



Discussion guide developed by Heartland Truly Moving Pictures to accompany *Coach Carter*, a Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. A Truly Moving Picture Award winner is a film that unlocks the vast potential of the human spirit and enables us to view stories that display courage, integrity and hope, taking entertainment to a higher level.

www.TrulyMovingPictures.org

COACH CARTER

One Film Can

Heartland Truly Moving Pictures, a non-profit organization, recognizes and honors films and filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life. We believe that one film can move us to laughter, to tears, or to make a difference. *Coach Carter* is a movie that demonstrates that One Film Can.

Synopsis

Inspired by a true story, *Coach Carter* is an inspirational account of a controversial high school basketball coach Ken Carter (Samuel L. Jackson), who received both high praise and staunch criticism when he made national news for benching his entire undefeated team for poor academic performance. Set in Richmond, California, this rousing, heartfelt portrayal of human courage and conviction is about overcoming the obstacles of your environment and showing young men a future that stretches beyond gangs, drugs, prison, and yes, even basketball.

Playing high school basketball takes more than skill, perseverance, discipline and teamwork—especially when you play for Coach Ken Carter. Just to step on Carter's court takes a signed contract that assures him you'll be performing at your best on the court and in the classroom. On Coach Carter's watch, it's not just about winning a basketball game; it's about his team's future.

That's why, when some of Carter's players let their grades slip, he chooses to padlock the gym, keeping the undefeated team from practicing and from playing. Standing up to school officials who oppose him, not to mention a town full of angry parents, many of whom see basketball as the only way for their sons to get out of Richmond, Carter refuses to back down. Having attended Richmond High himself, he has literally been in those boys' shoes. Like them, he loved playing the game. And even though he was a very accomplished player, and still held many of the school's records, it is education—not basketball—that Carter feels led him to be the man he is today.

Encouraging others to put education before recreation, Carter wants to leave a legacy. He wants players to see beyond their hoop dreams and see a future with endless options and possibilities.

Coach Carter is an MTV Films Tollin/Robbins production of a Thomas Carter Film, presented by Paramount Pictures.

Young men...the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.

Coach Carter

In the movie, Coach Ken Carter encounters a team of players facing more than a losing season if they don't change their actions. They are facing a future with very limited opportunities.

Carter sees not only his team's potential as basketball players, but as men. He teaches them to look at their lives as a journey and encourages them to think past their current station in life and toward their futures.

Discussion Questions

- As a former student and team member at Richmond High School, Carter recognizes the journey each of his players has ahead of them and begins immediately imposing rules that encourages each to begin taking steps toward their future. What are some ways he helps them begin their journey as a team?
- How do Carter's players change their lives under his tutelage? Think of Kenyon Stone, Timo Cruz, and Junior Battle in particular. What first steps are they encouraged to undertake and how do those steps begin to change their lives?
- Carter is a mentor to these student athletes. Have you ever had a mentor? How did that person influence you?
- Are you a mentor to anyone? Has the philosophy of Coach Carter inspired you to mentor others in some way, whether it be coaching, teaching or being a Big Brother or Sister?
- Do parents, coaches and teachers have different roles in the lives of young people? Why? How do these roles intersect? How do they diverge?

Average is just not good enough. Period.

Coach Carter

Richmond High School was plagued by low graduations rates for the entire student body, but even more so for athletes. In a 2001 newspaper article, Carter reflects on the 1999 season portrayed in the movie and talks about some of the academic successes experienced in the years following.

Carter pointed out that Richmond High has received \$175,000 from the state for meeting attendance requirements, which he attributed to an improved academic atmosphere on campus.

"We're the only high school in our district who met these requirements," he said. "Our other students see the basketball players getting scholarships, and see that they're successful."

Newhouse, Dave. "Scholar-athletes Taste Success." The Oakland Tribune 12 June 2001
< <http://www.coachcarter.com/oaktribune.htm> >

Discussion Questions

- The above quote exemplifies that when a person demands something more than average, results are often proven. Can you think of examples in your own school or community where demanding above average resulted in multiple successes? Describe.
- What are some examples of how Coach Carter tried to raise the bar for the players on his team—on the court, academically and in life?
- Do you believe that using "Sir" to address his players, and likewise have his players address him, as well as making each of his players wear a coat and tie on game day is setting the bar too high? What do you think these requirements addressed for his team members?
- What are your beliefs for the role of a coach in academics? Do you believe that Carter overstepped his bounds or do you believe that he was justified in expecting more than had previously been expected of the student athletes? Use the following conversation between Coach Carter and Principal Garrison to discuss the different views in the school and the community about whether average is good enough.

Carter: *"You painted a pretty extreme picture of what these kids face. No one expects them to go to college. No one expects them to graduate."*

Garrison: *"So you take away basketball, the one area in their life where they have some success?"*

"Yes, ma'am."

"And you challenge them academically?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What if they fail?"

"Then we've failed."

These are student athletes. Student comes first.

Coach Carter

Coach Carter imposed educational standards for his team that had before been unheard of, and these new expectations encouraged his team to improve not only academically, but to begin thinking about a future beyond high school and sports.

Discussion Questions

- There are several schools of thought in the movie regarding the importance of education versus sports. With which do you agree? Which should take precedence in a student's life, particularly with the lives that the students at Richmond High School face? Why?
- Many of the parents in the movie bring up an interesting point. When Carter listens to the complaints of parents after he begins the lockout, one father states that until his son had basketball to look forward to, he wasn't even attending classes. Due to basketball, his son began attending classes regularly and the father found it unfair to take basketball, and in turn, his son's motivation, away. Is there any point at which Carter should have conceded to the wishes of the parents and the school and ended the lockout? Why? At what point?
- Think about the Richmond High School board and the principal. Do you believe they had everyone's best interest in mind? Why?

Below are three articles that follow up on the success of the players two years after 1999, the year upon which the movie was based.

"Benching Dream Team Was Right Move"

Los Angeles Times

John M. Glionna

July 11, 2001

<http://www.coachcarter.com/latimes.htm>

"Scholar-athletes Taste Success"

Oakland Tribune

Dave Newhouse

June 12, 2001

<http://www.coachcarter.com/oaktribune.htm>

"Coach Ken Carter Interview"

NPR, All Things Considered

January, 1999

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1031779>

COACH CARTER

Truly Moving Moments

Coach Carter has been honored as a Heartland Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. This award was created to honor films released theatrically that align with Heartland's mission to recognize and honor films and filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by artistically expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life.

These award-winning movies are made up of moving and inspiring moments – those moments that cause you to think, see something in your life differently, and be inspired to do something. It's what makes the movie and its message remain with you well after you've left the theatre.

Think about *Coach Carter*. What were the moments that stood out to you? How did they make you feel? How will they cause you to think about things differently in the future? Share those moments with others at www.TrulyMovingPictures.org. Simply create a membership or login if you already have one, and then search the movie list for *Coach Carter*. You can leave your review of the movie or thoughts about your Truly Moving Picture in the "Thoughts and Reviews" section.



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