



***Hey Hey It's Esther Blueburger!* Teacher Resource**

A great deal of thanks and appreciation goes out to the members of our Teacher Advisory Committee, who volunteer their time to assist in the development of Sprockets teacher resources.

This teacher resource was written by Maggie Hanrahan.

TITLE: *Hey Hey It's Esther Blueburger*

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Australia

RELEASE YEAR: 2007

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: English

DIRECTOR: Cathy Randall

RUNTIME: 103 minutes

CURRICULUM LINKS:

- Grades 7 and 8 Health and Physical Education
 - Healthy Living, Personal Growth and Development
- Grade 9 Health and Physical Education
 - Healthy Growth and Sexuality

FOCUSING QUESTION: What adolescent issues are addressed in this film, and do you feel it's a realistic depiction?

SYNOPSIS:

Esther Blueburger longs to fit in. However, the unusual and unique Esther is an outcast at the elite all-girls private school she attends, where conformity is the rule. This leaves her without any friends to invite to her upcoming bat mitzvah... that is, until she meets Sunni, a student at the nearby public school.



Sunni likes Esther precisely because she is different from anyone else. A friendship quickly develops, and the pair devises a plan for Esther to attend Sunni's school by posing as an exchange student. There, Esther meets Sunni's group of misfit friends and feels that she has finally found a place where she belongs. But as Esther starts imitating her new friends rather than just being herself, her friendship with Sunni is put in jeopardy.

Balancing quirky laugh-out-loud comedy with sophisticated drama exploring the experience of being an outsider, *Hey Hey It's Esther Blueburger* is a charming coming-of-age story that celebrates the importance of being an individual. Featuring outstanding performances from newcomer Danielle Catanzariti as Esther and Keisha Castle-Hughes as Sunni, as well as clever dialogue and colourful cinematography, the film delivers an uplifting reminder that being true to yourself is more important than fitting in.

N.B. Youth smoking. One brief scene is set in an exotic dance club, but there is no nudity.

Recommended for grades 7 through 9

AN EDUCATOR'S COMMENTS ON THE FILM:

"This film has the perfect mix of humour and drama. Esther is a quirky, lovable protagonist facing problems that many teens encounter. A lightheartedness is cleverly combined with a serious message. This film is great for girls, but boys would most definitely find it entertaining as well."

PRE-SCREENING PREPARATION:

Discuss the following terms:

- Peer pressure
- Stereotypes
- Conformity
- Bullying
- Harassment
- Coming of age

POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY:

Discussion Questions

1. The opening sequence of the film is highly choreographed and artificial. Why has the director chosen to do this? How does it reflect issues that arise in the film?
2. What makes Esther different from the other children at her school?
3. What is a bar mitzvah/bat mitzvah? Do you know of other cultures that have coming-of-age ceremonies?
4. Discuss what qualities Sunni has that may attract Esther as a friend.
5. Does Esther have a happy home life? How would you characterize her parents?
6. Esther creates a very unique poem when she arrives at her “new” school. Is this simply humour, or does the poem have a deeper meaning?
7. What jeopardizes Esther’s friendship with Sunni?
8. Tragedy plays a major role in the outcomes of the action in this film. Would the story work without such drama?

Hot Seat

Invite Esther Blueberger to your classroom. Have a student or teacher volunteer to take the “hot seat” at the front of the classroom and become Esther. Ask her all about her life at school and at home, and her tragic and comedic moments.

Extension Activity

Australian films, interestingly, often examine the role of the outsider. Characters like Esther, who seem to dwell on the periphery of their social circles, take centre stage in a number of films:

- *Muriel’s Wedding*
- *Strictly Ballroom*
- *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*
- *Looking for Alibrandi*



View one of the selections above and compare it to *Hey Hey It's Esther Blueburger* in terms of the issues explored and the use of humour. Could any other films you know of, from any country, be added to the list? As a class, create your own list of films dealing with characters that seem to be on the outside looking in. Do these films provide any insight into this social issue?

CONCLUSION/WRAP-UP:

Discuss: Is it inevitable that there will always be those who are excluded? Can you truly be an individual in our society?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. *Muriel's Wedding* (directed by PJ Hogan, 1994)
2. *Strictly Ballroom* (directed by Baz Luhrmann, 1992)
3. *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (directed by Stephan Elliott, 1994)
4. *Looking for Alibrandi* (directed by Kate Woods, 2000)