



A STEVE TAYLOR FILM

BLUE LIKE JAZZ

HIGH SCHOOL DISCUSSION GUIDE
BY STEVE CASE

INTRODUCTION

Blue Like Jazz is a movie that tells the story of one person's search to discover God for himself. It is a story that involves doubt, insecurity, bad behavior, questioning and an honest look at what it takes to have a faith of your own, not merely one that you inherit from family or a church community.

And as difficult as it can be to see people we love struggle, we know that it is through struggle, though asking honest questions and wrestling with things ourselves that we find what it is we truly believe. There are great studies about the role of doubt in forming peoples' faith (see the Fuller Youth Institute Sticky Faith project for one example: [Click here](http://stickyfaith.org) to go to <http://stickyfaith.org>), and we hope that this discussion guide about the stories told in *Blue Like Jazz* will be a help to engage the teenagers in your group (and their parents) to work on their questions and doubts together, and know that they are not alone, swirling in the blue without someone to grab hold of them.

So check out the options for food, games / activities and discussion in this guide, and let us know how this has helped or affected your group.



GROUP ACTIVITIES

Option 1

Download copies of the *Blue Like Jazz* poster Here: <http://bluelikejazzthemovie.com/downloads> and cut these into jigsaw puzzles. Each puzzle will need to be different but with the same number of pieces. Place the pieces to the puzzles in envelopes. Break your group into teams and give each team an envelope. PRIOR to the meeting, place one piece from each puzzle in the

wrong envelope. The only way students will be able to complete the puzzle is to find the missing piece and share their extra piece with another group.



Option 2

Set up an obstacle course for your students. Break them into teams and explain that they are to make their way through the course. Then hand each player a full suitcase. NOTE: When you set up the course make sure the last obstacle is a crawlspace through which the suitcase will not fit. They must leave the suitcase behind in order to cross the finish line. After the game talk about how we all tend to carry our baggage around with us wherever we go and we must learn to let go or it will drag us down.

Option 3

Below are two lists. One is the list of bumper stickers from Pastor Kenny's car, and the other is a list of the stickers from the car Don first encounters at Reed College. After showing the group the lists...have each person create their own sticker that sums up their own personal theology or philosophy of life.

Pastor Kenny's Car

Stop Drop and Roll won't work in hell
Jesus is my designated driver
God recycles. He made YOU out of dust.
When God seems far away, who moved?

Reed College Car

Abstinence makes the church grow fondlers

I found Jesus. He's drunk in my backseat.
Another brilliant mind ruined by education.
We Will Not Obey
Earth: Not Machine Washable

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The questions are set up in the same way that the film describes the elements of Story: **Setting. Conflict. Climax. Resolution.** You may want to explain these to the group, or set up poster board with each element listed.

SETTING

The youth pastor at Don's church tells him not to get brainwashed by the Baptist college because its gotten "way more liberal." Without repeating something you heard on the news or from your parents...what is a liberal and what is a conservative? What is brainwashing? Do you think it happens in school? In churches?

How does your church take communion? Do the "elements" of communion matter? Congregations have raged at each other over the whole grape juice or wine issue - do you think it matters? Jesus used leftovers from the Passover feast. Imagine it's not just your first communion but "THE" first communion. What elements would you use?



Is the lock-in at Don's church like yours? How? If not, how is yours different?

Why do you think Don's friend Jordan lied about the party?



“STUFF” DON’S DAD SAYS:

“A brain like that, working for a church?”

- Do people tend to equate atheism with intelligence or faith with stupidity? Explain.

“You only hang out with those people because you are afraid to hang out with people who don’t.”

- Who are “those people” who are the “people who don’t.” Name some examples of each.

“Write your own d@%n story. Be a writer, but go somewhere where they don’t hand you the script and tell you to copy it.”

- What is he trying to say about Don’s choice of college?
- Have you ever been looked down on or criticized for your beliefs?

What was the biggest culture shock you ever had?

The Dean of Student Affairs says...“the human dilemma must be experienced.” What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree? Give an example.

All of life is made up of our stories. If every story is made up of SETTING, CONFLICT, CLIMAX, RESOLUTION then we repeat these over and over again. Where are you right now? What was your most recent RESOLUTION?

Which story element represents your current relationship with God?

Don’s dad says, “Life is like jazz...it doesn’t resolve.” What stories in your life are you currently waiting for a resolution?

What is Don learning by asking questions he never would have thought of at home in Texas?

CONFLICT

Is there significance to the giant web made out of rope on campus?

What do you think Don’s biggest Conflict was?

Penny says, “I wasn’t born a Christian.” Are we born into the faith? How hard is it to ask questions in your church?

Penny asks Don “Are you going to turn me in?” Talk about a situation in which you would be embarrassed if those around you knew you were Christian.

Why does Don dump all of his “armor” in the church?

How many times has God had to send you a message before you got it?

What do you believe about the Bible? Who taught you your beliefs? What ideas have you come to on your own?

The atheist debater in the bookstore says, “The universe doesn’t owe us meaning?” Do you agree? What does that mean? What about Don’s question, “Where do we find meaning?” How would you have answered Don? What questions would you have asked the debaters?





CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Don engages in civil disobedience (for credit) with Penny, Lauryn and others at Reed. They are trying to bring attention to things that they care about. Churches have done this for centuries. Did you know:

- The Boston Tea Party were a group of Christians from the Congregationalist tradition. (They also stole the Liberty Bell and buried it under a church so the British couldn't get it.)
 - The church fought for the slaves aboard the Amistad and for the abolition of slavery.
 - The church had an active role in the Women's Suffrage movement and the Civil Rights movement.
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- *How has the world changed through the civil disobedience of the church?*
 - *Do you think the church still plays a role in social issues? How?*
 - *Is civil disobedience Christian?*

CLIMAX

Do you have any life experience that can compare to the Renn Fayre party?

The pope says that people seem almost visibly comforted when they see him (the pope) walking toward them. Why do you think that is? Do you think people feel comforted or anxious by Christians? Why?

Think about the "voices" in your own head that either argue

with each other or perhaps pull you in opposite directions. Give them faces like cartoon characters. Talk about them as if they were separate...literally outside of you...what directions are you being pulled in?

A wise theologian named Mike Yaconelli once said 50% of the people you hear partying down the hall won't be there when you graduate. Do you think this is true? Does it make you nervous or give you some comfort?

It's an old joke but there is something to be said for letting your four-year-old stick the paper clip in the light socket. They'll learn and never do that again. When was the last time someone let you fall and hit bottom? Is it possible to truly learn the lesson without looking up from the ground?

Why does Don's story's climax begin with him trapped in a toilet?

Why doesn't the minister seem at all surprised?

When Penny heard about the earthquake in India she left immediately. What would make you drop everything and leave to help someone?



RESOLUTION

Don says, "Sometimes you have to watch someone love something before you can love it yourself. Penny loves Jesus. My dad loves jazz. He told me jazz is like life because it never resolves. I hear resolution."

What does resolution sound like? Look like? Taste like? Smell like? Feel like?



Have you ever loved something or someone because you saw someone else love it / them? Explain.

Answer Don's question, "What if God is trying to compose something?" What do you think God might still be composing / creating?

Why do you think the "confessors" side of the booth looks like internal organs? Why is there a grenade in the wall?

Don says, "Jesus is the geek in the cafeteria sitting by himself and I'm the guy trying to act like he's not my friend." Who is Jesus in your life?

Perhaps the most powerful line in the movie is "I spent a whole year trying to ditch God, but I can't. It's like he's following me around." Did Don know God at the beginning of the film? What did he have to experience before he could "know" God? Talk about a time in your life when you knew God better.

Can you forgive someone for misrepresenting God?

What does the church need to apologize for?

In Psalm 46, God says, "Be still" to David. The word for "be still" here is "sige" (pronounced see-gay). It is the same word that Jesus says to the storm when the disciples are in the boat. It is also the word Jesus says to the crazy naked guy who ran around in the tombs and beat himself in the head with rocks. Jesus said, "sige" to silence the voices in his head.

Who would you say, "sige" to in this story. Who would you say it to in your life?

The title of the movie (and the book the movie was based on) comes from the idea that God is composing something and all of creation, all the answers are out there... "swirling in the blue like jazz." Take a moment and come up with your own "blue like jazz" analogy about God's creation. You can use music, numbers, art, or whatever fits your thinking.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Did this movie make you feel terrified or nostalgic?

Finish This Sentence: Oh, man, one time when I was in college, _____ and I'm lucky I'm still alive.

Don's mother calls him when she finds out he's heading toward Reed College. She says, "I need to talk to you before WE make a decision about this." It appears the decision has already been made. How much influence do you have over your children's major decisions? How much did your parents have on yours?

What frightens you the most about your soon-to-be-adults going off to school or moving out of the house?

When does being grown-up begin?

Think about the last ten years...what was the major worry you had or the year you thought you would never survive? Did you? How? Looking back, how did it resolve?

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QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS *cont.*

Look at the four words the writer uses to tell the story. SETTING, CONFLICT, CLIMAX, RESOLUTION. Apply these to your children's life/lives since the day they turned 13. (Don't choose an event for RESOLUTION.) Imagine the "resolution" hasn't happened yet. How would you like to see it resolve? How much control do you have over it?

What happened your first week of college that would have shocked your parents?

About what age did your children begin to understand Daddy wasn't the strongest man in the world who could fix anything and Mommy didn't know everything? Is it hard to allow your kids to see your flaws? Why?



CONCLUSION

Question for youth leaders: Is your group a place where people can commit to share their questions, doubts, fears and celebrations in a safe and open place? Can you be known as a place that makes that culture happen?

Close your time together in prayer, acknowledging that God is with all of us as we experience life, as we question what we believe, and as we discover new things about life, God, ourselves and others.

*Steven Case has been in youth ministry for nearly 20 years, serving Episcopal, Presbyterian, UCC and United Methodist congregations. He has written several books for Youth Specialties/Zondervan including *The Book of Uncommon Prayer*, *Everything Counts* and *Road Rules*, as well as the *Caffeine+* series for Pilgrim Press. A celebrated workshop leader, Steven speaks at seminars around the country. He lives in Florida with his wife, Becky, and his own teens, Aprille and Eric.*



STUDY NOTES:

