

Deaf Jam



Teacher Resource Package

**Prepared by:
Susan Starkman, B.A. M.Ed**



**Toronto Jewish
Film Festival**

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Synopsis:

Country of Origin: United States

Director: Judy Lieff

Runtime: 70 minutes

Themes: Deaf Culture, Self Expression, Cultural Identities

Aneta Brodski is a vibrant, expressive young woman who has much to say but her potential to be heard was limited to people who understand American Sign Language (ASL). This all changed after she discovered ASL poetry, a physical art form that combines facial expressions, hand gestures and body movement. Performing at poetry slam competitions, she dazzles the audience with her high-energy act. When Aneta is offered the chance to work with Tahani Salah, a hearing Palestinian slam poet, their differences do not prove to be obstacles. The director mirrors the physical nature of ASL poetry with her use fast-paced cutting, animated graphic text and other innovative techniques that situate the viewer squarely in Aneta's world.

Curriculum Links

Deaf Jam can be used to meet the curriculum requirements of the Language, Writing and Media Studies component of Grades 7-12, and Grade 9 Comprehensive Art (ALC10). It can also be used in Dance from Grades 9-12, Dramatic Arts from Grades 9-12, Media Arts from Grades 10-12, Visual Arts from Grades 9-12, and History Grades 10-12. For a detailed outline of curriculum applications, visit the website of the Deaf Culture Centre at <http://dcc.yontrack.com/Public/Default.aspx?I=182&n=Curriculum>.

Related Texts

Deaf Jam Official Website

<http://www.deafjam.org/about.html>

PBS Independent Lens

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/deaf-jam/>

Context: Deaf Culture

Before viewing the film, students should learn about deaf culture and history in Canada. While the film prevents an overview of that history in the United States, teachers will want to trace the development of deaf culture in a Canadian context. To that end, there are a number of websites and resources that they can consult. Listed below is a brief outline of the development of deaf education in Canada as well as some websites that can provide teachers with the necessary background as well as some classroom resources.

Timeline of Deaf Education in Canada: (Source: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/deaf-culture>)

1800-1960s: Sign language is forbidden in many Canadian classrooms because it was (wrongfully) believed to impair speech development in deaf children.

1970s-early 1980s: Sign language allowed but usually in the form of artificial manual codes. These produced signs in English or French word order, without American Sign Language (ASL) or Langue des Signes Quebecoise (LSQ) grammatical syntax that frequently lacked conceptual clarity.

Late 1980s and early 1990s: More schools allowing ASL and LSQ in the classrooms.

1993: Provincial government amends the Ontario Education Act to recognise ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction for deaf students. It is the first (and, to date, only) province to pass a law regarding ASL and LSQ.

2000s: Multiple ways of incorporating deaf students into the education system. “Mainstreaming” allows for deaf students to attend local schools either in self contained classrooms or in classes with hearing students. Technological devices have also been incorporated such as induction loop and FM systems in which a wire around the classroom passes amplified signals to hearing aids. Many schools also take a bilingual/bicultural approach to educating deaf students, including ASL and written English as classroom languages and introducing subjects such as deaf studies.

Selected Websites and Resources

Deaf Culture Centre

<http://www.deafculturecentre.ca/Public/Default.aspx?I=98&n=CCSD>

The Canadian Hearing Society

<http://www.chs.ca/>

The Hearing Foundation of Canada

<http://www.hearingfoundation.ca/Default.aspx>

Ontario Association of the Deaf

<http://www.deafontario.ca/>

Related Questions/Activities/Discussion Topics

1. Define the term deaf culture and identify some of the values, beliefs and traditions associated with it.
2. Discuss the connection between language and culture. How are cultural changes reflected in the evolution of language (e.g. how has immigration influenced the English language in Canada)?
3. In what ways does the history of deaf culture struggling to preserve its language compare with the struggles of other cultures living in Canada?
4. Can you identify any other obstacles to cross-cultural understanding between the Deaf and hearing people apart from language?
5. Visit the American Sign Language University site at <http://www.lifeprint.com/>. Write a brief paragraph introducing yourself and convert it to American Sign Language.
6. Research the history of deaf art. What is Deaf View/Image Art (De'Via)? What is the difference between a De'Via artist and a deaf artist? What are some of the themes in De'Via art? What are some of the formal elements that characterise De'Via art?
7. In deaf culture, people often talk about the "pathological" versus the "cultural" view of deafness. What is meant by these terms? Create a chart outlining the difference these two different approaches to deafness.
8. Divide the class into groups and have each one research a famous deaf person. Have them share their findings with the class.
9. Read the article "Singing With Their Hands" at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/fashion/singing-with-their-hands.html?_r=1 Visit some of the youtube videos mentioned in the article. Divide the class into groups and have each one come up with an ASL version of a popular song to perform in front of the class.

Further Resources

Deaf Culture Online

<http://www.deaf-culture-online.com/deafculture.html>

Deaf Zone

<http://www.deafzone.com/welcome/index.html>

ASL Info

<http://www.aslinfo.com/index.html>

Context: Spoken Word, Poetry Jams and Poetry Slams

Deaf Jam introduces the viewer into the world of poetry slam competitions. Many students may not be familiar with slam poetry and the tradition out of which it rose. Before viewing the film, teachers should familiarise their students with terms such as spoken word poetry, poetry jams and poetry slams.

