Film Study: Cinderella Man

James J. Braddock is an up-and-coming boxer finding success and wealth in the late 1920s. The crash of the stock market and the Great Depression quickly change all of that. Nursing an injured hand, Braddock continues to fight in low paying matches, struggles for work at the local docks, and tries to keep his family fed and their one room apartment heated. This movie is an accurate, heart-wrenching historical depiction of one American family’s ethical struggles during The Great Depression as well as one man’s determination to hold on to his integrity and his family.

Viewing Questions:
1. In what year does the movie begin?
2. How much is Braddock paid for his fight?
3. How would you describe the living conditions in 1928?
4. Based on the items on Braddock’s dresser, would you consider him to be well off? Why or why not?
5. How have things changed by September of 1933?
6. What evidence is there of great financial issues facing the family?
7. What does the mom (Mae) do to help increase the amount of milk?
8. Why did his son steal the salami? What did his dad promise him after he forces to take the salami back to the butcher?
9. After Braddock breaks his hand boxing, what is he forced to do to make money?
10. In addition to boxing, what other business did Braddock have before the Stock Market crashed?
11. What reason did the worker give for shutting off the electric despite Mae’s pleas?
12. What does Mae see when she and the kids are collecting wood from the billboard for heat?
13. What factors motivate Mae to send the kids away?
14. Why does Braddock go on government assistance? Why do you think he was reluctant?
15. What is unique about the birthday party in the movie?
16. What is the cause of the argument between Mike and his wife at the birthday party? Is there more to it than the drinking?

17. Why is Jimmy given an opportunity for another boxing match? Why does he take it despite the odds against him?

18. According to Jimmy, why didn’t he eat the day of the fight?

19. What is the result of the match? What key factor is the difference in the fight compared to his last?

20. How much money does Jimmy have left after the boxing match? What does he do the morning after the fight?

21. What does Mae find when she goes to see Joe (Jimmy’s Trainer)? What does that tell you about the overall impact of the Great Depression?

22. Who wins the rematch with John Henry Lewis?

23. What images motivate Jimmy against Lasky?

24. After the Lasky fight, what does Jimmy return to the New Jersey Relief agency?

25. What is the “Hooverville” Mike’s wife talks about? What is Mike doing there before he is killed?

26. What does Braddock say at the press conference about giving his relief money back?

27. Why does the promoter force Jimmy to watch Max Baer’s fight on tape?

28. What reasons does Jimmy give for accepting the fight?

29. According to sports writers, what impact is Jimmy Braddock’s comeback and success having on people?

30. Why doesn’t Mae want Jimmy to fight? Why does he go on with it?

31. What does the priest say about the people who are praying in the church?

32. What does Mae say to Braddock in the dressing room?

33. Who wins the fight?

34. Which famous heavy weight does Braddock lose his title to eventually?

35. Why do you think Jimmy Braddock inspired so many people during the Depression?
Post-Film Short Answers:

1. What issues do people today deal with that are similar to those of the Braddock family? How are today’s issues different? What sorts of new issues do our children face?

2. The Great Depression affected everyone to some degree. How were the people in the movie affected? How were the different socio-economic classes affected?

3. Doing what is right is sometimes difficult. How difficult was it for Braddock to pay off his debt to the government at a time when no one was giving back?

4. The scene where Braddock’s son explains why he stole is extremely powerful. Would you steal if your family hadn’t eaten in a week, or if your family’s ability to stay together depended on it? How do you feel about the ethics of this decision?

5. Braddock states that he knows what he is fighting for: milk. How does that make you feel about what you have today? Should we be ashamed for having XBoxes, big screen TVs, cell phones, and the latest digital cameras? Although Braddock was fighting for milk, he knew that winning also meant fame and money. Do you think that he wanted this fame? Why or why not?

6. Many times in today’s society is critiqued for being lazy. Is it? Why or why not? Could you have shown the same determination that Braddock did to succeed? Explain.

7. How has this movie changed the way you view the struggles your grandparents and great grandparents went through?

8. ‘You know what? I’m all prayed out,’ ~ Jim Braddock. Why does Jim find it so hard to believe at that point? How important a role does Jim’s family play in his career? How do they inspire him to win?

9. Why do you think Jim is nicknamed the ‘Cinderella Man’ by the press? Why do you think Jim Braddock’s winning streak inspired people so much? What makes his story so inspirational even now?

10. What do you think Ron Howard wants us to take away from the film? Why?