

## Top Ten Movie Dads

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By Steven D. Greydanus

For better and for worse, Hollywood is still a **man's world**. As with the moms list, I set out to find affirmative depictions of :

- **admirable fathers** (biological, adoptive, and foster fathers)
- in on-screen **father-child relationships**
- ideally, though not necessarily, in **intact families** of some sort or other

❖ **Tevye** (Topol) in ***Fiddler on the Roof*** (1971)

Atticus Finch was a man ahead of his time and place ; Tevye, a hardworking Russian Jew in 1905 Tsarist Russia, is a man deeply shaped by tradition struggling in a rapidly changing world. Out of **love for his daughters**, he bends further than he ever thought he could yet sticks to his deepest principles, despite the agonizing cost.

❖ **Marlin** (Albert Brooks) in ***Finding Nemo*** (2003)

Mufasa and Mr. Incredible are more impressive, but Marlin, for all his **anxieties**, is the reason Finding Nemo is arguably the best animated father-son story ever. Fatherhood *defines* Marlin, and he rises to **true heroism** — reluctantly at first, but finally with unstoppable resolve.

❖ **Frank Sullivan** (Dennis Quaid) in ***Frequency*** (2000)

Has anyone, even **Steve Martin** or Spencer Tracy, played more sympathetic fathers in more movies than **Dennis Quaid** (see ***The Rookie*** and ***Soul Surfer***) ? In *Frequency*, probably the ultimate Hollywood father-son weepie, he plays a **devoted, heroic dad** who moves heaven and earth to be there when his son (**Jim Caviezel**) needs him most.

❖ **Gwilym Morgan** (Donald Crisp) in *How Green Was My Valley* (1941)

In **John Ford's sentimental, elegiac**, Best-Picture winner about a family of six sons and one daughter in a tight-knit Welsh coal-mining community, Mr. Morgan stands tall as a **pillar in his community and the justly revered head** of his family — though his wife and grown sons are very much his equals.

❖ **Giuseppe Conlon** (Pete Postlethwaite) in *In the Name of the Father* (1993)

In this fact-based film, Daniel Day Lewis plays a petty Irish street thief wrongly implicated with his upright father in an IRA bombing. Straight as an arrow, **devoutly Catholic**, with **indomitable dignity**, Giuseppe unfailingly puts his best face on the worst circumstances and never gives up on his son.

❖ **Guido Orefice** (Roberto Benigni) in *Life Is Beautiful* (1997)

Though controversial for its sentimental, tragi-comic tale of love and loss in the shadow of the Holocaust, Roberto Benigni's popular Best-Picture winner offers a moving portrayal of a father's **self-sacrificial efforts to shield his son** from the worst of the darkness around them.

❖ **St. Thomas More** (Paul Scofield) in *A Man for All Seasons* (1965)

Like Atticus Finch, Thomas More is occupied with weighty matters outside his family, but the **warmth and mutual affection** between him and his daughter Margaret, his **pride** in her intellect and accomplishments, and her **deep filial piety** toward him reveal Thomas as the best of fathers.

❖ **Dr. Tatsuo Kusakabe** (Shigesato Itoi) in *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988)

Studio Ghibli is renowned for films featuring sympathetic parents, but Dr. Kusakabe, caring for his two daughters while their mother is hospitalized, is arguably the best : **easygoing and good-humored, attentive** despite his workload, and alive to the childlike wonder of his daughters' world.

❖ **Chris Gardner** (Will Smith) in *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006)

Chris Gardner is among the **most responsible, most self-sacrificing struggling** fathers in Hollywood history (see also *Cinderella Man*). Based on a true story, the film celebrates Chris's **heroic determination to protect and care** for his son under increasingly desperate circumstances, including homelessness.

❖ **Atticus Finch** (Gregory Peck) in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962)

Atticus Finch is the most universal fixture on lists of best movie dads for a reason. Not only is he **one of cinema's great heroes**, he's a hero to his children, and rightly so. **Authoritative** but not authoritarian, **righteous** but not rigid, **reserved** but not distant — he offers his children one of the greatest gifts a father can : a **high standard to live up to**.

See also :

- **James Braddock** (Russell Crowe) in *Cinderella Man* (2005)
- **Pacha** (John Goodman) in *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000)
- **Mr. Incredible** (Craig T. Nelson) in *The Incredibles* (2004)
- **Peter Bailey** (Samuel S. Hinds) in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)
- **The Tramp** (Charlie Chaplin) in *The Kid* (1921)
- **Mufasa** (James Earl Jones) in *The Lion King* (1994)
- **St. Vincent de Paul** (Pierre Fresnay) in *Monsieur Vincent* (1947)
- **Rev. MacLean** (Tom Skerritt) in *A River Runs Through It* (1992)
- **Olivier** (Olivier Gourmet) in *The Son* (2002)
- **Arthur Winslow** (Nigel Hawthorne) in *The Winslow Boy* (1999)