

# Lesson Plan

## *Rachel is: A Dialogue on Disability in Our Culture*

### **THE FILM:**

At 21 years old Rachel Glynn is graduating from high school. She is excited by the prospect of living more independently. As Rachel and her family prepare for her future, they have some of the same concerns many families have as children prepare to leave the home: Where will she live? Where will she work? Will she successfully transition to a life away from her family? But with Rachel there are additional concerns.

Rachel is a person with a disability. Her life thus far has been filled with school and after-school activities, and she and her family have received many supports over the years. While she is now an adult, Rachel continues to require supports in her home and work environments. Unfortunately, these supports come at a cost, and government funding is minimal and difficult to access. *Rachel is* documents Rachel Glynn's transition from a childhood dependent on the structures of school and home, to an adult life where other supports must be discovered if she is to be successful and happy.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will reflect on disability; what it means in their lives, the rights of people with disabilities, and their interactions with people with disabilities.
- Students will analyze and interpret media.
- Students will practice listening and speaking skills.
- Students will work in groups to develop critical thinking skills.

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-12

**SUBJECT AREAS:** English, Language Arts, Social Studies

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED:** 2-3 class periods of 45-60 minutes

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975. Before then, many students with disabilities were turned away from public schools. Parents were forced to keep children home or even institutionalize them. Now, with Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) signed into law, all students have a right to access general education curriculum within the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Many people with disabilities exercise their right to attend public school up until the age of 22. The year they turn 21 must be the last year they attend public school. Many students with disabilities attend regular public high schools, many of them achieve diplomas and are never recognized as individuals with disabilities by their peers. Other individuals are perceptibly different, some of

them attend regular public schools while others attend more specialized programs, designed to better fit their needs and learning styles. Rachel Glynn is one such student.

## **VIEWING AND RESPONDING TO THE FILM:**

### Pre-Screening Activity - Think-Pair-Share:

Students are asked to think about what mental retardation means to them. They should be given the option of writing their thoughts down, with the understanding that this will not be collected. *Do you know anyone who has a developmental disability or is mentally retarded? What are your impressions of people with developmental disabilities and mental retardation? What kinds of expectations do you have about what they can or cannot do?*

Students turn to a partner and spend a couple of minutes discussing their thoughts about individuals with mental retardation.

On the board, create a web around "Individuals with Mental Retardation." Post students' thoughts as they share what they have thought about and discussed with their partners. Leave this posted to allow for additional comments after the film.

### Introduce the Film:

Introduce the film *Rachel* is using some of the information from The Film or Background sections or any other information you feel your students may need previous to screening the film.

Encourage but do not require students to take down notes if they want to remember anything particularly surprising, moving, or interesting, or any questions they may have during the film.

### Post-viewing Discussion:

After the film allow time for a full class discussion. You might ask:

- What did you find interesting?
- What feelings came up?
- What scenes stand out?
- Did you notice yourself laughing at any point? What was funny?
- Did anything surprise you? Why?
- If Rachel or Charlotte, or any of the people in the film were here, what questions might you have for them?

Ask the class if there is anything on the web created before viewing the film that they now disagree with. Is there anything that should be added?

### Jigsaw:

Break the students up into small groups of no more than three to four students. Assign each group a particular question to address in their group. Ideally, present each group with a piece of chart paper to note their major discussion points. Inform students that they may present conflicting ideas on their chart paper if doing so will represent all of the group members' contributions. If a particular group finishes early, you might give them a second prompt. Also, if the viewing discussion prompted a particularly interesting question/discussion point not covered below, it could be presented to a group for further discussion.

