

Prairie Christian Academy Media Permission Form

Class: CALM 20 Teacher: M. Robertson

Name of Movie: The Pursuit of Happyness Rating: PG-13

Learning outcomes to be accomplished through this film:

Students will apply an understanding of the emotional/psychological, intellectual, social, spiritual, & physical dimensions of health - and the dynamic interplay of these factors - in managing personal well-being.

Content review of film is attached:

Section of movie to be viewed (if a clip rather than the entire film):

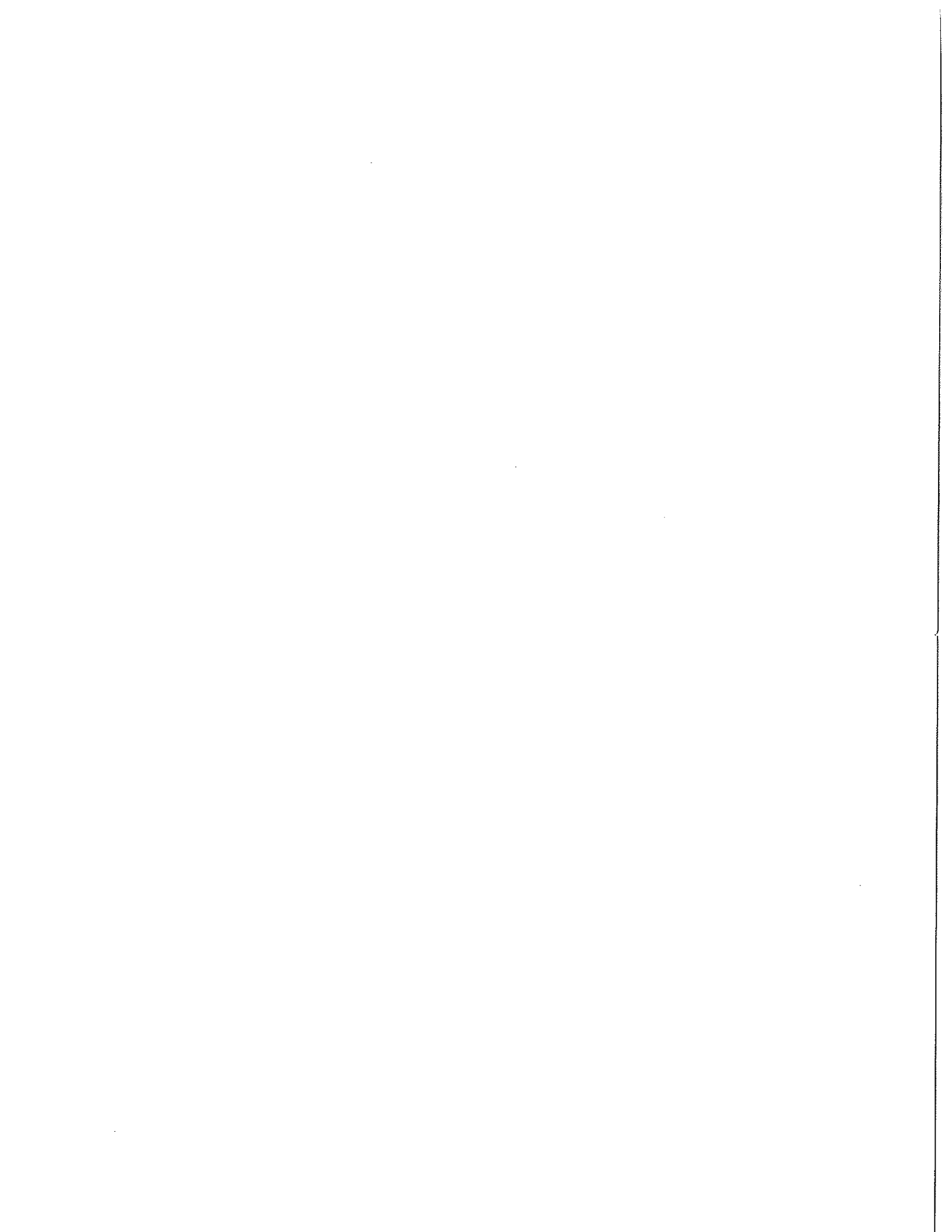
Potential concerns in this section:

We will be discussing the protagonist's choices and reactions to the stress(es) he faces. Language will be edited manually.

