



***The Blindflyers* 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 C. Evans.

TITLE: *The Blindflyers*

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Germany

RELEASE YEAR: 2004

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: German

DIRECTOR: Bernd Sahling

RUNTIME: 88 minutes

CURRICULUM LINKS:

The Blindflyers is relevant to the following Language Curriculum strands for grades 5 to 8.

Subject	Strand	Expectations
Grade 5 to 8 Language	Oral Communication	1. Listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes 2. Use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes 3. Reflect on and identify their strengths as listeners and speakers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in oral communication situations

	Reading	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning 2. Recognize a variety of text forms, text features and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning 3. Use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently 4. Reflect on and identify their strengths as readers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful before, during and after reading
	Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience 2. Draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience 3. Use editing, proofreading and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression and present their work effectively 4. Reflect on and identify their strengths as writers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful at different stages in the writing process
	Media Literacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts 2. Identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning 3. Create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques 4. Reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts



FOCUSING QUESTION:

How does this film teach its viewers to empathize with the protagonist (who is visually impaired)? What considerations should be made for the blind when using multimedia?

SYNOPSIS:

Marie and Inga are best friends and roommates at a boarding school for the blind. They love playing music, and when they learn that a band is looking for youth musicians for a song and video competition, Marie and Inga decide to audition. But while the band members acknowledge their talent, they decide the girls aren't right for their video because they are blind.

Marie is still shaken from this disappointment when she meets Herbert, an adolescent émigré on the run from the police. Herbert wants to return to his homeland against his father's wishes, and Marie agrees to help him hide for a couple of days in the school observatory. When they find out that Herbert's ticket home will cost five hundred euros, Marie and Inga come up with a plan: they will form a band – The Blindflyers – and will busk on the streets. Things go smoothly until someone recognizes Herbert, forcing the trio to figure out a new way to raise the funds.

With excellent use of sound, sensitive direction and great acting, *The Blindflyers* tells an intelligent and compelling story about friendship and resourcefulness that also offers a realistic look at the similarities and differences between the ways blind and seeing youth experience the world.

N.B. Youth smoking and a very brief shot of a woman's breast on a television screen.

Recommended for grades 6 through 9



AN EDUCATOR'S COMMENTS ON THE FILM:

"This is a wonderful film to introduce students to the topic of disability (the film addresses blindness). This film enables students to address their own discriminatory perceptions about disability and what can be done to remove the stigma."

PRE-SCREENING PREPARATION:

Students will undoubtedly get more out of the film if they have first considered the challenges faced by the blind. Therefore, one or all of the following three activities are suggested to help prepare students for the themes and issues raised in the film.

Activity 1:

Before class

Assemble a few objects for a guessing game. Some of the objects should be ubiquitous so that students will be able to easily recognize them (e.g., a die, an orange, a watch), and other objects should be less common in appearance (e.g., a bottle of shampoo, a Christmas tree decoration, a counter from a board game, etc.). Put all the objects in an opaque bag.

During class

Call volunteers up to the front of the class one at a time and ask them to put their hand in the bag, find an object and – without removing it from the bag – try to guess what it is by touching it. Announce that this is an exercise and not a competition, as some objects in the bag are more challenging to guess than others. When students are engaged in the exercise, they should describe what they are feeling to the class before they guess what the object is. Once the students have guessed the object, they can remove it from the bag and show the class.



Debriefing

Once the identity of the object is revealed, ask each student how difficult (on a scale of one to ten) it was to identify the object, tracking the students' responses on the blackboard. After all the objects have been identified, ask students to comment on why some objects are more challenging to identify than others. Help the students recognize that familiarity with an object plays a critical role in how easy it is to identify.

Activity 2:

Before class

Prepare a design (either a drawing of a lego structure or a pattern constructed out of different shaped pieces of card; the pattern should include pieces that are different sizes, shapes and colours) and make enough copies so that half the class will have one. Bring enough materials to class so that the remaining students can reproduce the design, as well as enough blindfolds for half the class.

During class

Assign each class member a partner and ask one partner to put on the blindfold. Distribute design materials to the blindfolded partner and copies of the design to the non-blindfolded partner. Explain to the non-blindfolded partners that they are responsible for giving directions to their partner to help them assemble the design. Non-blindfolded partners are NOT allowed to touch any of the materials required to complete the design – they can only use language to describe what their blindfolded partner must do. Students should be given five minutes to complete the exercise (or complete as much of the design as possible).

Debriefing

Ask students to comment on the experience. How did they feel about the exercise? What was difficult about the exercise? What directions were ineffective (e.g., communicating colour to the partner who could not see)?



Activity 3:

Before class

Download a clip from YouTube that involves a lot of physical comedy. (One example is a clip from the television show *Frasier*, where Niles starts a fire in his brother's apartment. The clip can be found here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mWiPaQ872c.)

