



# Teaching Guide



## VIEW AND DISCUSS

### Rationale

Watching short films about young people with difference gives participants a chance to hear and see how differences affect themselves, their friends, and families.

### Procedure

1. Before showing the films to the group, it is suggested that the educator open up with a short discussion, recording answers on a smart board, chalk board, or poster board with the following questions:
  - Have participants name different kinds of difference?
  - What do student think defines a difference?
  - Have any of the students known someone with a difference?
  - What do student regard as “normal”? Suggest use of the word “average.”
2. Create groups of four to five students. Have them select 3 Diaries to watch.
3. After viewing 3 Diaries, ask participants to answer the following questions. Participants can respond individually or place them into small groups.
  - Now what do students think characterizes a difference?
  - Are there limitations/disadvantages to living with a difference?
  - Name any perceived benefits to living with difference.
  - What makes each subject feel happy, successful, fulfilled?
  - How was each subject treated by, and how do they interact with their family and friends?
  - What of the subjects’ experiences reminded you of your own?
  - Did the students laugh at any point in the film? Why did they laugh?
  - What would the students do if they had a chronic illness or identifiable difference?
  - Do some types of difference seem more onerous than others and why?
  - Would the students feel guilty if they knew they would have a child that might be different?
  - What did the students think of the films? Did they feel a connection to the subjects?
  - Do the students feel different about difference now? If so why?
  - For older students, what do they think of the issue of dating someone with a difference? Discuss potential and real roadblocks and hesitations.
  - Now how do students define “normal”? Have they revised their views?
4. Answers can be discussed within individual groups or a member of smaller groups can be chosen to present responses to the larger group. Discussion to follow among the group as a whole or back in smaller groups.



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## WHO AM I? (IDENTITY CHART)

### Rationale

Drawing out an identity chart is always a helpful tool for students so they can visualize on paper the many factors that shape who they are within their families and their communities. Charts can be shared in small groups. This comparison can help students make connections with others who have a difference.

### Procedure

Before students draw out their own charts, brainstorm as a group about “Who Am I?” Examples can be your role in your family, with friends, your hobbies, your background, along with physical characteristics. It is helpful to show a few examples of what a “Who Am I” chart might look like. Creativity is encouraged. The chart starts with a blank piece of paper with a big circle in the middle with the name of the student.

Ask students to share their charts (with a buddy, small group, or large group).

### Variations

This activity can be used before watching the film or after watching the film. An excellent variation is to ask students to make one chart representing how they see themselves, and one as they think the outside world sees them.



## WRITING ASSIGNMENT

### Rationale

Writing is a strategy that allows students to explore their feelings on paper. Writing slows down the students’ thinking process and provides an opportunity to stop and think not only about their own perspective but that of others. Writing also provides students and teachers a record to refer to at a later time.

### Procedure

Here are Two Prompts from which to choose:

Prompt #1 – Have the teacher or leader of the assignment read a section of the book, “Wonder” by R.J. Palacio (print out PDF) example below. After the students listen, have them write a paragraph about how they felt after hearing this part of the story.

Prompt #2- Have the students write a paragraph explaining a time in your life when you felt “different” at the hands of another and recall how that felt.

General Suggestions to get students thinking:

- Have you ever been in a similar situation?
- Have you even been singled out and how did it make you feel?
- What was going through your mind at the time?
- What kind of reaction did you have – internally and externally?
- Can you identify how you would have responded?
- Did you ever think to yourself: “I would not have done that”
- Can you own up to feeling scared or worried about being around extreme differences?



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## THINK AND SHARE

### Rationale

Asking students to think of one experience that might be difficult to share can be liberating in a safe environment where students might find someone else who feels the same way. Having students write their thoughts down first gives an opportunity to think first. Pairing students with only one other person gives a sense of security and comfort that they will not feel embarrassed or ashamed of their feelings.

### Procedure

Have the students write down an experience that they have had with someone who has a difference. A cousin, friend, sibling, or neighbor who might have a chronic illness, and/or emotional or learning differences.

For example: being in a family with a sick sibling and feeling left out, having a friend who misses a lot of school and feeling jealous, scared that someone you care about might die.

After students have written down their experience, have students pair up with one other student to share their story.

As a large group, discuss what similarities each pair had.



## TALK TO ME

### Rationale

Personal experiences are a way for all students to relate to one another. When students are in an environment that is supportive, safe, and comforting, they will share.

### Procedure

Open a discussion about personal experience with feeling “out-of-it” because of some characteristic you possess that is beyond your control but for which you felt ostracized. Then in groups of three or four have students talk about their stories. Have them choose one and put together a “how to” piece for future generations about how to handle yourself in a situation where your self-worth is questioned because of someone else. Encourage them to come up with new and safe ways to handle the situation. Give them about 20-30 minutes to discuss and rehearse a short skit.

Have students make their presentations.



## VOICES: THE GROUP SPEAKS

“Voices” is an immersive experience; a traveling video installation in which 9 video screens are suspended in a darkened room. It is a room full of choices expressing what it is like to be a young adult with difference. Students take a seat in front of a monitor and watch the film Diary using headphones. Each screen loops a single Diary. After 2-4 diaries are viewed, participants may come together as a group to discuss the experience using any of the prompts above.