Spoken Word

Spoken word is a type of oral poetry that was popularised in the 1950s and 60s with the rise of the Beat movement led by Alan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs. It was also an integral part of the underground African American scene during the 60s with groups such as The Last Poets being credited with laying the foundation of hip hop music. Spoken word poetry uses alliterated prose and occasionally metered verse to express social commentary. It is usually performed as a solo piece and it deals with issues of contemporary social relevance.

Poetry Jams

Poetry jams are informal performances that are the poetry equivalent of a jazz jam session. Improvisation and collaboration are its cornerstones and the poetry may or may not be original.

Poetry Slams

Poetry slams are competitions in which poets perform original work within a certain time limit (usually three minutes). They are given numeric scores by five judges who have been selected from the audience by the MC. Most of the poems take the form of social and political commentary.

The first poetry slam was held in Chicago in November 1984 at the Get Me High Club. Marc Smith, a poet and construction worker is credited for establishing the first slam competition and it has grown exponentially, with slam competitions held in dozens of countries around the globe.

Slams can be “open” or “invitational”. They can also revolve around particular themes (e.g. “nerd” or “erotica”). Occasionally, Slams will restrict themselves to under-represented groups such as high school students or women.

Canadian Poetry Slam Scene

Canada has a thriving slam scene across the country. Spoken Word Canada (SpoCan) is an organisation of spoken word performers and organisers whose mission is to “nurture, develop and advance spoken word artists, the professional spoken word community and the art of spoken word in Canada” (source: <http://spokenwordcanada.com/about>). Every autumn, SpoCan produces a national gathering of spoken word poets at the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word.

Related Resources:

Spoken Word Canada

<http://spokenwordcanada.com/>

Toronto Poetry Slam

<http://torontopoetryslam.com/>

BAM Youth Slam

<http://torontopoetryslam.com/bam-youth-slam>

Throw Poetry Collective

<http://www.throwcollective.com/>

Vancouver Poetry House

<http://www.vancouverpoetryhouse.com/vanslam/>

Canadian Festival of the Spoken Word

<http://cfsw.ca/>

Related Activities

1. Conduct a poetry jam in your classroom. Divide students into groups, assign them a topic (e.g. literacy, poverty) and have them prepare a three-minute performance piece for the rest of the class.
2. Have students watch some performances of Canadian slam poets (youtube has several). What are some of the themes that emerge in their poetry? Is it different from the topics covered by American slam poets? If so, how? (**NB: many of the pieces on youtube contain strong language and themes that would be suitable only for senior high school students**)

Deaf Jam: General Discussion Questions/ Activities

1. The film opens in silence, with sound gradually integrated into the visuals. Why do you think that director chose to do this? How else does the director make the viewer empathise with deaf people?
2. What are the five components of a sign? How does the director convey these components visually?
3. How is rhyming conveyed in sign language?
4. At times, the director uses subtitles to translate ASL and at others, she uses a voice-over narration. Which do you think is more effective? Why?
5. Aneta and her classmates discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being deaf. What are some of the features they mention?
6. What are some of the fears that the students express about their future after leaving high school?
7. How does the director utilise subtitles in a way that allows viewers to better understand both the words that are being signed and the tone in which the signer would like his/her ideas conveyed?
8. Aneta decides to perform without an interpreter, saying that she wants the audience to watch her and insisting that she “will force them to look into [her] eyes.” Why do you think she makes this decision? Do you think that it is the right one? Why/why not?
9. Before Aneta performs, we see her peers watching the hearing poets perform. What is their reaction to the performances? How does it differ from the way that the hearing audience responds to Aneta’s poem?
10. Although the performance piece they work on together deals with the politics of the Middle East, politics do not seem to get in the way of Aneta and Tahani’s relationship. How does poetry help them to understand each other’s perspective? What are some of the other factors that allow for them to become friends even though they come from different cultures and religions? What do you think that the two young women learn from each other?
11. Tahani shows Aneta some of her poetry but Aneta’s ASL poetry is not written down. How do they manage to translate ASL into the words that Tahani speaks while Aneta signs?
12. When Tahani and Aneta perform their piece in front of an audience, the camera initially focuses on the two of them. However, when Aneta is telling her story, the camera focuses only on her and we can’t hear what Tahani is saying. Similarly, when Tahani tells her story, we can’t see Aneta signing. Why does the director film the piece this way? Do you think it is effective? Why/why not?
13. The poet Bob Holman is quoted in the film as saying “survival of a culture is a survival of a language, is a survival of a people.” What does he mean by this? Do you agree? Why/why not?

14. Divide students into groups. Ask half of them to write a letter from the point of view of a hearing mother trying to convince her daughter to get a cochlear implant. The other half of the class should write a letter from the daughter outlining the reasons why she does not want to get one. Read the letters aloud. Which one is more convincing? Why?
15. At the end of the film, Aneta says that she would like to change the definition of the word deaf from “can’t” hear to “don’t” hear. What is the difference? Do you think this is a better definition? Why/why not?
16. Write a film review of *Deaf Jam* based on the criteria sheet included in this guide.

Criteria Rating (5=great, 1=poor)						
Information	5	4	3	2	1	Comments
Clarity of Information						
Experts Used?						
Presentation						
Factual						
Emotional Impact						
Interest						
Film Techniques						
Images						
Words						
Subtitles						
Music						

Editing						
Structure						
Graphics						

References

(All websites cited are from May, 2012)

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