Lesson: It's About Access

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore issues of accessibility as they step into their immediate communities to determine a range of physical barriers to those living with disabilities and conceptualize ways to remove some of those obstacles.

The video clips provided with this lesson are from *When I Walk*, a film by and featuring Jason DaSilva, who has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). The documentary chronicles Jason's struggle to adapt to the realities of living with MS while holding on to his personal and creative life. With Jason's body growing weaker, his spirits, and his film, get a boost from his mother's tough love and the support of Alice Cook, who becomes his wife and filmmaking partner.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

• Recognize the barriers people living with disabilities encounter in their daily lives.
• Be alert to and analyze accessibility issues in their communities.
• Construct plans for remediating accessibility issues.

GRADE LEVELS

9-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Language Arts, Social Studies, Current Events,

MATERIALS

• Internet access and equipment to show the class online video
• Chart paper
• Any printouts of resource materials downloaded from provided URLs (teachers may choose what to print and distribute)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period, plus 30 to 50 minutes for the homework assignment (and additional class time, if possible, for extended community work)

FILM CLIPS

Clip 1: There's No Elevator (Length: 1:37)
This clip begins at 43:13 with Jason DaSilva saying, "Hi. I was wondering, do you know if your restaurant has wheelchair access?" It ends at 44:50 with Jason saying, "There's no elevator."

Clip 2: The Cars Will Run You Down (Length: 0:33)
The clip begins at 32:14 with Jason saying, "There are no accessible cabs." It ends at 32:47 with Jason saying, "The cars will run you down."

Clip 3: Mapping Accessibility (Length: 2:20)
The clip begins at 1:06:16 with Jason saying, "One day I came up with an idea. What if everyone could share all the accessible places they know, and what if they could put them on a map?" It ends at 1:08:36 with Kevin Greisch saying, "Yeah."

Clip 4: Scooting Around (Length: 1:26)
The clip begins at 33:00 with Jason saying, "Hey, Alice, this is Jason." The clip ends at 34:26 with Jason saying, "Scooting around the Guggenheim Museum is so much fun."

Clip 5: What Happens When I Can't Eat My Food? (Length: 3:37)
This clip begins at 38:51 with Alice Cook saying, "Why were you in a bad mood this morning?" It ends at 42:28 with Alice saying, "And you were like, well, at least you have me for 15 years."

Clip 6**:** You Have to Hear the Geese (Length: 2:02)
The clip starts at 1:00:32 with Jason saying, "Why are you going on a trip?" It ends at 1:02:34 with Alice saying, "Jason, you have to hear the geese."

ACTIVITY

1. Ask students to name some of their favorite places to hang out, such as restaurants, shops and theaters. List about 10 venues total. Then, invite students to vote on their favorites by a show of hands. Select the top three venues.

2. Invite students to describe what makes each venue so popular, naming as many characteristics as possible. Prompt students to think about the spaces' physical qualities, including the locations of their front doors, ease of movement inside them and any special design qualities that might be appealing (like a very cool spiral staircase). List all of the physical characteristics by category (students can name these categories).

3. Tell students that they will watch a clip about a person living with physical disabilities. As they watch, encourage them to keep in mind the venues they like and the list of characteristics they compiled, with a focus on physical qualities.

4. Show Clip 1: There's No Elevator (Length: 1:37) and Clip 2: The Cars Will Run You Down (Length: 0:33) After viewing the clips, discuss them with the students, using the following prompts:

   • What stood out for you in this clip? What was new and surprising?
   • What did the clip prompt you to think about in terms of accessibility for a person with and without physical disabilities? What might someone without a physical disability not realize about accessibility?
   • Think about the venues you listed. Are they accessible to people with disabilities? Where are the barriers?
   • What kind of responsibility to become accessible do you think venues like the ones you selected should bear?

5. Briefly share with students some data about environmental accessibility (http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/accessibility.htm), as well as some background on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (http://www.ada.gov/index.html), established to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities, which covers the removal of physical/structural barriers. Students should understand that ADA compliance regulation, and particularly what kind of accessibility must be provided in certain contexts, varies by states. Thus, some venues do not have to follow the law completely, and sometimes the law is not followed at all.