Teacher's Signature: Michael Robertson

Principal's Signature: [Signature]

Parent's Signature: _____



Video Reviews



The Pursuit of Happiness

"I met my father for the first time when I was 28 years old. When I had children, my children were going to know who their father was." So vows Chris Gardner, an earnest salesman and father desperately struggling to make ends meet the hard streets of San Francisco in the early 1980s. But his chosen vocation, peddling expensive bone-density scans that most physicians don't want, has left him and those he loves hovering on the brink of disaster.

Day after unsuccessful day, Chris comes home to his dispirited girlfriend, Linda, and their 5-year-old son, Christopher. Linda pulls double shifts to stay w/ striking distance of solvency, all the while chastising Chris for his failure to provide. Predictably, she doesn't think much of his latest brainstorm: securing an internship at the stock brokerage firm Dean Witter. Linda's bitterness and negativity may wear on Chris, but they can't dampen the weary salesman's deli in his son. Christopher is the apple of Daddy's eye.

Then Linda leaves Chris (and their son) for a job in New York. She's barely out the door when Chris learns he's been offered the coveted internship. The catch? It's unpaid. Despite the financial risk, Chris decides to go for it, frantically juggling his schedule to get Christopher to and from day care each day. dwindling savings quickly result in an eviction from their apartment. And then another from a motel. Soon, father and son are homeless, staying in city shelters on good nights and in public restrooms on the worst.

As his desperation mounts, Chris clings tenaciously to the hope that his hard work will eventually pay off. And his dogged pursuit of a better life forges a powerful father-son bond that no misfortune can destroy.

POSITIVE ELEMENTS

"You're a good papa." Those tenderhearted words from Christopher to his father as they spend the night in a homeless shelter poignantly capture the essence of *The Pursuit of Happiness*. Chris isn't perfect, but one emotional scene after another clearly demonstrate his drive to protect and provide for his son.

Physical affection (hugs and kisses) and heartfelt moments mark their relationship. Chris repeatedly asks Christopher to trust him, and Dad proves that he's worthy of that trust. When Linda threatens to leave, Chris demands that their son stay with him. He knows he'll be a better parent than she would be—a reality to which Linda grudgingly acquiesces. Later, Christopher asks his dad, "Did mom leave because of me?" Chris responds, "Mom left because of me. And you didn't have anything to do with that."

Actively concerned about his son's education and mental development, Chris gets upset when he learns that Christopher's day care provider, Mrs. Chew, lets the kids watch *Bonanza* and *Love Boat*. Chris teaches his son word meanings, such as the difference between *probably* and *possibly*, and the fact that *happiness* is misspelled on his day care's sign. (It's mistakenly spelled with a "y"; the film's title intentionally follows suit.)

Chris encourages his boy to make a birthday wish-list, then gets him a basketball as a present. And one of the film's most powerful scenes comes when Christopher is trying to shoot hoops with his new ball. After a strong-but-errant shot, Dad critically informs him, "You'll excel at a lot of things, but not [basketball]," perhaps projecting his own experience onto his son. Christopher immediately lives down to Dad's low expectations and takes a weak shot. Noticing his son's downcast countenance, Chris realizes his error and rectifies the situation, saying, "Don't ever let somebody tell you you can't do something. Not even me. All right? You got a dream? You gotta protect it. People can't do something themselves, they want to tell you you can't do it. You want something, go get it. Period."

A harrowing night of homelessness finds the pair killing time at a deserted Bay Area Rapid Transit stop. Father and son imagine that Dad's bone-density machine is actually a time-travel device that takes them back to the time of the dinosaurs. Christopher gleefully joins in the make-believe game as they flee from a T-Rex into a "cave"—a public restroom where they spend the night. Dad holds the door shut with his foot, and tears stream down his face as he watches his innocent son sleep on his lap.

In addition to such a strong father-son relationship, *The Pursuit of Happiness* also presents the American Dream as an achievable reality. It begins when Chris asks a Dean Witter broker (who he sees getting out of a bright-red Ferrari) what's needed to do the job. The answer he gets back is this: "You've got to be good with numbers and good with people." Chris believes he has those skills and aggressively pursues executives at Dean Witter once he discovers internships are available.

He hounds his first contact, Jay Twistle, until the man pays attention to him. Several other people at Dean Witter give Chris chances to prove himself, though they aren't really duty-bound to do so. And even though he's virtually broke, Chris gives \$5 to one of his rich superiors so he can pay for cab fare. Later, Chris misses an appointment with an executive (for reasons beyond his control), and goes to the man's house to apologize. The exec, Walter Ribb in turn, kindly invites Chris and Christopher to share his skybox at a 49ers game.

