

PARENTS GUIDE TO

movie messages: *The Iron Giant*

Seek and find worldviews
while having fun as a family

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®



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The Iron Giant

BY **PLUGGED IN STAFF**
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
DANNY SCHLITZ

The entertainment industry bombards us with obvious and subtle messages. But we often don't recognize them as worldviews or notice how they skew our thinking. To help you and your family identify varying worldviews in the culture, play this game of Movie Messages while watching the animated film *The Iron Giant*.

Note: For young children who aren't ready to play this game, you can introduce them to worldview training with a casual mention such as, "That's Christianity. That's what we believe. God loves us and sent His Son to die for our sins."





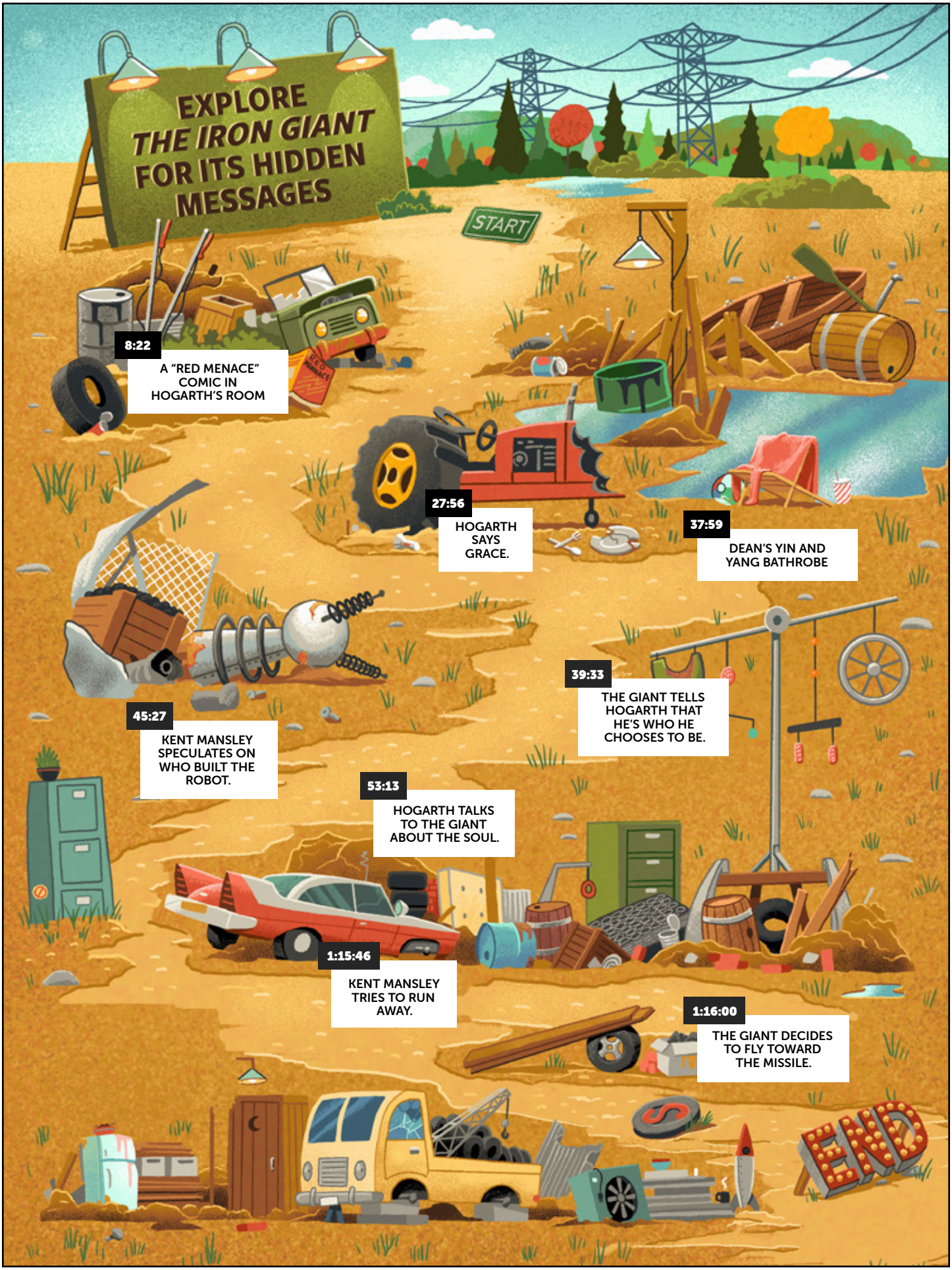
Directions:

