



## FILM: **QUEEN OF KATWE**

FDG RATING: 3.0 ☺☺☺○○

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

Mira Nair: *Director*  
Madina Nalwanga: *Actress, Phiona*  
Lupita Nyong'o: *Actress, Harriet*  
David Oyelowo: *Actor, Robert Katende*

DATE: October 22, 2017

### DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **QUEEN OF KATWE**

Queen of Katwe has more depth than the typical Disney story, and yes, it's another sports underdog overcomes the impossible. But credit goes to director, Mira Nair, for capturing the kaleidoscope of colors, and vibrant rhythm of Uganda life in the poorest of slums. Filmed entirely on location using many citizens of Katwe in the production, the film is based on a true story about 9 year old Phiona, who stumbles upon missionary Robert Katende (David Oyelowo), who is teaching children how to play chess in an abandoned church. She and her brother sneak away each day when they are supposed to be selling the bread their struggling mother has baked, and although, at first being sneered at by the other less poverty stricken children, Phiona eagerly tries to learn the game. To the surprise of Katende, Phiona has the ability to see many moves ahead and strategize how to gain the advantage against her opponents. Katende quickly recognizes her unusual skill and under his guidance, Phiona becomes good enough to compete in local tournaments, eventually becoming a top player, allowing her and her family to escape from a life of poverty.

There are some dramatic events, tender moments, and sprinkles of humor but generally the film moves along at an even pace. One resident reviewer noted a favorite scene when Phiona becomes "too big for her britches" after tasting how wealthier Africans live, but soon returns to her more humble life. Two poignant scenes are when Phiona's mother sells a treasured possession for a few extra dollars to buy fuel for candlelight so Phiona can read her chess books at night. And when she is on her first flight to a competition, asking her coach if the expanse of sunlit clouds is Heaven. He tells her no, Heaven is much higher than this world. His response reminds us that although she is living a momentary dream, the reality of her life is still very harsh.

Madina Nalwanga, without any previous acting experience, is excellent as Phiona; Lupita Nyong'o is always exceptional and imbues the role of Phiona's mother, Harriet, with the perfect amount of pride and strength as she struggles to provide for her family; and David Oyelowo as Katende is, of course, also outstanding, despite the character being a bit too saintly.

Some of our reviewers commented it was better than expected for a formulaic story. What was most interesting was the setting and insight into the bleak realities and sociological daily life struggles in the slums of Katwe. Despite the poverty, after feeling drained from other catastrophic theme films, Queen of Katwe was a refreshing emotional break.

"Heartwarming" was how another participant reviewer described the story as Phiona transforms from shyness to quiet resolve and then to steely confidence. At the end of the film, we see the photos of the actual people in the story and read how their lives have changed.

Enjoyable but not quite a winning film, we gave Queen of Katwe a score of 3 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

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