



# NATIONAL TREASURE

**Rated:** PG • **Running Time:** 2 hours, 11 minutes  
**Starring:** Nicolas Cage as Ben Gates; Diane Kruger as Abigail Chase; Justin Bartha as Riley; Sean Bean as Ian Howe; Jon Voight as Patrick Gates; Harvey Keitel as Sadusky  
**Director:** John Turteltaub

**Themes:** Faith, persistence, integrity, trust, situation ethics, importance of family name and legacy, the need to preserve and study history, a son's desire for his father's approval

## Story Summary

Every family has a history. The Gates family, however, is *obsessed* with history. That's because, in 1832, an ancestor received a cryptic clue purportedly leading to untold riches hidden somewhere in the colonies by noble Masons, including America's founding fathers. Gold. Jewels. Priceless artifacts. But all the Gates family has to show for generations of searching are years of mockery and scorn from academics. Patrick Gates is fed up. He's wasted enough time, money and energy on this fool's errand. But his son, Ben, keeps chasing the dream, presently bankrolled by Ian Howe, a crafty man willing to take extreme measures in pursuit of the world's treasures.

Ian's true nature emerges during a mission to the Arctic. After tracking down a ship frozen in the ice, the team finds no treasure, only a riddle. With savant-like accuracy, Ben deduces that they'll need an invisible map encrypted on the back of the Declaration of Independence. Ian wants to steal the document. Ben refuses. As tempers flare, so does a signal flare, which falls to the ground, igniting a splash of gunpowder surrounded by barrels of the stuff. Ian and his thugs flee, trapping Ben inside with his computer-savvy sidekick, Riley. Miraculously, they survive an incredible blast.

Ben and Riley head to Washington D.C. to warn authorities that the Declaration of Independence is a target. No one takes Ben seriously, including the lovely Abigail Chase at the National Archives. After all, he's one of those crazy Gates boys. And besides, security is so tight—aided by cameras, sensors, heat monitors and bullet-proof glass—that no thief could possibly succeed. Or could they? Ben decides the only way to protect the document from Ian is by stealing it himself during a formal gala. It turns out that Ian and Ben have chosen the same moment to strike. Treasure *hunter* and treasure *protector* cross paths during a tense, high-tech caper.

With the Declaration in their possession, a defiant Abigail in tow and the police hot on their heels, Ben and Riley visit Ben's irritated-but-helpful father. They carefully

**Cautions:** Action violence includes car chases, gunplay, explosions, a tazing and brief flashbacks of groups in battle. A man falls to his death. Skeletons and frozen corpses are among human remains discovered. We hear exclamations of "hell," "bloody," "for god's sake" and "oh my god." Patrick falsely assumes that his son's *predicament* involves getting a woman pregnant. A formal gala features champagne. Abigail wears a low-cut evening dress.

expose the invisible encryption. Now a believer, Abigail joins Ben and Riley on a multi-city scavenger hunt, decoding clues while evading Ian's cronies and a resolute FBI agent named Sudosky. They visit landmarks from Washington to Philadelphia to New York City, experiencing thrilling chases and narrow escapes along the way.

The final stop on this action-packed magical history tour finds our heroes face to face with Ian's team in the sanctuary of an old church. A clue leads everyone into creepy catacombs beneath the streets of Manhattan. By torchlight, treasure hunters and protectors alike navigate rotting staircases and treacherous catwalks as they descend into the bowels of the city. They reach a dead end. Ian abandons them to become relics themselves, leaving in order to chase down yet another clue in Boston. But a fortuitous turn reveals an escape route ... and treasure beyond imagination.

In late 2004, Disney believed untold riches were as close as its ability to create big-budget blockbusters restrained enough for families. As spokesperson Nina Jacobson told *The New York Times* just before *National Treasure's* release, "It's all about moving from the conventional definition of a family film to the more sophisticated idea of a general audience film that is appropriate for a family audience." This actioner from megaproducer Jerry Bruckheimer strikes that balance well, and was handsomely rewarded. *National Treasure* and its sequel combined for more than \$800 million in worldwide box office.

