion guides available at www.ArmorOfLightFilm.com/Downloads, this one does not come with a companion Audience Guide, as it is assumed you will use your discretion about any appropriate supplementary handouts or materials.



TIPS for Facilitating Discussion

Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. But by their very nature, those same topics can also give rise to deep emotions and the expression of strongly held beliefs. The following strategies, among others you may have developed, can be useful in keeping the conversation focused and constructive.

- Set agreements. Productive discussion requires that we not disparage others' opinions or beliefs even if we disagree. Emphasize the need to refrain from attacking or criticizing others and to instead ask questions to deepen understanding of the underpinnings of one another's views. Although you may have already outlined expectations for class discussion at an earlier point in the term, it may be worth going over this briefly and checking in with everyone about whether they have any suggested additions or modifications before discussing this topic. A short list of commonly used agreements includes:
 - Allow people to finish their speaking
 - Speak to one another with respect
 - Listen to understand
 - Share the airtime
 - Respect confidentiality upon request
- If students veer off-course from any classroom guidelines you've set, use "PSA" (Purpose, Slip, Alternative) framework: State the agreement that seems to have been broken and the purpose of that agreement; note what looks like a slip in adhering to the agreement, and check in with the speaker or others as appropriate for confirmation; and offer an alternative way of speaking/engaging that's in keeping with the agreement.
- If the conversation gets especially off-track, consider posing a question as a writing prompt that allows for a period of quiet reflection.



SELECTED FILM CLIPS *and Sample Discussion Questions*

Film Clip: 25:35 - 28:33

SUMMARY:

Rob Schenck gets "hands-on" experience at a shooting range and says, "I can see why people enjoy this sport so much." He also does a mental exercise of imagining the intimidating sound of the bullets in the school room at Sandy Hook, "and that thought wouldn't leave me."

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

The film depicts various ways that life experiences affect the views of Rob Schenck, Lucy McBath, and attorney John Phillips. How have you come to your present views about firearms, safety, and protection? How have personal experience, news accounts, beliefs, or family traditions shaped your views?

Film Clip: 20:50 - 21:56

SUMMARY:

News footage recounts the 2012 shooting incident, in which Michael Dunn fired shots into the car of four unarmed teenagers at a gas station after an argument over the volume of music they were playing and killed 17-year-old Jordan Davis.

Film Clip: 22:46 - 25:34

SUMMARY:

Michael Dunn is indicted for murder and attempted murder. A newscaster discusses "Stand Your Ground" self-defense law in Florida (brought to national attention after the 2012 death of teenager Trayvon Martin, who was shot by George Zimmerman), which allows people to shoot someone they believe is threatening them without having to try to retreat: "There comes a moment in a confrontation when you have the right to pull the trigger, and it is up to citizens to make that judgment."

Lucy McBath notes, "I was one of those people who when I would hear about shootings and gun violence and everything, I would pray for the people, but I never thought it would ever happen to us."

Film Clip: 46:04 - 36:28

SUMMARY:

Lucy McBath says of Stand Your Ground laws, "It's all based upon your *perception*, a perception of fear." "That is the ambiguity, that is the problem with the laws." "How have we gotten so far with the laws that the law doesn't value human life?"

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

How do we legally and morally make judgments about when to take a human life?

Film Clip: 55:34 - 57:48

SUMMARY:

Rob Schenck discusses the political history of U.S. Evangelicals, noting that they tended to identify as pacifists and conscientious objectors until the era of Ronald Reagan's presidency, when they came into the Republican party and became increasingly affiliated with the NRA.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

- 1) Why do you think the Republican party and the NRA have an alliance?
- 2) What role can or should people's religious institutions or positions play in political decisions in our country? Do your views on this change any as you think about a faith tradition that differs from your own?

Film Clip: 17:14 - 1:19:05

SUMMARY:

Shenck preaches about fear and firearms, the 2nd Amendment, and the 2nd Commandment, commenting, "Brothers and sisters, Fox News and the NRA are not spiritual authorities. I'm concerned about the NRA promoting the idea that the best way to solve the most vexing problems in our society is to be prepared to shoot people dead. That doesn't sit well with me as a Christian moral vision."

