

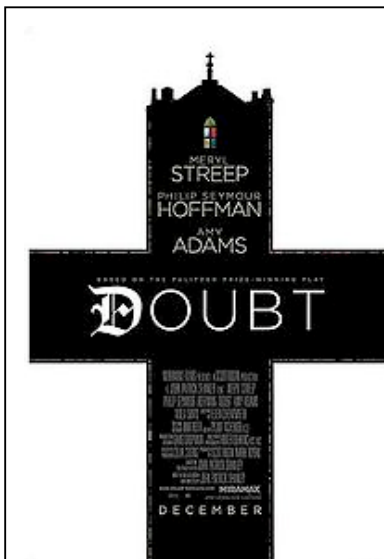


Presents

## GlenVIEWINGS: The Year's Best

### *Doubt*

"Doubt allows for uncertainty and growth, whereas certainty is a dead end." - Father Flynn



**Director:**

John Patrick Shanley

**Producers:**

Scott Rudin

**Writer:**

John Patrick Shanley

**Starring:**

Meryl Streep

Phillip Seymour Hoffman

Amy Adams

Viola Davis

**Music**

Howard Shore

**Cinematography**

Roger Deakins

**Editing**

Dylan Tichenor

**Distributors:**

Miramax Films

**Release date:**

December 12, 2008

**Running time:**

104 minutes

**Budget**

\$20,000,000

**Box Office gross**

\$74,681,396

One of the questions you will ask yourself while watching *Doubt*, and probably long after it has finished, is "Did he or didn't he?" Although the mystery is the driving force of the plot, *Doubt's* writer/director John Patrick Shanley has stated that the assigning of guilt or innocence is perhaps the least interesting aspect of this fascinating film.

Of greater import is our embroilment in a power struggle between two opposing worldviews, set to collide within a moral maze of shifting truths and changing times. Initially affirming modern preconceptions of how a progressive priest and an authoritarian nun in the Bronx in 1964 might have behaved, Shanley then challenges our beliefs by making these caricatures more nuanced just as doubt enters their minds and startling, unforeseen realities emerge. The intention is to prompt a greater appreciation for the merits of proceeding with caution before making judgments -- although even caution may not guarantee satisfaction and certainty.

Slightly expanding the scenario from his play's original cast of just four actors, Shanley still retains the tense intimacy of the stage – and gets blistering performances from his Oscar-nominated cast – while also relishing in the chance to visualize the story's many strange omens and ambiguous symbols. These add to the film's balance-scale construction, as accusations and assumptions mount up on each side of the debate. The audience ultimately becomes the last character in the story, set to continue the film's polemic in the discussions they will no doubt have after the credits roll.

**Did you know?**

- A former Marine, John Patrick Shanley's other screen credits include *Moonstruck*, *Joe Versus the Volcano*, and *Alive*.
- Shanley attended – and was thrown out of - Cardinal Francis Spellman School in the Bronx. The film is dedicated to his first-grade teacher, Sister Margaret McEntee, who was the model for Sister James and acted as a consultant on the film.

- Viola Davis was Oscar nominated for Best Supporting Actress despite only appearing in two scenes. Her performance is still not the shortest to be nominated however; Beatrice Straight was nominated in 1976 despite only appearing in *Network* for 5 minutes 40 seconds.



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### ***Doubt***

**"When you take a step to address wrongdoing, you are taking a step away from God, but in his service." - Sister Aloysius**

### **Things to Explore**

- Why is the story set in 1964? What relevance does it have to 2005, the year it was written?
- In his first sermon, Father Flynn states that doubt, like faith, can be a unifying force. Do you find doubt to be a unifying, or a divisive, element in the film?
- How does the meeting with Mrs. Miller affect Sister Aloysius? What do you think is the symbolism of the camera tilting at that point?
- Why is doubt a threat to Sister Aloysius?
- What is the significance of the following in the film: wind, the lightbulb popping, the bird flying into the church, Father Flynn's fingernails, Father Flynn's sermon on gossip?
- Shanley's play was originally titled ***Doubt: A Parable*** for the stage. A parable is 'a succinct story that illustrates a moral or religious lesson.' What is the moral lesson of ***Doubt***? Why do you think the '***A Parable***' title was dropped for the film?
- Is having doubt a strength or a weakness? Does faith require doubt?
- How might events have happened differently if Sister Aloysius had been less certain?

