

Conversation Guide



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A Guided Tour Through *A Real Pain*

A Real Pain follows mismatched cousins David (Jesse Eisenberg) and Benji (Kieran Culkin) as they reunite for a tour through Poland to honor their beloved grandmother. Following in the same spirit of curiosity and personal exploration, this conversation guide will take you on a “guided tour” through five of the film’s most thought-provoking scenes and invites you to dive deeper into the themes they address.



Whether you are exploring the film as a group or on your own, this guide provides a framework to reflect on personal family histories, the role of humor in processing tragedy, Jewish death and mourning rituals, and inherited trauma.

Introductions at The Warsaw Hotel

"I'm just interested in people from other places..."

- Benji

In *A Real Pain*, the heritage tour of Poland attracts participants with starkly different motivations: some seek to understand the region's history, while others trace the footsteps of family members who survived – or perished in – the concentration camps. As the characters introduce themselves, we see how their personal and family histories travel with them, shaping how they experience and respond to the tour and each other.

▶ **Play Clip 1**

Reflecting on this scene, how would you introduce yourself to this group of people if you were on a tour like this one? What information/stories would you include? What would you leave out? Why?



The Warsaw Uprising Monument

"God I can't believe I'm doing this"

- Diane

The diverging individual responses to Polish history surface when David and Benji encounter the Warsaw Uprising Memorial. While David thinks the memorial should be viewed from a respectful distance, Benji finds a humorous emotional release in frolicking amidst the oversized soldiers.

► Play Clip 2



How has humor helped to process traumatic history? Where is it most helpful? Is it possible to cross a line?



Old Jewish Cemetery, Lublin

"These are real people, James...They're not history lessons."

- Benji

Jewish tradition marks death and mourning with countless rituals—from covering mirrors during *shiva* (the seven days following a person's death) to reciting memorial prayers thrice daily to laying stones upon graves, among many others—each gesture acknowledging death's profound weight. In the graveyard scene, James and Benji clash over how to best honor the people buried there. James feels that sharing historical facts about the place and the people who lived there keeps their memories alive, while Benji feels that this neglects their humanity and flattens them to nothing but names and numbers.

▶ **Play Clip 3**

What do you think is the most effective form of commemoration? Why?
How would you want to be commemorated?



Did you know, the custom of placing stones on graves is an ancient Jewish tradition? While its origins are unknown, there are several popular explanations. One practical explanation is that stones are a good memorial symbol because they are free and easily found. A more spiritual explanation is that stones act as a kind of "forcefield" that keeps demons from haunting the dead.

For more information on other Jewish mourning customs, see [the Reboot Glossary](#).

The Restaurant

"I move forward, because I know my pain is unexceptional..."

- David

Personal and inherited trauma manifests uniquely in individuals and communities—some remain haunted by the past like Benji, while others dismiss their pain as "unexceptional" like David.

▶ **Play Clip 4**

How do you understand the divide of wrestling with the past and moving beyond it? How does this show up in your life?

Research reveals that traumatic events like the Holocaust not only have a lasting impact on survivors, but can also show up in the second and third generations in profound ways (e.g. differences in stress hormones between Jewish descendants of the Holocaust and their peers).

To learn more about generational trauma and its manifestations among descendants of Holocaust, see [the Reboot Glossary](#).



Grandma Dory's House

"It's so unremarkable"

- Benji

"Yeah. I guess I don't know what I'd pictured."

- David

History looms large in the imagination, yet its physical traces often appear mundane. After visiting so many poignant sites and monuments, David and Benji are underwhelmed when they visit their grandmother's former house. How could such an unremarkable building have been the home of their Holocaust surviving grandmother? Their instinct to place stones in front of the door reveals a struggle to make reality match expectations.

▶ **Play Clip 5**

What do David and Benji's expectations coupled with their feeling of underwhelm reveal about the human need to understand and memorialize family histories? When visiting sites connected with your family's history, how do you reconcile your expectations with reality?



About Reboot



Reboot is an arts and culture non-profit that reimagines and reinforces Jewish thought and traditions, offering an inviting mix of discovery, experience, and reflection. Through **Reboot Studios**, our media investment and development arm, we fund and produce projects in television, film, theater, podcasts, music, publishing and beyond. We also provide a variety of educational experiences and resources connected to the arts. We have launched more than 40 projects in the past three years that have engaged more than 30 million participants. In the past year these projects have also won broad acclaim, playing at dozens of film festivals, winning Emmy and Tony awards, and being shortlisted for an Oscar. Find out more at [Rebooting.com](https://rebooting.com).

See *A Real Pain* Group in Theaters

A Real Pain is now playing in theaters across the country. Scan the QR code below or [click here to find a showing near you](#).

Interested in screening *A Real Pain* for your Synagogue, class, club, or community center? Group tickets are now available. [See the film's website for details](#).

Find a Theater Playing *A Real Pain*



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