

Gran Torino (the movie)

Plot Summary:

Recently widowed senior Walt Kowalski (played by 78 year old Clint Eastwood) speaks his mind no matter who he offends, and growls under his breath whenever he disagrees with those around him. Much of his personal values are shaped from his time in the Korean War. He doesn't understand his family, nor they him. As such, they tolerate each other more than love each other. He has lived in the same house for much of his adult life, in an older working class suburban neighborhood of Detroit. It is slowly transforming into an immigrant neighborhood. The Lor family, of ethnic Hmong descent, move in next door to Walt, the family which includes two teenagers: outspoken Sue, and brooding and passive Thao. The neighbors' initial "don't speak to me" relationship changes when, out of circumstance, Walt saves Thao from a potentially violent incident with a Vietnamese youth gang. This incident, only the latest of run-in's Thao has had with them, sparks the neighbors to get to know each other. This new relationship with his neighbors extends to an antagonistic relationship with the Vietnamese gang. Walt realizes that neither Thao or Sue will ever be able to live in peace as long as the gang exists. *Some tough language and violence but it might push some thinking around the immigration issue in a practical way.*

Producer Robert Lorenz said that while the script was originally set in Minnesota, he chose Michigan as the actual setting as Kowalski is a retired car plant worker. Eastwood wanted Hmong as cast members, so casting director Ellen Chenoweth enlisted Hmong organizations and set up calls in Detroit, Fresno, and St. Paul; Fresno and St. Paul have the two largest Hmong communities in the United States, while Detroit also has an appreciable population of Hmong. Chenoweth recruited Bee Vang in St. Paul and Ahney Her in Detroit.

Roger Ebert wrote that the film is "about the belated flowering of a man's better nature. And it's about Americans of different races growing more open to one another in the new century."

- What immigration issues do you see in this movie?
- What role did the "church" play in this movie?
- Respond to the quote: "Who brought you people here anyway?" Walt asks Sue. Sue replies: "Blame the Lutherans." What role did the Lutheran play in Hmong immigration?
- What key idea jumped out at you from watching this movie?