   Ask students to form pairs or small groups and briefly discuss other accessibility issues that might exist in their community and services for people with disabilities (examples include theater and cinema for the hearing impaired and audio library books for the blind). The goal is to have them become more aware of challenges and gaps that an average person would not typically notice. Invite the pairs or groups to share their findings and discuss what this all means in terms of the quality of life for people with disabilities. Show Clip 3: Mapping Accessibility (Length: 2:20) and Clip 4: Scooting Around (Length: 1:26) to reinforce understanding of these struggles and barriers. Ask students what they think can be done to make the improvements that are necessary to ensure access, equality and quality of life for people living with disabilities.

6. Assign, or have students to choose, one of the following options:

   OPTION A: Jason DaSilva has become a disability advocate and activist, and has created AXS Map http://www.axsmap.com/, a tool for helping people locate wheelchair-accessible businesses and places. Students can find community locations on the site to review and rate based on their accessibility status. Students can work in small groups to list and rate local sites for AXS Map. As a follow-up, they can reach out to the venues to suggest ways to make their sites more accessible.

OPTION B: Students work in small groups to focus on an element in their community that presents an accessibility barrier and to design (by drawing, writing or representing in another way) methods for making it more accessible to the disabled.

They can do this one of several different ways:

- Review standard ADA and related checklist to decide what can be altered based on requirements (for example, enlarging a doorway or adding an elevator):
  - **United States Access Board**
    http://www.access-board.gov/
  - **Checklist for Existing Facilities**
    http://www.ada.gov/racheck.pdf
  - **The Accessible Virtual Community**
    http://access-mainstreet.r2d2.uwm.edu/Virtual_Community/Restaurants_Dining
  - **Universal Design New York**
    http://www.nyc.gov/html/ddc/downloads/pdf/udny/udny2.pdf

- Review some accessibility designs, such as:
  - **Sesame Stairs from Allgood Trio**
    http://www.allgood.co.uk/news.asp?info=Sesame+stairs+from+Allgood+Trio
  - **Accessible Playgrounds**
    http://www.playlsi.com/Explore-Products/Universally-Accessible-Playgrounds/Accessible-Playgrounds/Pages/Accessible-Playgrounds.aspx
  - **Accessible Sidewalks and Street Crossings**
    http://www.bikewalk.org/pdfs/sopada_fhwa.pdf

If time permits, students can explore the concept of universal design and what it suggests for the designs they envision:
http://www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/about_ud/about_ud.htm
http://www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/about_ud/udprinciples.htm

7. Engage students in a discussion about what it might take to put some of their thoughts about accessibility into action in their community. Where might they start? Whom would they contact? How would they proceed? This conversation will jumpstart their homework and, if possible, allow for continued work geared to making some changes regarding community accessibility issues.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Students brainstorm action steps they can take to tackle accessibility issues discussed in class. For example, they might approach the local chamber of commerce or merchants' association to push for greater accessibility, perhaps starting with the most frequented venues. They can reach out to their public officials to learn more about what is being done about accessibility issues. They can reach out to local or state disability support advocacy groups to request a guest speaker. Generated lists are shared in

class, and if extended time is available for this work, students can select one or more actions to perform.

EXTENSIONS

1. **Confronting Adversity**
   An outstanding theme in the film is Jason's approach to accepting and negotiating his illness. His resilience helps him cope and move forward to balance quality of life with the disease. People experiencing difficult circumstances often find ways to work within and around adversity. Students first read stories (this can be done in small groups):

   - **Living Well with MS**
     http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Living-Well-With-MS/Personal-Stories/Life-with-MS
   - **Living a Full Life with Chronic Illness**
     http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/04/02/living-a-full-life-with-chronic-illness/
   - **How to Stay Hopeful and Resilient Through Adversity**
     http://blogs.psychcentral.com/positive-psychology/2011/05/how-to-stay-hopeful-and-resilient-through-adversity/
   - **Hoda Kotb: 6 Inspirational Stories of Overcoming Adversity**
   - http://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2013/01/21/hoda-kotb-6-inspirational-stories-of-overcoming-adversity/
   - **Knocking Out Adversity With Boxing Champion Terri Moss**
     http://www.huffingtonpost.com/erin-havel/knocking-out-adversity-wi_b_4646909.html

Students then reflect on personal or other stories of adversity, which can include any situation that has been challenging, and discuss how adversity was negotiated. Students compile a list of factors that contribute to resilience. To jumpstart this, students can review resilience-related material: **What is Resilience?** http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/resilience/what-resilience and/or **Being Resilient** http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-info/hot-topics/being-resilient.php. They then add to this list, which guidance counselors or health teachers can distribute to students school wide.

