



## Beginners



### Synopsis

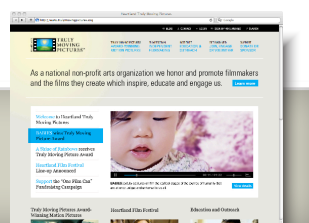
Oliver meets the irreverent and unpredictable Anna only months after his father Hal has passed away. This new love floods Oliver with memories of his father who, following the death of his wife of 45 years, came out of the closet at age 75 to live a full, energized, and tumultuous gay life. The upheavals of Hal's new honesty, by turns funny and moving, brought father and son closer than they'd ever been able to be. Now Oliver endeavors to love Anna with all the bravery, humor, and hope that his father taught him.

### Discussion Questions

- The film addresses the personal relationship between Oliver and Hal, and references the larger historical and social context in which they grew up. In what ways does the larger context make the whole story more universal, in contrast to the intimate portrait of these two people?
- *Beginners* was written and directed by Mike Mills. Mills' experiences were very similar to Oliver's in that after the death of his mother his father announced he was gay, and he was left to work through the repercussions of such a major shift. In what ways do you think writing and directing the film might have been cathartic for Mills as he questioned who he was and how he had been raised?
- After his mother died, Oliver faced an emotional situation. He had lost his mother, and had now lost his "old" father, as Hal began to live a new life. How did Oliver cope with the situation? How do you think you might cope with a similar situation?
- Oliver's inability to maintain a lasting relationship is explored as he starts going out with Anna. Do you think Oliver's insecurities and fears were partly a result of watching his parents for so many years, as they lived a passionless, yet loving, life together?
- For many years Hal lived as a straight, married man. But he knew all along that he was gay. What were some of the reasons, socially or politically, he was forced to live such a closeted life for so long?

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- After Hal's announcement, he suddenly found new energy and a new yearning for life. Why do you think this desire suddenly manifested itself after years of being in a committed, loving relationship with his wife?
- What kind of companionship does Oliver find in his father's dog, Arthur? Oliver talks to Arthur as he would another human; what makes their relationship so special? What special significance does Arthur have for Oliver as a lingering connection to his father?

### Do Your Research

- Research the different reactions American culture has had toward homosexuality from the 1950's to today. The short segments in the film showing the gay rights movement include archival footage; research the actual events depicted in the film to get a better idea of the pressures Hal sensed as a young gay man in the 1950's. Do you think societal values have changed substantially in the past 60 years? Do you think there are still similar attitudes in America today?
- Think about the role of relationships in Oliver's life, and how they evolve throughout the film. Does he have the beginnings of a healthy relationship by the end of the movie? Look at your own relationships, and think about how they may or may not be similar to Oliver's relationships with his mom, dad, and Anna. What can you learn about their universal experiences that might apply to your own life, and make your own relationships stronger?



### Get Involved

- Throughout the film Oliver is shown to be an artist, and draws a lot of sketches to illustrate his frame of mind. The writer/director, Mike Mills, actually drew many of the pictures shown in the film. Drawing can be a powerful way to work through things in your life that are difficult to process. Visit the Center for the Study of Art and Community ([www.artandcommunity.com](http://www.artandcommunity.com)) for advice on building a local community in your city that is focused on art and drawing.

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