

JOURNEY INTO DYSLEXIA

- Discussion Guide -

This guide can be used by teachers, community groups, families, or individuals who are interested in exploring the various issues raised by the HBO Documentary Film *Journey into Dyslexia*.

FILM SYNOPSIS

Growing up is tough. Surviving school is even tougher. Being stigmatized with the label “learning disabled” can make a child’s social and academic life unbearable. This feature-length documentary gives hope to students whose dyslexia makes them fear the written word, by showing that many “disabled” are more able than their peers and proving that with the proper education and attention everyone can succeed.

Journey into Dyslexia profiles students with dyslexia, as well as adults who struggled in school and then succeeded in life. The film addresses misconceptions in the public and demonstrates the great potential of each dyslexic individual. The film also includes interviews with professionals in the fields of medicine and education who assess the road ahead technologically and academically, and culminating with stories shared by successful adults who are dyslexic. By sharing their methods of coping and their paths to present day, these subjects bring a new outlook on life to those struggling with their “disability”.

FILM RUNNING TIME Approximately 76 minutes

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FILM CREDITS: Produced by Alan and Susan Raymond; Directed by Susan Raymond; Photographed and Edited by Alan Raymond; Written and Narrated by Susan Raymond.

DYSLEXIA... is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of traits, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and math. Dyslexia affects individuals throughout their lives; It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations, or extra support services.

Source: <http://www.interdys.org/FactSheetsDyslexiaBasicsPrototype.htm>

IDENTIFICATION – MISSING THE SIGNS AND REPERCUSSIONS

Students who struggle with Dyslexia, Disgraphia, and ADHD often face the added burden of educating teachers and peers about their disability in order to receive instruction that truly supports their needs (approx 7-11m in).

- Why do some educators fail to indentify students struggling with dyslexia?
- How can missing the signs affect students in the long run?

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- What can families do to advocate if they think their child has a reading disability?

Not one dyslexic is the same. Some read at levels far below their years, while others can read perfectly but lack comprehension. Advances in brain imaging allow researchers to study dyslexia, which is visible in the brain.

Tracey Johnson, a college recruiter, describes teachers who categorized her reading as slow in elementary school and subsequently put her in a special education class without identifying her as dyslexic. Tracey ultimately stayed in special education classes through high school and did not begin addressing her problem until later in life. (approx. 46-51m in)

- How can social economic status and environment affect a diagnosis?
- Should students who have dyslexia be in the same reading classes with students who don't have dyslexia?
- How are people able to function without the instruction? What are their options?

The problems displayed by individuals with dyslexia involve difficulties in acquiring and using language

For a list of common signs, go to: <http://www.interdys.org/SignsofDyslexiaCombined.htm>

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REACHING OUT FOR HELP

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) define the rights of students with dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities. These individuals are legally entitled to special services to help them overcome and accommodate their learning problems. Such services include education programs designed to meet the needs of these students. The Acts also protect people with dyslexia against unfair and illegal discrimination.

Source: [http://www.interdys.org/
FactSheetsDyslexiaBasicsPrototype.htm](http://www.interdys.org/FactSheetsDyslexiaBasicsPrototype.htm)

In order to receive special services under the ADA, students must often notify their schools about their learning differences. The responses can be surprising. In the film, college student Phred speaks about the process and lets us tag along as she presents a Letter of Accommodation to an instructor, who listens to her request and agrees to adjust her presentation style. Phred has made these kinds of requests before but in the beginning it wasn't so easy. "Why are you here?" was the common sentiment she felt from peers and educators. Some professors explained that she the first student to reach out to them. (approx 52-56 min in)

Prompts

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- Do you think most of the teachers in your community understand what can cause a learning disability?
- What programs do teenagers and adults with dyslexia in your community have access to?
- What are some steps schools can take to help facilitate the process of disclosing a disability? What can teachers do?
- Should students disclose their disability prior to applying to college?
- Would you disclose a learning difference to an employer? Why? Why not?

READING

It is a myth that reading and intelligence are directly correlated. For those with dyslexia though, reading can be an especially daunting task because they are not able to process and express information as efficiently as others. “You’re working harder for less gain often than the other people around you,” Dr. William Keeney says to a class at Delaware Valley Friends School “but it’s not because you’re not as smart as they are.” (approx 12 min in) As the film shows, those with Dyslexia might not have been born with some skill sets, but just like an entrepreneur, they learn to build from scratch the environment they need in order to succeed. There are plenty of success stories. From scientist and professor Dr. Carol Greider who won a Nobel prize For Medicine, to micro-sculptor Willard Wigan, to biofuels entrepreneur Steve Walker--all of these individuals overcame lack of educational support, labels and low self-esteem to be not only successful but leaders in their field.

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Prompts

- Do you equate reading with intelligence? Why? Why not?
- Do you know anyone who is dyslexic?
- Identify ways to support people you may know with different learning styles.

BULLYING

For kids, being dyslexic carries a stigma that's especially hard to shake. Zack, a second grader, describes crying because kids never wanted to sit next to him. Sometimes, the experience is worse. Children with learning differences are generally at higher risk of being bullied than those without disabilities. Speaker Jonathan Mooney describes being called 'stupid' and 'lazy' over the years. Justin describes getting beat up all the time. Dyslexic kids learn to take the insults 'like a beating,' and generally work harder than classmates for much less gain, leading to anxiety, anger and frustration at school.

Prompts

- What is bullying? What are the forms?
- How are children with learning disabilities targeted?
- What can you do if know a child who is being bullied?

For more information, go to: http://www.idonline.org/article/Bullying_Among_Children_and_Youth_with_Disabilities_and_Special_Needs