A "live" TV clip of President Ronald Reagan includes the exhortation, "We've got to face the truth, and we've got to work to turn things around." Chris does that, and much, much more.

SPIRITUAL CONTENT

Chris and his son stay at a shelter that offers a gospel-oriented church service. A choir sings, "You promised you'd meet me at the altar of prayer!... Lord, please move that mountain." Other lyrics insist, "I won't give up," and include the line, "Hello, Jesus."

Christopher tells his dad a joke about a drowning man who kept praying for God to save him. The man refuses the help of two boats that come by, insisting that God will answer his prayer. After he dies and asks God why He didn't save him, God tells him, "I sent you two big boats, you dummy."

SEXUAL CONTENT

We see Linda in a bra and slip as she gets dressed for work. She's also seen in a camisole. Two scenes show Chris and Linda (who are unmarried but living together) in bed (without any sexual activity). A brief shower shot shows Chris' shoulders.

VIOLENT CONTENT

Sprinting across a busy San Francisco street, Chris gets hit by a car. He breaks the windshield then is thrown roughly to the concrete (yet avoids major injury). Linda hits Chris several times in anger; he in turn grabs her arm firmly. Twice, Chris shakes his son in moments of extreme frustration, but manages to exercise enough restraint not to hurt Christopher. Chris gets into a scuffle with another homeless guy who cut in front of him at the shelter. (Their conflict is broken up before it can turn into a full-on fight.)

CRUDE OR PROFANE LANGUAGE

A spray-painted f-word mars the slogan of Christopher's day care ("Joy. Fun. Happyness"). As Chris explains the misspelling of *happiness*, Christopher asks, "Is f--- spelled right?" Chris tells his son that's not a word he's supposed to learn, and that it's not part of the school's motto. Other profanity includes two-and-a-half s-words and a handful each of the words "h---," "d--n," "a--" and "b--ch."

DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONTENT

Linda smokes cigarettes.

OTHER NEGATIVE ELEMENTS

Chris is not by nature a deceptive person. But several times he lies in front of his son (who recognizes the deception) to keep others from realizing how desperate his situation really is. And when he's unfairly left to pay a cab fare he doesn't have the money for, he flees. (The infuriated cabbie chases him, swearing and yelling threats.)

Chris' lack of funds means he's perpetually evading angry landlords who want back-rent from him. He always tells them he'll get the money, but is never able to make good on that promise. Someone paints "Dear Chris, U suck" on the wall of his apartment. An internship administrator treats him like an on-call servant, asking him to do all kinds of favors (such as getting doughnuts, moving his car, etc.). After the IRS garnishes \$600 in back taxes from his bank account, Chris loses his cool and angrily demands that a friend pay back \$14 that he owes him (as his son looks on).

Christopher dances around in his underwear in two scenes.

CONCLUSION

Inspirational isn't a word I would normally choose to describe a great movie, as it conjures up connotations of something sappy or overly sentimental. Nevertheless, I think that's the word that best captures Will Smith's powerful portrayal of real-life father and pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps worker Cf Gardner.

As a new father myself, I'm hard put to think of any movie I've ever seen that inspires me more to be a good dad than this one does. Days after seeing it, memories of certain scenes continue to challenge me in my own occasional moments of laziness or self-absorption. Suffice it to say that self-pity and lack of initiative are two character traits Mr. Gardner simply does *not* exhibit, no matter how bleak things get for him and his son. Instead, he elevates Christopher's needs above his own over and over again. He can't always change their awful circumstances, but Chris does everything within his power to meet his son's physical and emotional needs, and to protect him. Nothing can deter this loving papa from lavishing affection and tenderness upon his son.

Director Gabriele Muccino says of this precious father-son relationship, "The movie plays like a love story. But in this case we don't have a woman and a man meeting each other. Instead, we have a father and son walking together through life. Their relationship is very strong, very powerful. ... Chris endures the unimaginable and still makes sure that not even the worst moments will have a bad effect on his son's life." The chemistry between the pair onscreen no doubt enhanced by the fact that Will Smith's son, Jaden, portrays Christopher.

Only a few negative elements (noted above) and the film's occasional use of realistic, street-level vulgarities let it down. I've certainly seen PG-13 films with more language problems, but there's still enough here (20-plus) to give discerning moviegoers pause. What won't trip them up—and might even breathe new life into their own relationships—is Chris Gardner's powerful, passionate pursuit of the best life possible for his little boy.

MPAA RATING
PG13
GENRE
Drama
CAST