### Discussion Prompts/Questions for groups:

- Did moments in the film prompt laughter? Do you feel your laughter or that of your peers was appropriate? Why or why not? Is it ever appropriate to laugh at a person with a disability?
- Rachel's mother says, "I don't want my life to be defined by the circumstances of Rachel's life. It's like, I've got a lot of life in me and I want to live still." To what extent do you believe the parents and family of a person with a disability should remain responsible for the daily supports and supervision that person may require?
- Rachel is 21 years old and wants to move out of her home. She is willing to work. Should the government guarantee her housing and employment?
- Rachel meets a young man at the JCC who seems surprised to learn that they are the same age, 21. Are any of the struggles Rachel goes through struggles you can identify with? Can you empathize with her and what are the ways that you can? And if not, what do you think are the major differences between what you want from life and what Rachel wants.
- Rachel is clearly bullied during her stay with Amelia's family through the Life Sharing program. Why do you think she does so little to defend herself? How did that scene make you feel? Why do you think this happens? What do you think you would have done if you were present?
- Have you witnessed bullying, teasing, or even exclusion (which can also be hurtful and victimizing) of persons with disabilities? As a peer, what can you do to be sure this does not happen/continue?
- What do you imagine Rachel achieved in order to participate in her graduation ceremony? How is achievement different for different people?

After the group discussions have finished, one presenter from each group should present the groups ideas to the whole class, using the chart paper as a guide.

### Final Discussion:

Help the class to summarize their ideas in a final whole group discussion. Utilize the web created earlier. Are there any final thoughts to be posted?

### **FURTHER ACTIVITIES/ENRICHMENT**

- Students write a letter or email to the filmmaker at [charlotte@jaktarfilms.com](mailto:charlotte@jaktarfilms.com) critiquing the film and asking questions.
- Students view and discuss *Willowbrook*.
- Students consider other films/books they have seen/read that include characters with disabilities and compare and contrast how they are portrayed versus Rachel's portrayal in *Rachel is*. How are individuals with disabilities portrayed in media?
- Create a journal entry reflecting on ideas brought up during the film or discussions.
- Write a film review of *Rachel is*.
- Write a letter to a state representative discussing any of the issues presented in the film.
- Assign readings from books by Rachel's mother, Jane Bernstein: [Loving Rachel: A Family's Journey from Grief](#) and [Rachel in the World: A Memoir](#)

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

The ARC - The Arc is the world's largest community based organization of and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities  
[www.thearc.org](http://www.thearc.org)

*Rachel is* website – [www.rachelis.com](http://www.rachelis.com)

Jane Bernstein's [Loving Rachel: A Family's Journey from Grief](#) and [Rachel in the World: A Memoir](#)

### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Developmental Disability** – a mental or physical impairment beginning before the age of 22 that alters or inhibits a person from doing at least three of the following: take care of themselves, speak and be understood clearly, learn, walk, make decisions, earn and manage an income, or live on their own.

**Mental Retardation** - is a disability that occurs before age 18. It is characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills. It is diagnosed through the use of standardized tests of intelligence and adaptive behavior.

**Person first language** – the correct way to speak about a person with a disability, putting the person before the disability, e.g. a woman with developmental disabilities rather than a developmentally disabled woman.

**Person Centered Planning** – service planning which assists a person to achieve his/her goals by emphasizing the individual's gifts, talents, skills and challenges. Person centered planning recognizes that individual needs and wants may change and the services and supports needed will also change. Services are viewed as vehicles to enhance each person's well-being, independence, productivity and capacity for appropriate social interaction.

**Transition** – a process designed to facilitate an individual with a disability in his/her movement from school to post-school activities including integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. Depending on individual state's laws, transition planning begins between ages 14 and 16 and may continue through age 21.

**Life Sharing** – sometimes called family living, is a program that arranges for an individual with a developmental disability to share a home with a family or individual he/she is not related to.

**Service Provider** - An agency or individual employed to provide a service to individuals with disabilities. Services may include at home support, job coaching, residential placement, etc.

**Underserved people** – people who receive some services, but not all services they need.

**Unserved people** – people who do not receive services.

**Self Determination** – a person's right to make decisions determining the course of his/her own life.