



Forrest Gump

Lesson 1

Disability Equality Learning Objectives

- To know about the types of impairment that lead to experiencing learning difficulties;
- To understand the ways in which society has responded negatively to people with learning difficulties;
- To understand the adjustments and support that can be provided so people with learning difficulties can be fully included in society;
- To understand the difference between a realistic portrayal of someone with a learning difficulty, such as in *I am Sam*, and a caricatured portrayal, such as in *Forrest Gump*;
- To appreciate that there is a long tradition in the cinema of laughing at people with learning difficulties;

- To understand the ways that someone with learning difficulties could be portrayed without being stereotyped.

Film Learning Objectives

- Use of flashback to enhance narrative.

Curriculum Objectives

- PSHE – deconstruct Hollywood filmic depiction of a character with learning disabilities and its relation to reality.

Further Curriculum Links

- GCSE English – *Of Mice and Men* – characterisation of Lennie in the novel and the film adaptation, compared to Forrest;
- Media Studies – Hollywood portrayal of a character with learning difficulties, and the ‘star’ concept associated with this film.

Activity 1

Teaching and Learning activity	Essential notes
<p>Teach the class about the nature of having a learning difficulty and how society has discriminated against this group of disabled people in the past and today.</p> <p>Write the following points on the board for students to think about when watching the extracts:</p> <p>How do the filmmakers use:</p> <p>a) flashbacks to tell the story?</p> <p>b) Forrest’s narrative to involve the audience?</p> <p>Watch the most suitable extracts to show how the flashbacks convey a narrative which simultaneously represents Forrest’s life.</p> <p>Ask students to describe how they think this would affect the audience?</p>	<p>See History of attitudes to disabled people (Early 20th century) on the bfi website: www.bfi.org.uk/disablingimagery?</p>

Learning Outcomes

- Use of flashback to enhance narrative.
- Understand the types of impairment that lead to experiencing learning difficulties.
- Understand the ways that society has responded negatively to people with learning difficulties.
- Understand the adjustments and support that can be provided so people with learning difficulties can be fully included in society.



Activity 2

Teaching and Learning activity	Essential notes
<p>After watching extracts, the whole class brainstorms words to describe the character of Forrest. Students may profile Forrest's character individually after this.</p> <p>Watch an extract of the film that demonstrates that Forrest has a learning difficulty.</p> <p>The class discusses whether this is a realistic portrayal of a person with learning difficulties. Give reasons.</p>	<p>Students could use the Comparing characters sheet in the <u>Student handouts</u> on the bfi website: www.bfi.org.uk/disablingimagery?</p>

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the difference between a realistic portrayal of someone with a learning difficulty, such as in *I am Sam*, and a caricatured portrayal, such as in *Forrest Gump*.
- Appreciate that there is a long tradition in the cinema of laughing at people with learning difficulties.

Activity 3

Teaching and Learning activity	Essential notes
<p>The class views the extract that depicts how Lieutenant Dan becomes physically disabled. While watching the extract, the class notes how Forrest helps him come to terms with his impairment.</p>	

Activity 4

Teaching and Learning activity	Essential notes
<p>The teacher defines the term 'satire', with relevant examples found in the film or in the current press to demonstrate the meaning.</p> <p>Explain to the class, with extracts from the film, that the filmmakers are taking a satirical look at recent American history, using actual documentary film of events.</p> <p>Once this is understood, the class must explain how Forrest is included in these events.</p> <p>Ask the class how likely it was that the events in the film could happen to one person? Then discuss why you think the filmmakers used a character with learning difficulties as the main character within these events?</p>	<p>Note to teachers: you could complete a grid with a column for the events in American history and another for how Forrest is included in the events. Ask how Forrest acted, and why?</p> <p>This could be done by the whole class on the board, while watching the extracts; or students do it on individual sheets.</p>



Activity 5

Teaching and Learning activity	Essential notes
<p>Divide the class into four groups. Each group deconstructs:</p> <p>a) how the filmmakers are portraying Forrest; b) how the events are related to this portrayal; in these scenes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The running scene, up to the end of being in the college team (15"–24");• In Vietnam (37"–44");• In Washington for the medal ceremony, up to the end of the Peace Rally (59'–1'04");• The last scene in the film, after Jenny has died and Forrest is looking after young Forrest (2' 02"–2' 06"). <p>Ask the class to discuss in small groups: How could Forrest, who clearly has learning difficulties, be included in a film without making fun of him or showing him doing unrealistic things?</p> <p>Ask the students to devise a more appropriate plot synopsis.</p>	<p>As above, you could use a grid on the board for column a) and column b), while students observe the extracts.</p> <p>The final activity in this section could allow the teacher to compare Forrest's depiction to Lennie in <i>Of Mice and Men</i>.</p> <p>Students could deconstruct Lennie's personality and compare him to Forrest and discuss the author/film director's intention in portraying this in the novel or film. This would be a successful task particularly if students are studying this novel for GCSE English.</p> <p>You could use the Write a scene/storyline sheet in <u>Student handouts</u> on the bfi website: www.bfi.org.uk/disablingimagery?</p>

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the ways that someone with learning difficulties could be portrayed without being stereotyped.