2. **ADA and School**

People with disabilities have long been strong activists, advocating for their rights across issues. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law in 1990, is one of America's most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation. It prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life—to enjoy employment opportunities, to purchase goods and services and to participate in state and local government programs and services.

The ADA sets some parameters for public schools, which students can read about or which the teacher can share: **ADA Q & A: Back to School** http://www.pacer.org/publications/adaqa/school.asp. (Each state has a set of ADA compliance regulations; students can read those to learn how their state deals with the ADA in public schools.) Keeping in mind that schools have some leeway when it comes to structural compliance, have students tour the school, using a checklist such as the **Americans with Disabilities Act Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal** (http://www.ada.gov/racheck.pdf) to figure out how they might make their school more accessible.

Another option: Students explore the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which addresses educational services and recent rulings about equal access to sports for students with disabilities. Resources: **Schools Must Provide Sports Options for Disabled Students** http://video.pbs.org/video/2338805822/ and **Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004** http://idea.ed.gov/.

3. Love and Care

One of the most challenging aspects of personal relationships can be illness or disease that requires partners to re-envision their lives together. This is true for all types of relationships, including those between couples and those between parents and children of all ages. These situations bring both challenges and rewards. There are also situations where a person may enter into a relationship with another person who is already living with some type of illness, disability or related condition. Show Clip 5: What Happens When I Can't Eat My Food? (Length: 3:37) and Clip 6: You Have to Hear the Geese (Length: 2:02).

Students reflect on the clips and discuss how the relationship between Jason and Alice evolves and the choices Alice makes going into the relationship. Students then work in small groups or pairs to learn more about how couples and/or families cope and make life decisions by reading one or more short pieces, such as:

- **Caring for a Loved One with Chronic Illness**
- http://lovingwithchronicillness.blogspot.com/2012/01/candid-moving-guest-post-caring-for.html
- **Love in the Time of Chronic Illness**
- http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/12/love-in-the-time-of-chronic-illness/282477/
- **Caring for a Seriously Ill Child** http://kidshealth.org/parent/system/ill/seriously_ill.html
- **Caregiver Survival Tips** http://www.beliefnet.com/Love-Family/Caregiving/Caregiver-Survival-Tips.aspx

Based on the clips and articles they read—and personal experience, if any—students can list strategies for coping with and caring for a loved one or a close friend.

RESOURCES

National Multiple Sclerosis Society: Definition of MS
http://www.nationalmssociety.org/What-is-MS/Definition-of-MS

When I Walk: **What Is AXS Map?**
http://wheniwalk.com/axs-map/

YouTube: *When I Walk*
https://www.youtube.com/user/wheniwalkinc

Independent Lens: **Lives Worth Living**
http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/lives-worth-living/film.html

PBS NewsHour: **Limited Funds, Lingering Bias Has Delayed ADA Compliance**
http://video.pbs.org/video/2365060019/

The Center for an Accessible Society: The Americans with Disabilities Act
http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/ada/

Community Tool Box: Ensuring Access for People with Disabilities
http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/phsyical-social-environment/housing-accessibility-disabilities/main

Wheelchair
http://www.newdisability.com/accessibility.htm

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects
(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Content Knowledge: (http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Language Arts, Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior

Behavioral Studies, Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions

Family/Consumer Science: Living Environments, Standard 6: Understand how knowledge and skills related to living environments affect the well-being of individuals, families and society

Civics: What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy? Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michele Israel owns Educational Writing & Consulting (www.micheleisrael.com), where she works with large and small educational, nonprofit and media organizations to bolster products and programs. Her rich career spans more than 25 years of successful experience developing educational materials and resources, designing and facilitating training, generating communication materials and grant proposals and assisting in organizational and program development. Her long list of clients includes the Public Broadcasting Service, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Teaching Tolerance, Aspiranet, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, WETA Public Television, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* and the Harm Reduction Coalition.