1. Give every player a set of 10 worldview cards.
2. Watch *The Iron Giant* until you reach an incident on the game board. Then pause the movie.
3. Each player chooses a card that matches the worldview identified in the movie and places it facedown. Then players turn over their cards to reveal their answers.
4. The correct cards are removed from play. The cards deemed incorrect are returned to each player, and the movie continues.
5. This game doesn't cover every worldview in this movie. Players who have guessed wrong can catch up by calling out the correct worldview if it comes up again in the movie. (This can only be done with worldview cards that have been removed from play.)
6. The first player to get rid of his or her eight cards is the winner.

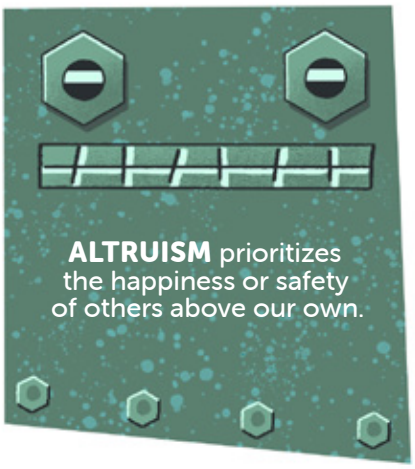
*The **Evolution** and **Humanism** cards are not part of this movie's game board. If someone plays the Evolution card and wants additional information, read Genesis 1:20-28, where God creates animals and humans. If someone plays the Humanism card and wants additional information, read Acts 5:29, where Peter and the apostles remind us that "we must obey God rather than men."

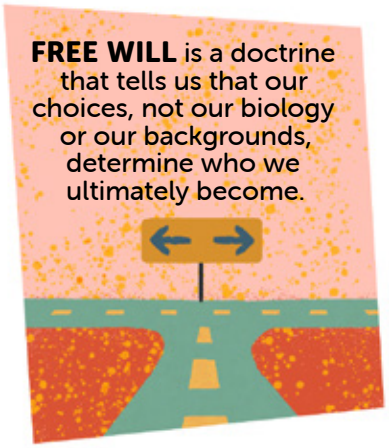
Be sure to first check out *Plugged In*'s review of *The Iron Giant* to make sure it's right for your family.
FocusOnTheFamily.com/IronGiant

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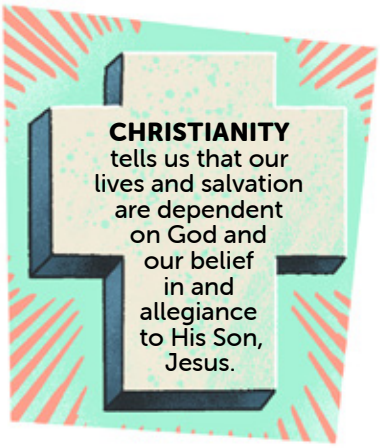
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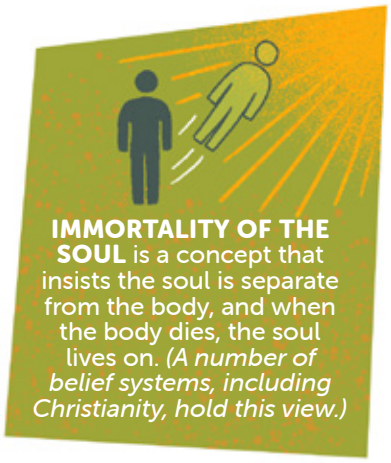


