

Deciphering Dyslexia

Lesson Plan

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Objective

To enable students to gain an understanding of dyslexia by hearing the accounts of young dyslexics. Further, to help students decipher this reading disability and to develop compassion for young people living with it.

Target audience

Students aged 13 to 17

Connections

Arts and culture
Languages and literature
Social sciences

Film required for the activity

The documentary film *Deciphering Dyslexia* (56 min 9 s).

Summary of the Lesson Plan

This lesson plan (*see note 1*) will first let students put themselves into the shoes of young dyslexia sufferers; it will enable them to realize how these young people cope with learning in general and, more specifically, with learning how to read. It gives students a glimpse of how dyslexia affects daily life (*see note 2*). Secondly, it shows what can be done to enhance the well-being of dyslexic persons. In general, students will be able to understand how this documentary helps to clear up our notions of what dyslexia is.

Start and preparatory activity: I have dyslexia and I'm living my life fully!

Approximate duration: 45 minutes.

Before beginning the activity, write this sentence in capital letters on a flip chart, but do not show it to your students: NAIGIEM A LIFETIME.

Step 1: Tell your students that this film is about dyslexia. Ask them if they have ever heard this word, if they know anyone with dyslexia and if so, if they can describe how dyslexia affects them.

Step 2: Ask students about how important reading is in their daily lives and then ask them to give concrete examples. Next, make up teams and give each team one of the statement excerpts you will find on worksheet 1 (see Appendix). Give teams the following instructions: try to imagine the person making this statement, his or her age and what he or she is trying to express. Give students several minutes to write down what they think the excerpt means before beginning a team discussion. If anyone has experienced a similar situation, ask them to give precise information about the circumstances and their feelings.

Step 3: Review the team discussions with the entire class. Then, watch the first minute of the documentary so that they can meet the four individuals who made the statements:

Jeremy Desjardins, Tyler Wong, Thomas Stringham and Kathryn Thompson. Point out the images the filmmaker chose to introduce them to us. Ask students to explain why the filmmaker chose to show each person doing an activity they enjoy as they talk about their difficult experiences at school. How do the images of signs, traffic signals, a restaurant menu, etc. help the viewers gain an understanding of the problem? And what about those images in which we see different people reading the same book (*see note 3*)? What effect do these images have on the viewers?

Step 4: Display the flip chart and give your students five seconds to decipher the sentence written on it. Explain that the word NAIGIEM is what a dyslexic person would read instead of the correct word IMAGINE. Tell them that Thomas Stringham, one of the persons with dyslexia in this documentary and an advertising man by profession, chose this sentence to illustrate what a dyslexic person experiences every day. Collect their impressions about this short exercise.

Conclude the activity by asking students to do some research on dyslexia during the week, and then try to understand the meaning of this school motto: “If you can’t learn the way we teach, we will teach you the way you learn.” Tell them that the next activity will enable them to understand what it means.

Activity: Deciphering dyslexia to understand it better

Approximate duration: 2 sessions of 60 minutes (*see note 4*).

Step 1: Ask students to briefly summarize what they discovered during the week they were researching dyslexia and then comment on this expression by one of the young people shown in the film: “You just have to realize you have it for life and you’re just gonna deal with it.”

Step 2: Explain that the documentary will let each team get to know the person (and their parents) whose statement excerpt was quoted in the preparatory activity. Each team member will fill in *worksheet 2* so that once they have all seen the film, the team can discuss each member’s observations. Ask students to pay special attention to what the dyslexic person is saying, feeling and experiencing due to living with dyslexia, as well as the means available to them to offset their learning difficulties. In addition, ask them to write down which parent statements and specialist explanations made the greatest impression on them. Watch the film from the beginning, then give them the time needed to fill in their worksheet.

Step 3: Gather the class together again and begin a discussion by using the following questions: What impact did learning difficulties seem to have had on the interviewees in their childhood? What impact did dyslexia have on their school life? In other areas of life? On their self-confidence? How did people around them react to this, especially their parents? What common misconceptions did the dyslexic persons have to deal with? What helped them to overcome their difficulties?

