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## LITTLE CHILDREN \_\_ 8/10

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### *Odd, tragicomic tale of romantics seeking love outside loveless marriages*

*Written by Todd Field and Tom Perrotta*

*Directed by Todd Field*

Kate Winslet ...	Sarah Pierce
Patrick Wilson ...	Brad Adamson
Jennifer Connelly ...	Kathy Adamson
Gregg Edelman ...	Richard Pierce
Phyllis Somerville ...	May McGorvey
Jackie Earle Haley ...	Ronnie J. McGorvey
Noah Emmerich ...	Larry Hedges
Jane Adams ...	Sheila

This one slipped by me last year, though Kate Winslett and Jackie Earle Haley were up for Oscars for best actress and best supporting actor, respectively, and the writers were up for best screenplay. It's an odd movie for a number of reasons, but I found the voiceover narrative really funny, like one of those wild and crazy documentaries of the 50s:

"Bob becomes irritable when his golfing clubs are misplaced in the garage."

"Nancy wishes her bottom were not so large as she walks to her normal sunbathing location on the beach."

The story starts in a park where an impromptu frustrated-wives club has formed with Sarah Pierce (Winslet) as an overeducated, and somewhat reluctant member. Sarah and the other young women gossip and watch over their handful of children.

The most titillating gossip is about a young house husband (Patrick Wilson as Brad Adamson) who brings his boy to the park as well. Calling him the Prom King, the other women fantasize about this attractive guy who keeps to himself. Sarah doesn't understand the fuss, and when the girls dare her to get his phone number she walks right up and makes introductions.

In fact, as a joke she gets him to kiss her, which scandalizes the girls and eventually sends the two down the road of adulterous bliss. Sarah's husband has disconnected from her via Internet panty-worship, and Brad's professionally superaccomplished wife (Jennifer Connelly as Kathy Adamson) treats him like a child.

The development of hot, steamy romance—where we get to see a lot of Kate Winslett (if you like that sort of thing)—leads them to consider running off together, a totally impractical idea especially considering their two children.

Sarah's sad, slow little girl is named Lucy (Sadie Goldstein) and Brad's shy little boy—whom Mom insists on letting sleep in the marital bed—is named Aaron (Ty Simpkins). Both Lucy and Aaron are underdeveloped five-year-old-somethings, and just as their parents come out of their shells together the kids grow more healthily assertive in each other's company.

Enter the subplot:

A sex offender lives in the neighborhood, a majorly screwed-up guy named Ronnie McGorvey (Jackie Haley) who exposed himself to a kid. A friend of Brad's, former cop Larry Hedges (Noah Emmerich), takes it upon himself to continually harass Ronnie. You have the impression that between Larry and Ronnie, Larry is the unmitigated whack job.

I'm really not sure how the two plots relate or what the author is trying to tell us. Adultery is like child abuse? Trying to find love is like escaping child abuse? Love is the answer to child abuse? A society focused on the overarching, unquestioned wonderfulness of children produces frightened, substandard children and stuck adults?

I'm leaning toward the latter. Reading some other reviews, I note Carina Chocano of the LA Times seems to hit the nail on the head with the following clause: "While Sarah and Brad's standard adulterer's guilt is painfully heightened by the aggressively virtuous cult-of-the-child that stifles their pretty suburban town..."

That's the tie-in, and I found myself rooting for Brad and Sarah to break free. Will they? There are several literary allusions in this film, and many *Crash*-like accidents that seem to move the characters toward redemption. Are they redeemed or do they remain trapped, that is the question. And which are which?

A great movie for generating discussion, especially with one's loved ones, in the course of which one can learn a lot about oneself. Must see again.