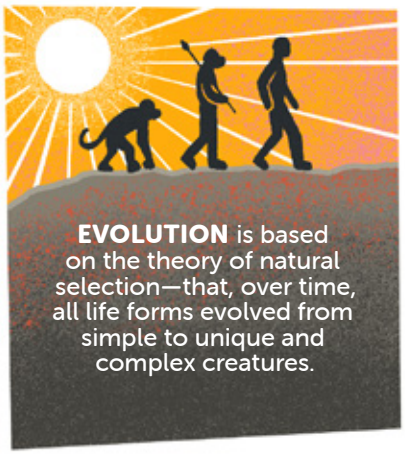


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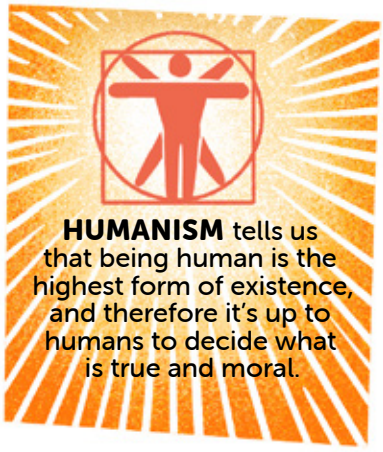
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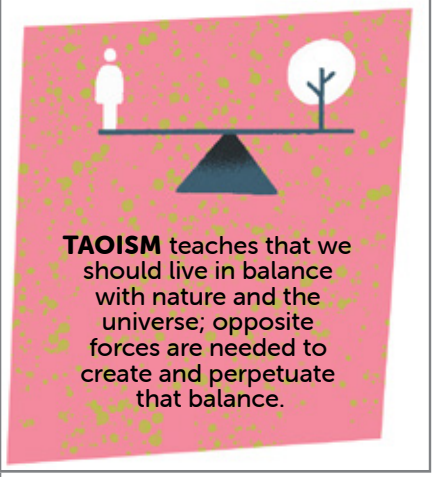














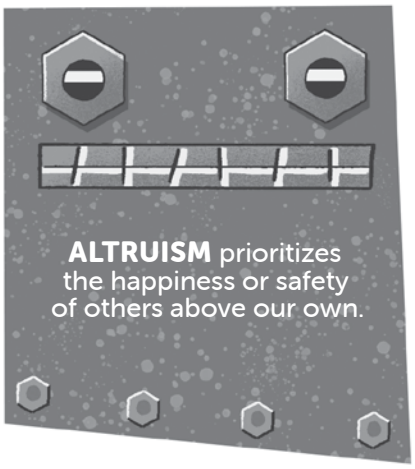


MOVIE REVIEWS

For a review of *The Iron Giant* and other titles, visit **PluggedIn.com**, Focus on the Family's media review and discernment website.

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ALTRUISM prioritizes the happiness or safety of others above our own.

FREE WILL is a doctrine that tells us that our choices, not our biology or our backgrounds, determine who we ultimately become.



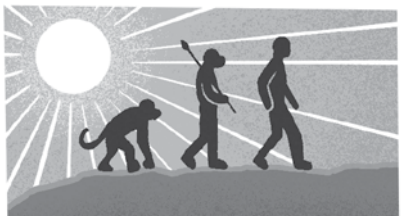
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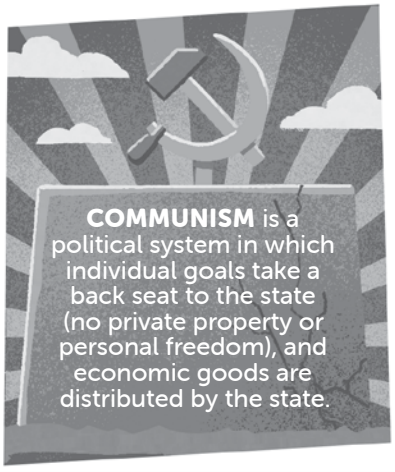
CHRISTIANITY tells us that our lives and salvation are dependent on God and our belief in and allegiance to His Son, Jesus.



IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL is a concept that insists the soul is separate from the body, and when the body dies, the soul lives on. *(A number of belief systems, including Christianity, hold this view.)*



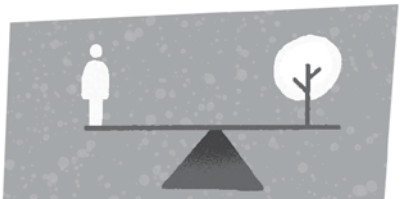
EVOLUTION is based on the theory of natural selection—that, over time, all life forms evolved from simple to unique and complex creatures.



COMMUNISM is a political system in which individual goals take a back seat to the state (no private property or personal freedom), and economic goods are distributed by the state.



HUMANISM tells us that being human is the highest form of existence, and therefore it's up to humans to decide what is true and moral.



TAOISM teaches that we should live in balance with nature and the universe; opposite forces are needed to create and perpetuate that balance.



ETHICAL EGOISM tells us that we should always act in our own self-interest.



