



FILM: **LEARNING TO DRIVE**

FDG RATING: 3.2 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Isabel Coixet: *Director*  
Ben Kingsley: *Actor: Darwan*  
Patricia Clarkson: *Actress: Wendy*

DATE: Sept. 20, 2015

**DISCUSSION SUMMARY: LEARNING TO DRIVE**

The film "Learning to Drive" uses driving lessons as a metaphor for learning life lessons. The successful, emotionally vulnerable, literary critic, Wendy, (perfectly played by Patricia Clarkson) is forced to become more independent and learn to drive after her husband of 21 years leaves her for (ironically) an author who Wendy has given rave reviews. This sets the tone of wry humor that is peppered throughout the film.

Her driving instructor, Darwan, (Ben Kingsley) is also in the midst of a major life transition, marriage, which is the polar opposite of Wendy's traumatic divorce. Although extremely confident as a driving instructor, Darwan, (Ben Kingsley) isn't sure how to welcome his new bride-to-be, selected by his family, and arriving from India in a few days. Wendy and Darwan develop a close friendship as each helps the other transition into their new role in life even though they are from dramatically different cultures. Life's truisms are captured as nuggets of wisdom shared by Darwan as part of his driving lessons such as "You can't always trust people to behave properly" and "Fear is good. When you are afraid, you pay more attention." When he asks Wendy what women like as gift, Wendy suggests a book of poetry would be a thoughtful gift for his new bride, rather than sexy lingerie as suggested by Darwan's nephew.

It's interesting to note that Darwan is exceptionally patient with his student, Wendy and teaches each lesson step by step. And yet he leaves his new bride, Jasleen, to fend for herself unable to speak English, in an unfamiliar neighborhood, criticizes her cooking, is disappointed at her lack of education, and at the same time, expects her to venture out and make friends. He seems to want to stay connected to Wendy because he hasn't yet learned how to connect with Jasleen. By the end of the film, Darwan, Jasleen, and Wendy, predictably, have learned to take the wheel and navigate the new road of life they have taken leaving us with a sense of satisfied fulfillment for each of the characters.

We all enjoyed the characters and the cute story but noted that the film was definitely elevated by the performances of Ben Kingsley and Patricia Clarkson. We gave the film a middle of the road 3.2 score on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best.)



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See you at the movies!

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