During class

Play the clip to the class twice. The first time, do not turn on the screen so that students can hear the soundtrack of the clip but cannot see any visuals. (You may decide not to play the entire scene in the first showing.) Ask the students to write down what they think is happening in the scene as they listen to it. (Students are encouraged to close their eyes so that they don't get distracted by the visual activities in the classroom and can focus more easily on the assignment.) Students are likely to complain that they have no idea what's happening in the scene. (In the *Frasier* clip, there is no dialogue.) However, they can still pick up clues on what is occurring in the scene by listening to the style and speed of the music, the sound effects from the activities, the laughter from the audience and the noises that the actors make (gasps, sighs, squeals, etc.) After the first screening, ask students to suggest what they think is happening in the scene. Write suggestions on the blackboard and encourage students to share why they think their suggested activities happened in the scene. After all suggestions have been recorded, replay the scene and allow the students to watch the visuals as well as listen to the soundtrack.

Debriefing

Ask the students which actions were not possible to deduce from the soundtrack and which actions were possible to deduce. Why is this the case? What could the writer/director of the scene change to give people who cannot see the action an idea of what was happening in the scene?



Introducing the film:

After completing one of the above suggested activities, inform students that they will be attending a screening of *The BlindFlyers* at Sprockets Toronto International Film Festival for Children. Write the title of the film on the board and ask students to guess what they think the film is about. After hearing some suggestions, tell them that the film is about a group of young students (roughly the same age as the students in this class) who are visually impaired and attending a special school for the blind. Ask the class what things students who are visually impaired may have difficulty doing in a "regular" classroom and what may be different about a school for the blind. (You can use this opportunity to introduce students to Braille, as the film shows the students typing and reading Braille without explaining what it is.) Ask students to share their own perceptions of blindness and the types of challenges faced by people living with visual impairments.

Ask students to make mental notes during the screening about what techniques the film uses to help its viewers empathize with the visually impaired protagonists.

POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY:

Invite students to share their thoughts about the film. What did they enjoy? What did they not enjoy about the film?

Activity 1:

Ask students to brainstorm with a partner the techniques the film uses to help viewers empathize with the visually impaired protagonists. After five minutes, ask the students to share their thoughts. Suggestions may include the following:

- The movie opens with a white screen – the viewer can hear what is going on in the scene but cannot see anything.



- The title credits appear in Braille first and are then translated into letters.
- At certain points in the film, the background sounds increase in volume to emphasize how sensitive Marie, the protagonist, must be to noise in order to compensate for the fact that she cannot see.
- When Marie asks to “look” at someone, she touches their face to create the picture of that person in her mind.
- The teacher, Mr. Karl, encourages “soup training” to help the students become more self-sufficient; the viewer observes how simple tasks – like serving soup – are much more of a challenge when you cannot see. (However, the challenge can still be overcome. Teachers should note that the film’s title, *The Blindflyers*, is a reference to the scene when Marie is running down the corridor after meeting Herbert, and Mr. Karl asks her why she is “flying.” Marie responds, “Because I feel I can do anything.” The film’s title, therefore, reinforces the empowerment of people with disabilities.)
- Marie and her friend Inga are ostracized by “lookies” – a notable example is when the three boys seeking to recruit musicians for their band refuse to let Marie and Inga join because of their disability.
- Marie and Inga have difficulty navigating their way around unfamiliar places and require walking sticks.
- Marie and Inga memorize the “feel” of routes to the places they visit often (e.g., they know they’ve arrived back at school when they hit the wall surrounding the school’s premises).
- Marie and Inga did not see the thieves steal their money when they were busking.
- The music video at the end of the film does not contain a lot of detailed visual images; the viewer only sees silhouettes of a couple of the band members *

Are there any other things that the writer/director could have done to help the viewers empathize with Marie?



*When talking about Marie and Inga's music video, point out to the students that this is the one part of the film where there are no subtitles – i.e., viewers are not meant to understand the lyrics Marie is singing. Why do you think the director did this?

Possible suggestions:

- Marie wrote the lyrics based on her own personal experiences. Nobody should understand the lyrics because nobody besides Marie can understand what she has been through.
- The lack of lyrics is intended to teach viewers a lesson: because they probably don't speak the same language as Marie in the song, viewers could benefit from some visual clues in the video as to what the song is about. However, no visual clues are provided, thus there is no advantage to those people who can hear the song and see the video versus those people who can just hear the song.

You may wish to ask students to write a paragraph on what they think Marie's song is about.

Activity 2:

Ask the students (in groups of three or four) to write a script that both "lookies" and people who are visually impaired can enjoy. As writers/actors, what do the students need to do to be sensitive to their audience? Give the students one to two classes to prepare their script. Allow each group to present their script to their peers while half the class is blindfolded. After each presentation, ask the blindfolded audience members if they understood what was happening in the play.

Debriefing

Ask the students which play was most sensitive to the needs of the audience. What did they do in their skit that enabled the blindfolded audience members to be able to follow along? What did they not do? If



students were going to repeat the exercise, what would they change about their script? What would they not change?

CONCLUSION/WRAP-UP:

Ask students to think about the title of the film. What message is the film trying to convey about people living with a visual impairment? Has this film and the exercises conducted in class changed your perceptions of people living with visual impairments? How? Ask students to write a journal entry in response to these questions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. Synopsis and release information about the film:
http://www.german-cinema.de/app/filmarchive/film_view.php?film_id=945
2. Canadian National Institute for the Blind: www.cnib.ca/