### **Themes**

- Modernity versus tradition
- Power struggles
- Certainty versus ambiguity
- Faith
- Child abuse and Church scandals
- Judgment
- Responsibility
- Preconceptions and stereotypes
- Gender, class and race roles



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## **GlenVIEWINGS: The Year's Best *Doubt***

**"You just want things to be resolved so you can have simplicity back." - Sister Aloysius**

### **Library Resources**

**1) *Doubt : A Parable***, John Patrick Shanley.

The complete script of Shanley's Drama Desk, New York Critic's Circle, Pulitzer and Tony award-winning play about the complex events at St. Nicholas Church School in the Bronx during the fall of 1964.

<b>Copy</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Location</b>
812.54 SHA	Book	Nonfiction

**2) *The God Factor: Inside the Spiritual Lives of Public People***, Cathleen Falsani.

This collection from the Chicago Sun-Times religion columnist contains a revealing chapter on John Patrick Shanley.

<b>Copy</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Location</b>
200.922 FAL	Book	Nonfiction

**3) *The Best plays Theater Yearbook, 2004-2005***, Edited by Jeffrey Eric Jenkins.

*Doubt* is one of ten plays from the year given an honorary essay in this collection.

<b>Copy</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Location</b>
808.82 BES 2004/2005	Book	Nonfiction

**4) *Drama for Students. Volume 23 [electronic resource (eBook) : Presenting Analysis, Context and Criticism on Commonly Studied Dramas]***, Project Editor, Sara Constantakis.

This E-book contains a biography of John Patrick Shanley, and guides to the play's themes, context and critical reception.

<b>Copy</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Location</b>
Gale Virtual Reference	Electronic Book	Internet

**5) *Doubt [videorecording (DVD)]***

The DVD contains features on translating *Doubt* from the stage to the screen, creating the music, snippets from the cast, and an excellent commentary on the film by writer/director John Patrick Shanley.

<b>Copy</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Location</b>
DVD DOU	DVD, Fiction	Audiovisual



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### ***Doubt***

**"Did you ever prove it?" - Sister James**

**"To whom?" - Sister Aloysius**

**"Anyone but yourself?" - Sister James**

### **Online Resources**

<http://www.doubt-themovie.com/>

The excellent official website for the film, containing clips, photos and sound excerpts from the film, biographies and interviews with the main cast and crew.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0918927/>

The film's page at the Internet Movie Database, where it currently has a rating of 7.8 out of 10 from over 28,000 users.

<http://www.filmspotting.net/boards/index.php?topic=5065.msg225787#msg225787>

A full and fascinating review of *Doubt* that may be the best available on the web. The review is notable for its in-depth study of the differences between the play and the film, and its mix of humor, strident opinion and thoughtful, intelligent analysis.

[http://cdn1.libsyn.com/cinecast/filmspot246\\_022009.mp3?nvb=20090224183543&nva=20090225183543&t=0826d6a507598df5f36b8](http://cdn1.libsyn.com/cinecast/filmspot246_022009.mp3?nvb=20090224183543&nva=20090225183543&t=0826d6a507598df5f36b8)

An excellent audio interview with Viola Davis, in which she discusses preparing for her key scene.

<http://creativescreenwritingmagazine.blogspot.com/2009/01/john-patrick-shanley-doubt-q.html>

An occasionally uproarious and always fascinating audio interview with John Patrick Shanley in which he reveals enormous amounts about himself, his career and the play, and yet still gives nothing away.

<http://carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/12/12/doubt-and-the-bagger/>

An amusing and informative brief video from the film's premiere.

[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/12/11/movies/20081211\\_SHANLEY\\_AUDIOSS/index.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/12/11/movies/20081211_SHANLEY_AUDIOSS/index.html)

An audio slideshow by John Patrick Shanley in which he discusses the transition of *Doubt* from stage to screen, and the film's visual style.

<http://www.studio360.org/episodes/2008/12/12>

NPR's Studio360 feature on *Doubt* contains a brief interview with writer/director John Patrick Shanley in which he outlines his motivations for writing the story, and reveals the true-life roots for the characters.