**Before You Watch**  
Since the Declaration of Independence is central to the story, take time to read



the document together. You'll find a transcript online at [archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html](http://archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html). (Once there, click the "Our National Treasure" link for a reference to the film.) More than a mere history lesson, reading the Declaration will give you and your teen a deeper appreciation of characters' respect for it beyond its usefulness in their treasure hunt. Ponder the language. Take note of Thomas Jefferson's references to God. Discuss what this iconic symbol of liberty must have meant to the first Americans, and what it means to you.

**Bible Bookmarks** Prov. 2:1-8; Matt. 6:19-21; Mark 8:36; Luke 5:10b-11, 10:25-37; Acts 17:32; Col. 2:2-3; Heb. 11:1; 1 Pet. 3:8-17; Rev. 21:18-21

### Talking Points

**1** Ben has devoted his life to a cause, putting unshakable faith in stories and bits of evidence in hopes of a grand payoff. How is his quest similar to or different from the Christian life? Consider Hebrews 11:1, Luke 5:10b-11, Acts 17:32 and Revelation 21:18-21.

**2** Young Ben asks, "Grandpa, are we knights?" Have you ever dreamt of being part of a cool club or secret society? What about imagining yourself as a heroic figure you met in a book or movie? How have those experiences challenged or shaped you?

**3** How is Ian, at least early in the film, different from most bad guys we see in adventure stories like this one?

**4** Paraphrasing a line from the Declaration of Independence, Ben concludes, "It means if there's something wrong, those with the *ability* to take action have the *responsibility* to take action." Do you agree? If so, can you think of everyday examples, or times you've felt obliged to say or do something to right a wrong? According to 1 Peter 3:8-17 and Luke 10:25-37, what responsibilities do Christians have to others?

**5** Was Ben justified in breaking the law for the greater good? Discuss *situation ethics*, and instances of it in the film. Can you think of other movies or TV shows that have made what's wrong—done for noble reasons—seem OK? Then explore whether it would be acceptable to: 1) run a red light when rushing someone to the hospital; 2) tell a lie to keep from hurting another person's feelings; 3) torture a terrorist for information that could spare countless lives.

**6** What do Matthew 6:19-21 and Mark 8:36 say about the relative value of worldly treasure? What "treasures"

do you see people chasing today, and what might they cost in the long run? For riches worth pursuing, read Proverbs 2:1-8 and Colossians 2:2-3.

**7** If you've ever visited an historical landmark, reminisce about that experience and what impressed you most (maybe it was the gift shop). Of all the locales in the movie, which would you most like to see in person? Why?

**8** When they arrived at the empty treasure room, Ben received an unexpected prize: his father's respect. Talk about the mixed emotions each must have been feeling, and why it's important that children know they have their parents' love and support.

**9** For each of the following characters, share one adjective that best describes them: Ben, Riley, Ian, Abigail, Patrick, Sadusky. Was it hard to choose just one word for each? If so, what does that say about the complexity of people, and why

we shouldn't be too quick to label others?

**10** What do you think of the deal Ben cut with Agent Sadusky at the end of the movie? What do Ben's terms tell you about his character? Riley would have lobbied for more money. What would you have asked for if you'd been bargaining? Why?

### Follow-Up Activity

Proverbs 22:1 tells us, "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." How much do you know about your own family history? Together, see if you can trace your roots back into the late-1700s. Were your ancestors part of early American history? If not, where did they call home? What did they do for a living? What made them special? You may not find silver or gold, but every family history contains treasures that could end up lost or forgotten. Become a "treasure protector"!

### Just for Fun

*National Treasure* isn't the first time actor Jon Voight has played the father of a heroic treasure-seeker with a keen grasp of history. He previously appeared on the big screen as Lord Richard Croft in the action-adventure *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, which starred his real-life daughter, Angelina Jolie. —by Bob Smithouser



GET A CLUE: (l to r) Abigail, Ben and Riley study the Declaration of Independence.