- What does the presence of the narrator contribute to the documentary? How do the narrator and the different specialists explain dyslexia?
- This documentary shows photographs of the interviewees at different stages in their childhood and adolescence. Why did the filmmaker choose to do this? In your opinion, what effect could this process have on the viewer? On you?
- What do the images contribute to the explanation of dyslexia? Which ones caught your eye the most? Why? What effect could they have on the viewer? On you? In the same way, what music or what sounds in the movie made a particularly strong impression on you? Why?

- As the credits are rolling at the end of the film, the camera focuses on each child in turn as they state their names and identify which activity they enjoy the most. In your opinion, why did the filmmaker choose to do this?
- What would help dyslexic students achieve better success in school? How can multisensory teaching and one-on-one tutoring make learning easier for young children with dyslexia?
- How does this documentary explain the problem of dyslexia and how does it raise awareness about the issue?
- What did the different individual statements teach you about dyslexia? How did they change your perception of dyslexia?

Recap

Suggested duration: 45 minutes.

Ask students to find an original way of explaining dyslexia, either in the form of a poster, podcast, sketch, drawing, cartoon, etc.

Reflective Sharing

After completing the activities of this lesson plan, students ought to be able to:

- Give a definition of dyslexia and its characteristics in their own words;
- Identify the means with which dyslexic persons can make their daily life easier;
- Give examples of how the documentary can be used as a tool to raise awareness.

Notes

1. This lesson plan was designed for students aged 13 to 17. You can easily adapt it to the level of your own students.
2. Dyslexia is not letter reversal; it can appear in different forms, as shown in the documentary.
3. The book *One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish* was written by Dr. Seuss in 1960. It describes all kinds of fish: blue and red, skinny and fat, young and old, etc. It is an interesting way of showing diversity.
4. We suggest that you use two sessions to show the film (e.g. begin with a first session lasting 25 minutes) and divide the questions as needed. You can also do all of the activities or simply select those that are best suited to your own group of students.

Webography

- Canadian Dyslexia Association

<http://www.dyslexiaassociation.ca/english/whatisdyslexia.shtml>

- How to help a dyslexic child in the classroom

<http://www.classroom-assistant.net/symptoms.html>

<http://www.dyslexia-teacher.com/>

- Canadian Dyslexia Center (CDC) Inc

www.dyslexiacentre.ca

The texts by Louise Brazeau-Ward are particularly useful:

http://www.dyslexiacentre.ca/english/files/dyslexia_language_training.pdf

<http://www.dyslexiacentre.ca/english/files/confused%20is%20it%20dyslexia.pdf>

- Starfall is a free public service to motivate children to read with phonics.

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

- [LD OnLine.org](http://www.ldonline.org) is the world's leading website on learning disabilities and ADHD, serving more than 200,000 parents, teachers, and other professionals each month.

<http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/reading>

<http://www.ldonline.org/educators>

- Book: *One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish*, Dr. Seuss Enterprises, 1960.

Appendix Worksheet 1 Statements

Hint: Fill in the worksheet according to the sentence given to your team.

Statement excerpt	My reactions to this statement
I couldn't do the questions. I couldn't get it right.	
They started not liking me because I was put in a different corner. Nobody would talk to me.	
School was a disaster for me. I actually had bad report cards back in grade one.	
I remember being in not-good-reading groups.	

Appendix Worksheet 2 Statements and Explanations

Hint: Write the name of the dyslexic person whose statements you hear, then fill in the worksheet. As you are watching the film, pay attention to how this person hears, reads and writes: this will help you to get a better understanding of his or her experience. Also, pay particular attention to their feelings and to the persons who helped them cope with dyslexia.

Name of the dyslexic person you observed: _____

Statement excerpt	Excerpt of parent statement	My reactions

Write down this person's talents: _____

Identify the explanations of the specialists who helped you get a better understanding of dyslexia:

Name of specialist and professional title	Explanation