JINGOISM is extreme patriotism that aggressively promotes warlike measures.

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movie messages: *The Iron Giant*

Movie stop 8:22

Hogarth Hughes is in his room and gets ready to protect his little corner of America from what he assumes might be invaders. As he grabs his equipment, we see a "Red Menace" comic book.

What it is: Communism

Kids and teens obviously haven't experienced the Cold War world in which Hogarth grows up. (The story takes place in 1957.) But back then, communism—especially the brand of communism the Soviet Union represented at the time—was seen as a massive threat to the ideals of the United States and our way of life. Communists didn't just want to do away with private property, they also wanted to ban our most cherished freedoms, including free speech and religion. This isn't the first reference to communism in *The Iron Giant*. Throughout the movie, you can hear and see references to the communist Soviet Union and the fear it sparks in Hogarth's hometown of Rockwell, Maine.

Read: Psalm 14:1-2

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God."

How to talk with tweens and teens

Many verses in the Bible talk about sharing what we have with others, but that's a vastly different message from what communism pushes. In this man-made philosophy, the *state* is set up as a god, and communists reject the notion of the one true God. The citizens of Rockwell were right to be wary of the "red menace." But it's never good to live in fear, which can make us do crazy and sometimes downright bad things.

What to say to young children

In the movie, many people were afraid of a lot of things—from big metal robots to the countries or planets that might have sent them. What are you afraid of? What do you do when you're scared? Remember that the Bible tells us that whoever trusts God has nothing to be afraid of. *These words are based on Proverbs 29:25.*

Movie stop 27:56

Hogarth's mom, Annie, asks Hogarth to say a prayer before they eat. But Hogarth—distracted by the huge metal hand poking through the house and doing his best to keep it a secret—offers up one of the most unusual prayers that Annie has ever heard.

What it is: Christianity

Annie is raising Hogarth as a Christian, and he seems to know at least some elements of the religion—expressing faith in an all-powerful Creator and name-checking Satan a couple of times. But as is often the case with us, Hogarth can't seem to keep his mind on the prayer; he's focused on the big problem inside his own house.

Read: Matthew 6:7

"When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words."

How to talk with tweens and teens

Hogarth's prayer during *The Iron Giant* doesn't seem sincere. While played for laughs, his prayer probably isn't all that different from how we pray sometimes. We can be distracted when we pray, and we may use "empty phrases" instead of telling God our innermost thoughts and feelings, as well as our hopes and fears. We can pray sometimes as if no one is actually listening. It's important to remember that God hears our prayers and that prayer is perhaps the most important thing we do all day.

What to say to young children

When you talk to God, what do you tell Him? Why do you think it's important to pray? Is Hogarth really praying to God at the dinner table? Do you think he should pray for help in dealing with the iron giant? *These words are based on Philippians 4:6.*

Movie stop 37:59

Hogarth goes to the McCoppin Scrap Heap to see if his friend Dean might be able to keep the giant there for a while. When Dean answers the door, we can see a black-and-white-circle symbol on the back of his bathrobe.

What it is: Taoism

This circle is the symbol for yin and yang, and it's designed to illustrate the ideal balance between two opposite forces, such as light and dark, cold and hot, and male and female. While the idea of yin and yang isn't exclusively a Taoist one, it's most closely associated with the Taoist religion, which was founded in China about 500 years before the birth of Christ. Taoists believe that we should ideally live our lives in balance, like that yin-yang symbol. Taoism also suggests that stuff we define as good or bad is often artificial; it's all just part of the yin-yang balance of the universe. Values and morals are relative.

Read: Isaiah 5:20

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

How to talk with tweens and teens

The fact that Dean wears a bathrobe with a yin-yang symbol on it doesn't mean he's a Taoist. He's a 1957 beatnik (hipster), and at this time, the symbol is gaining traction with folks who are questioning the traditional values of the age. Dean might embrace some of the *feelings* associated with the symbol and probably sees himself as a hip, easygoing counterpoint to Rockwell's rigid, traditional vibe. Christians also see a balance in many things, but Christianity doesn't promote moral relativism. In the end, Dean is no moral relativist either. He has some very strong ideas about what's good and bad. Dean's use of the symbol reminds us that we should always be careful about co-opting popular images or symbols without knowing what they stand for.