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

- 1) What tools of rhetoric does Reverend Schenck use, here and elsewhere in the film, as he tries to encourage others to consider his way of thinking? What was more persuasive or less persuasive to you and why?
- 2) What role does fear play in people's beliefs about firearms? What changes could be made in your community or on a larger scale that would help more people feel more secure?

Film Clip: 1:02 - 1:07:22

SUMMARY:

Rob Schenck meets with fellow pro-life activists and questions whether being "very pro-gun, pro-2nd Amendment" is a "pro-life ethic." The meeting quickly turns heated, with Troy Newman, president of Operation Rescue, countering that "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." Disagreement ensues about whether the government should have a role in ensuring training for gun owners on operating a firearm. Rob Schenck comments that "it gets harder to reconcile these two conflicting positions of being pro-life and what I'm going to call pro-gun. There is a certain irreconcilable difference between these two positions, and yet we're trying to hold them together like two opposing magnets, and they're not fitting well."

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

- 1) Do you see a conflict between "pro-life" and "pro-gun" beliefs? Why or why not?
- 2) Discuss Troy Newman's assertion that "An armed state is a polite state."

Film Clip: 1:00 - 1:01:33

SUMMARY:

Schenck visits New Antioch Baptist Church in Baltimore, where African American congregants share thoughts on faith, race, and gun violence. Schenck comments: "And of course you can't ignore the racial dimensions to this whole subject. It's the giant elephant in the room that must be addressed. These questions divide black Bible-believing, spirit-filled Christian believers from white spirit-filled Christian believers. That division should not exist. But it does."

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What contributes to the racial divide Schenck refers to?

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT:

How has race intersected with attitudes toward guns in the United States from slavery through modern times?

Film Clip: 28:34 - 31:15

SUMMARY:

Rob Schenck attends an NRA event, where NRA representatives talk about "good Americans with guns" and freedom: "All we believe in and fight for has become a metaphor for the core American freedoms that we all want preserved." "There is no greater freedom...than the right to survive, to protect our families with all the rifles and handguns that we want." Schenck reflects on evangelicals' support of the NRA and the NRA's role in the national conversation and in the church. He also observes, "One of the great philosophical conundrums is can bad people do good things, and can good people do bad things? So can good people come together and yet contribute to bad outcomes? Of course. Of course. And we should all be ready to accept that about ourselves, and ask that question of ourselves, no matter who we are."

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

- 1) How is the 2nd Amendment associated with the concept of freedom?
- 2) How does terminology surrounding the issue, such as "gun control," "gun rights," and "pro-gun," affect the debate at large? How do the terms that people put on this debate accurately or inaccurately describe your positions? What would accurately describe them?

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT:

Research the history of the NRA. What was its original mission? When and why did it previously help promote gun control legislation? How and why has it evolved?

OVERALL *Reflections*

What questions do you have for those who see this differently? Think about how you can phrase your question as genuine with the intent to understand, rather than purely an attempt to persuade.

Can you identify any shared values between different perspectives that have been expressed or implied?

There are a lot of different voices and disparate views on this topic. The unlikely alliance between Lucy and Rob illustrates the potential for people to come together across deep party lines to find common ground. What do you see as possible in bridging divides on this issue?

How, if at all, has the film or discussion changed or broadened your perception of this topic?



EVENT *Feedback*

Thank you for facilitating dialogue about this film and the issues raised by it. The production team for *The Armor of Light* is working to bring discussions of the film to diverse audiences around the country, including those in classroom settings. As soon as possible after teaching this module, please provide feedback on your experience: You can either fill out the discussion facilitator feedback form on the following page, scan it, and email it to Outreach@ArmorOfLightFilm.com, or you can fill it out online:

Visit ArmorOfLightFilm.com/Event-Feedback.



EVENT FEEDBACK *Form*

Thank you for hosting a screening and discussion. Please tell us about it so we can help others doing the same! (We may share some of your comments anonymously on our site.)

Name: _____

Email: _____

Date of Your Event: _____ City: _____ State: _____

Name of sponsoring organization/institution, if applicable: _____

Tell us whether your discussion was general/secular, faith-based, or academic, and a bit about the demographics of your group (e.g. ratio of men & women, age range, race, religious affiliation).

What made this event worthwhile?

What was less satisfying or could use improvement?

What would you say to other discussion facilitators to help them have a successful screening and discussion?

Have a photo from your event? Please share it with us!

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