LESSON
Stereotypes, Cerebral Palsy, and Poetry

OVERVIEW
In this multidisciplinary lesson, students examine stereotypes about people with physical disabilities. Using clips from Still Tomorrow, a documentary about Chinese poet Yu Xiuhua, who has cerebral palsy, students will gain awareness of the clues they use to judge people. To better understand Yu’s condition, they’ll conduct research about cerebral palsy and write an “advice blog” addressing stereotypes about people with disabilities. As part of that research, students will consider how they choose what to click on when they do online searches.

OBJECTIVES
In this lesson, students will:
• Examine the cues they use to make judgments about people
• Learn about cerebral palsy
• Hone Internet search skills
• Research and write a blog entry addressing stereotypes of people with cerebral palsy
• Write a poem about emotions that arose during the lesson [optional]

GRADE LEVELS: 9-11

SUBJECT AREAS
Research Skills (esp. online searching) Health
English/Language Arts Inclusion / Anti-Bias Education

MATERIALS
Internet access, the film clips and equipment needed to show them.

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
1 class period plus homework

FILM CLIPS
Film clips provided in this lesson are from the film Still Tomorrow by Fan Jian. Access the streaming clips for free on POV’s website by visiting www.pbs.org/pov/educators. Borrow the full film from our DVD Lending Library by joining the POV Community Network: http://communitynetwork.amdoc.org.

Clip 1: Who is Yu? (2:45 min.)
The clip starts from the very beginning of the film and ends at 2:45 with a shot of the farm. We see Yu walking around the farm that has inspired some of her poetry as we hear a voice over of her reciting lines from her poems.

Clip 2: Labelling (:35 seconds)
The clip begins at 12:29 with a host’s question and ends at 13:06 after Yu says “but I can’t.” During a speaking engagement at Peking University, Yu is asked about how she overcomes her disability. She declares labelling unfair and discriminatory, but also says she has limitations that she will never overcome.

**Clip 3: Marriage** (1:20 min.)
The first part of the clip begins at 3:13 with the filmmaker asking Yu and her husband Yin how they met. It ends with Yu’s mother, Zhou saying “so I accepted him, right?” In the clip we find out that Yu’s marriage was arranged by her parents, against her will. The follow-up clip, which is only 12 seconds, starts at 27:34 and ends at 27:46. In it, Zhou explains that she had to find Yu a husband who would accept a disabled wife. She says that if Yu had been healthy, she would have been able to find a husband who made her happy.

**[Optional] Clip 4: Poetry** (1:15 min.)
The clip begins at 4:30 with a close up of Yu’s hands on a keyboard. It ends with a long shot of Yu using her laptop. Yu describes what poetry means to her: “Poetry makes me understand that it's important to live on. It supports me. Without poetry, life is empty. When I write, I feel poems give me, peace and tranquility.”

**ACTIVITY**

**Step 1: Who is Yu?**
Play the first 40 seconds of Clip 1. Pause before the voiceover begins and ask students what they think they know about the woman on screen.
- What sort of person do they imagine her to be?
- What do you think her job is?
- What’s their evidence?
- What sorts of clues are important to them as they draw conclusions?
- Is this someone they’d take the time to get to know if she showed up in the cafeteria?

**Step 2: Who is Yu, Really?**
Explain that they are viewing a clip from the film, Still Tomorrow, and the woman on screen is Yu Xiuhua, a poet from rural China who became famous when a post of one of her poems went viral.

Play the rest of the clip. Give students a brief chance to share thoughts about the poetry and imagery on screen. Then steer the discussion back to their first impressions:
- Did anyone guess that the woman was a famous poet?
- What role did stereotypes play in shaping their guesses about who she was?
- Where do stereotypes about people with disabilities come from?

**Step 3: Linking Labels to Discrimination**
Invite students to listen to some brief thoughts from Yu Xiuhua about stereotypes. Play Clip 2. Ask students for their thoughts. Yu says that labels lead to discrimination. Ask students to explain how this happens.

**Step 4: The Assignment**
Introduce blog posts as strategy that can help decrease the negative impacts of stereotypes. Ask students to imagine that they write an advice site for parents or for employers (they can choose their target audience). Their assignment is to write a post that includes: the most
important things to know about people with cerebral palsy and common misconceptions around the disabled community.

To help them think about the topic, play one more clip featuring Yu. This one describes the circumstance of Yu’s marriage. Play Clips 3a & 3b without pausing in between. After both clips, pause to invite student reaction.

**Step 5: Online Searching**
To help students start the research process, do an initial online search together as class. Consider using a site like Duck Duck Go, which doesn’t track results and allows users to turn off adds - this will expose students to the world of searching beyond Google.

In pairs or small groups, ask students to choose which site they would go to first and why. Reconvene and have every group share their choice and reasoning.

Fill in gaps as needed. Why did they assume particular sites would be credible? Note that cerebralpalsy.org is an attorney’s site. Ask why that might be the case? Does the fact that it is hosted by an attorney mean that the information on it isn't factual? Compare it to a site like mayoclinic.com. Which has more credibility on medical information? Were they misled by the .org versus .com suffixes? Once they are on the site, what are they looking at to assess credibility? If you don’t already have a reference, you could refer them for guidance to: [https://www.projectlooksharp.org/?action=webresources_websites](https://www.projectlooksharp.org/?action=webresources_websites)

Remind them of their assignment, including who their target audience is. Collect their final blog-style posts as an assessment.

**[Optional] Step 6: Processing Through Poetry**
Revisit Clip 1 and ask students to listen to Yu’s poetry and how it describes her surroundings. Then play Clip 4, during which Yu talks about why poetry is meaningful for her. Invite students to share their reactions to Yu’s comments. Ask students to write their own poems, either describing their surroundings or expressing the emotions they experienced during this lesson.

**EXTENSIONS / ADAPTATIONS**
Research the Americans with Disabilities Act and/or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Explore ways to share information about these laws with the community.

Read works of other Chinese poets or novelists.

Write poems about students’ experiences of their own community/neighborhood/school. Collect other poems about their surroundings (e.g., poems about rural life, or describing a city street, or honoring inspirational teachers). Create a pop-up poetry reading featuring the works that the class has written and collected.

**RESOURCES**
POV: *Still Tomorrow* by Jian Fan
[pbs.org/pov/stilltomorrow](http://pbs.org/pov/stilltomorrow) - The site includes a general discussion guide with additional activity ideas, as well as a reading list.

*Ability Magazine*: “The Birth of a Poet”
[https://abilitymagazine.com/poetic-documentation-yu-xiuhua/](https://abilitymagazine.com/poetic-documentation-yu-xiuhua/) - This article offers interesting background about Yu Xiuhua and the making of the film.
Cerebral Palsy Foundation
http://yourcpf.org/ - The Cerebral Palsy Foundation website offers fact sheets and additional information on cerebral palsy.

United Cerebral Palsy
www.ucp.org - United Cerebral Palsy focuses on helping people with disabilities live independently and productively. Its website provides a variety of resources, including fact sheets, disability “etiquette” tips, legislative updates, advocacy and links to support services.

National Center on Disability and Journalism
http://ncdj.org/resources/organizations/ - This organization’s website has a comprehensive list of organizations that support people with disabilities in a variety areas, from social services to employment and civil rights advocacy.

U.S. Department of Justice

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films
http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

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, 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 9–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

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.9-10.4, 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

W.9-10.2d, 11-12.2d Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic

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 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
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.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of The Teacher’s Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World (Corwin 2012) and was past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.