

# The Nanny Diaries (2007)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 1; L- 4; S/N – 3. Running time: 1 hour 45 min.

*Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice;  
you complacent daughters, listen to my speech.*

*In little more than a year  
you will shudder, you complacent ones;  
for the vintage will fail,  
the fruit harvest will not come.*

*Tremble, you women who are at ease,  
shudder, you complacent ones;  
strip, and make yourselves bare,  
and put sackcloth on your loins.*

*Isaiah 32:9-11*

The rich mothers in ShariMrs. X meets Annie the Nanny Springer Berman and Robert(c) 2007 Weinstein Pulcini's (the two are a writing/directing team) seem very much like the women against whom the prophet Isaiah thundered. However, if these 21st century "complacent daughters were ever to put on sackcloth, it would have to be draped artfully about their loins so that the designer label would show (you don't think they would wear ordinary sackcloth, do you?). The movie's satire is akin to that in The Devil Wore Prada, though not as well carried through.

The film starts well, with the just graduated from college

Annie (Scarlett Johansson) using her studies in anthropology to describe how children have been raised through the centuries around the world. Like a young Margaret Mead writing a research paper, Annie lectures as she leads us through displays at the American Museum of Natural History, showing how primitive cultures raised their children. She observes, "In Africa they have the saying, it takes a village to raise a child. But for the tribe of the upper-eastside of Manhattan, it takes just one person. The nanny."

Annie's mother, a nurse who sacrificed to put her through college, thinks her daughter is signing on at a large financial firm, but Annie is unable to put up with the stifling corporate atmosphere, so she walks out of the job interview. In Central Park, when she snatches from harms way a little boy named Grayer, his grateful mother mistakes Annie's name for "Nanny," so she hires her to replace the one who just quit. Following the anthropology theme, Annie names the mother Mrs. X. We can see the arc of the story, with Grayer the monster finally tamed by Annie, and Mrs. X being a thoughtless slave driver who would rather go shopping than spend five minutes with her son. That Laura Linney can inject some humanity into the clichéd character of Mrs. X shows how talented an actress she is.

Far from being a memorable film, the somewhat heavy handed lesson it imparts is surrounded by some funny observations. A youth or young adult group could have some fun exploring the values of our consumptive society.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

1) Have on hand several glossy fashion (women's and men's) magazines and copies of the Sunday New York Times. Ask the group members to go through these and list the values that underlie the ads (and possibly the articles, judging by their

titles and highlighted excerpts).

2) Some Scripture passages to compare with the ads: Ecclesiastes 2:8-11; Matthew 6:19-21; 19:21; 13:1-21; 19:16-26; Mark 14:41-44; Luke 6:24-25; 12:13-34; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; James 2:1-9; 5:1-7; Revelation 3:14-22.

For group discussion, print the passages on index cards; divide into subgroups, and give each a card, one or more magazine and Bibles for looking up and discussing the passage. After a period of discussion, bring the groups together and ask each to report their findings.

3) How is Mrs. X both oppressor and victim? What is it that Grayer needs so badly? What does Annie learn about lying and the need to tell the truth? How do you think the characters grow in understanding and character by the end of the film?