What to say to young children

What kinds of opposites do you run across in your daily life? (Parents, you can make this into a game by offering up one opposite and having your child say the other. For example: "The opposite of *day* is . . . ," or "The opposite of *hot* is . . . "). What's the opposite of good? The Bible tells us to always do good and to stay away from evil. How do the characters in the movie do that? *These words are based on Romans 12:21.*

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movie messages: *The Iron Giant*

Movie stop 39:33

Dean tells Hogarth not to worry about what the other kids in school think about him. "Who cares what those creeps think?" he says. "You are who you choose to be."

What it is: Free will

The statement "You are who you choose to be" sums up the most important theme in *The Iron Giant*. That theme runs counter to another important worldview: determinism. Determinists would tell you that we're all products of our programming. Our biology and DNA tell us what we're going to be in the future, and our choices are predetermined. The giant is literally a product of that programming. He was designed, at least in large part, to be a weapon. And when the giant's eyes narrow and turn red, he's defaulting to his original programming. But Hogarth tells the giant that he has a choice: "You don't have to be a gun. You are who you choose to be."

Read: Mark 8:34

"Calling the crowd to him with his disciples, [Jesus] said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' "

How to talk with tweens and teens

Many verses in the Bible, including the one we just read in Mark, confirm the idea of free will. We, like the iron giant, are who we *choose* to be. And while not everyone who believes in free will is a Christian, the concept of free will is a critical part of Christianity. God gave us free will so that we could freely choose to follow Him and do what's right. Like the giant, we often default to our original programming—our own fallen natures. While it's true that we have free will, we're called as followers of Christ to become who He created us to be. God designed us to be better than we often are, but our sin messed with our programming. Our sin corrupts us, just as it corrupts everything around us. We live in a broken world, but every day, we have a choice to do better—to choose who we want to be. God designed us to be better not by our own effort but through His power at work in us. That is the balance between free will and living in dependence on Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

What to say to young children

Just like Hogarth, you choose every day what sort of person you're going to be. You can do good things or bad things. Is it sometimes hard to choose to do good? Can you think of a time when you chose to do something good instead of something bad? Or a time when you chose to do bad over something good? How does God help you to make good choices? *These words are based on Proverbs 16:9 and Philippians 4:13.*

Movie stop 45:27

Government agent Kent Mansley buys Hogarth an ice-cream shake and tells him why the giant poses such a danger. "Everyone wants what we have, Hogarth. Everyone! You think this metal man is fun. But who built it? The Russians? The Chinese? The Martians? Canadians? I don't care. . . . We didn't build it, and that's reason enough to assume the worst and blow it to kingdom come!"

What it is: Jingoism

We see plenty of people who love their country in *The Iron Giant*, but Kent takes that love in a bad direction. His fear of other countries (or perhaps alien civilizations) makes him want to destroy the giant immediately—to shoot first and ask questions later, as the old adage goes. He assumes the worst without really knowing anything.

Read: Ecclesiastes 10:13-14 (NLT)

"Fools base their thoughts on foolish assumptions, so their conclusions will be wicked madness; they chatter on and on."

How to talk with tweens and teens

Jingoism is always a danger in our society. Patriots love their country, and nationalists will always prioritize the needs of their country over others. But jingoists take it one step further and turn that love into something extreme and dangerous. Yet it's not just politicians or generals or folks like Kent who can fall into the trap of making unwise assumptions. We can do the same thing. We can assume that a teacher has it out for us when that might not be the case at all. We can assume that someone hates us, when in truth he might just be shy or awkward. When we jump to the worst sorts of assumptions, it can cause us to lash out and make some unwise choices. It's always good to back up feelings with facts—to not assume the worst of anything or anyone, whether it's another country or the guy two lockers down.

What to say to young children

Sometimes we can think that people want to hurt us by making us do things we don't want to do. You've probably gotten angry at your mom and dad for making you clean your room or eat your veggies. But parents aren't trying to make you miserable. There's a reason behind their rules, and often those rules are there to protect you from harm or help you learn a valuable life skill. When you think something's not right or fair, don't lash out like Kent. Instead, think about why the rules are there in the first place. *These words are based on Hebrews 13:17.*

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movie messages: *The Iron Giant*

Movie stop 53:13

The iron giant is troubled after hunters kill a deer. He doesn't understand the concept of death, so Hogarth tries to explain it to him. He also talks about the concept of the soul and tells the giant, "Mom says it's something inside of all good things, and that it goes on forever and ever."

What it is: Immortality of the soul

Hogarth expresses an idea—which Christianity and many other faiths share—that we are more than just biological constructs. Something beyond scientific understanding exists in us, makes us who we are and goes on after we die. But Hogarth's simple explanation of the soul hides some complex thoughts. Some of them are compatible with Christianity, but others are a bit more problematic, which we'll unpack next.

Read: Matthew 10:28

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

How to talk with tweens and teens

Christianity, along with other belief systems, teaches that we have a soul, and that after we die, a part of us lives on. The idea that death isn't the end of life is an important worldview. But Hogarth's mother has taught Hogarth that souls are inside "all good things"—and that's not what Scripture teaches. Our afterlife isn't based on whether we do good or bad things, because our sin has made us inherently bad. Rather, it's based on whether we accept Christ as our Savior, because He washes away all of our sins.

Hogarth also tries to puzzle out whether the iron giant has a soul, and he concludes that the giant does. "You're made of metal, but you have feelings," Hogarth thinks aloud. "And you think about things. And that means you have a soul."

Only God can truly create life, and thus He's the only one who can truly create a soul. The idea of what constitutes life is an especially interesting one today as artificial intelligence is advancing. But an orthodox understanding of Christianity tells us that the giant—as wonderful as he might be—wouldn't live on without being physically rebuilt and rebooted.

What to say to young children

The iron giant is a very nice robot, but he will always be a robot. He probably couldn't go to heaven like you could. But unlike us, he can be rebuilt. *These words are based on Deuteronomy 10:12 and Ecclesiastes 12:7.*

Movie stop 1:15:46

Thanks to Kent Mansley, a nuclear missile is hurtling toward the town of Rockwell. The general says that because of Kent's actions, they're all going to die "for our country." Kent has an immediate change of heart and tries to leave town. Never mind the country. "I want to live!" he says.

What it is: Ethical egoism

Throughout most of the movie, Kent has been masquerading as someone who's looking out only for the good of the United States. He even tells someone that "I can do anything I want, whenever I want if I feel it's in the people's best interest." But in this scene, he reveals his true nature. He still feels he can do anything he wants whenever he wants, but the people's best interest was merely an excuse to pursue his own desires and goals.

Read: Philippians 2:4

"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

How to talk with tweens and teens

Kent's ethical egoism—the idea that our decisions should be based on self-interest—is the antithesis of Christian thought, where we're called to care for others as we would care for ourselves (Matthew 7:12). But often we're more like Kent than we'd like to admit. We pretend we're looking out for the good of others when in reality we're really justifying (or at least partly justifying) our own selfishness. Sometimes it can be a little bit of both. We might offer to make dinner—just to make our favorite food. Or we might join a study group to, yeah, study—but also be closer to a crush. People are complicated, and sometimes it's only during a crisis, like the one Kent experienced, that our real motives become clear, even to ourselves. Have you ever thought you were acting in someone else's best interest, when you were actually, at least in part, acting a little bit selfishly?

What to say to young children

You've probably never tried to escape a nuclear missile, but have you ever made a selfish decision? When? There's nothing wrong with doing something you want to do, but the Bible tells us to always look out for the needs and interests of other people, too. *These words are based on 1 Corinthians 10:24.*

Movie stop 1:16:00

Nothing can save the people of Rockwell from the nuclear-missile strike Kent ordered. Nothing except . . . the iron giant. And that's what he does—blasting into the sky to intercept the missile, even though he and everyone else knows it'll likely be the end of him. He thinks of Hogarth's words. "You are who you choose to be." And who did he want to be? His last words are "Superman."

What it is: Altruism

Many have compared *The Iron Giant*'s ultimate message to Christ's own sacrifice on the Cross, giving up His life so that we might live. Though not synonymous with Christianity, altruism goes hand in glove with its teachings. It also runs in complete opposition to Kent's selfish reaction just a minute before.

Read: John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

How to talk with tweens and teens

The movie suggests that the iron giant has a soul. By now we've learned that's not true. And yet, with his final sacrifice, the giant's actions are more in keeping with Jesus' teachings and example than Kent's. Do you think that most humans are more like the iron giant or Kent? Why do people not act as altruistically as they could or should?

What to say to young children

Have you ever made a sacrifice for a friend or family member? Or even a stranger? How did that make you feel? Why do you think God asks us to sacrifice for one another? *These words are based on John 15:13.*

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