



OK LET'S TALK ABOUT ME

STUDYGUIDE

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ISSUE 96 SCREEN EDUCATION

Introduction

This study guide to accompany *OK, Let's Talk About Me*, a documentary by Closer Productions, has been written for secondary students. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in English, Health and Human Development, SOSE, Religious Education and Media. > *OK, Let's Talk About Me* was produced in association with SBS Independent and the South Australian Film Corporation. It was screened to a full house at the 2005 Adelaide Film Festival in March and on SBS's Inside Australia in April 2005.



About the filmmakers

CLOSER PRODUCTIONS is Bryan Mason and Sophie Hyde. Mason and Hyde are independent filmmakers who have together created video work for dance and theatre companies, made music video clips, and worked with local arts and youth arts companies. They are developing several documentaries and short films.

Mason also works as a director of photography and editor on advertisements, short films and documentaries. He has created several internationally renowned skateboarding videos. Hyde works with young people, creating video work about them, as well as teaching them the skills of video making.

OK, Let's Talk About Me was funded by SBS Independent and the South Australian Film Corporation. Mason and Hyde were supported during the making of *OK, Let's Talk About Me* by mentors appointed by the funders.

Andrew Wiseman is well known for his work as a producer and director of both drama and documentary. His documentary credits include *Nothing to Lose* (2005), *Wonder Boy* (2001), *Chinchilla Dry* (1997) and *Driving With Richard* (1992). Wiseman produced the miniseries *After The Deluge* (2003) and *My Brother Jack* (2004), as well as the telemovie *Waiting At The Royal* (2004) and feature film *The Tale of Ruby Rose* (1988). He worked as an executive producer and mentor producer on *OK, Let's Talk About Me*.

Andrew Arestides has edited documentaries for over twenty years. His recent credits include *Case for the Coroner—Amber Stewart Inquest*, *Hired Assassins—Political Cartooning in Australia* and *Secrets of the Jury Room* (2004). He worked as supervising editor on *OK, Let's Talk About Me*.

About the documentary

Eddie Jenkinson is a seventeen-year-old boy with Down syndrome. *OK, Let's Talk About Me* traces Eddie's journey to independence as he prepares to turn eighteen. Eddie is about to finish school and start work. The documentary explores Eddie's choices and the control he asserts over his own existence.

During the initial filming of *OK, Let's Talk About Me* Eddie was a willing participant, enjoying the attention and eager to entertain. As the production continued, Eddie became reluctant and embarrassed. It took time developing authentic relationships and giving Eddie greater control of the filmmaking process for Eddie to become enthusiastic once again about telling his story.

Using *OK, Let's Talk About Me* in the classroom > Teachers may select from the following activities to support students' viewing and close analysis of *OK, Let's Talk About Me*.

Before viewing the documentary

- What defines you as being older and more independent?
- Why is independence important to an adolescent?
- What does turning eighteen mean to you? Make an A4 collage of words and images that reveal your feelings about this event.
- What career are you going to pursue? When you were younger, what did you contemplate as a career?
- What do you know about Down syndrome?
- How does society respond to individuals with disabilities?

After viewing the documentary

- After viewing *OK, Let's Talk About Me*, what do you now understand about Down syndrome?
- Were you challenged by the story of the documentary? Why? Why not?
- What scenes interested you the most?
- Why is the documentary titled *OK, Let's Talk About Me*?
- What are the central concerns of the documentary? How do you know? What do the central concerns mean for you?
- Who do you think the documentary is trying to communicate its messages to?
- How has your understanding of the issues facing individuals with Down syndrome changed since watching *OK, Let's Talk About Me*?
- How can Eddie's story influence our future? In a personal sense? As a society?

Key terms

Down syndrome / Disabilities / Independence / Stereotypes

Close analysis

Eddie

'OK, let's talk about me, right?'

- Who is Eddie Jenkinson?
- When is Eddie difficult?
- When does Eddie make you laugh?
- When does Eddie make you feel proud of his response to life?
- 'My name is seventeen year



boy. Seventeen year old.'

'My name is chocolate.'

'My name is Addams Family.'

- How does Eddie see himself?
- How does Eddie present himself to the world? What does this tell you about Eddie the teenager?
- What does Eddie value?
- What gives Eddie a sense of independence?
- What choices does Eddie make during *OK, Let's Talk About Me*?
- 'Let me handle this myself.'
- 'He hates being told what to do.'

What moments in the documentary support Eddie's desire to be in charge?

- How does Eddie assert control of his life?
- Eddie shows Mason and Hyde around his school.





When Eddie takes his seat in class what do you notice? What is Eddie's opinion of school? What do you think of Eddie's assessment of school?

- In a scene of *OK, Let's Talk About Me* Eddie is being taught how to catch the bus to school. He is not all that cooperative. Why do you think Eddie becomes difficult at times?
- At the café at school we see Eddie behaving responsibly, carefully preparing portions of a meal. Then we witness Eddie's childlike fascination with the detergent, followed by Eddie insisting that he has everything under control and insinuating that it is the staff at the college who are 'crazy'. Why have the filmmakers included this scene?
- 'Not now Bryan.' With his hand to the camera, Eddie tells Mason to stop filming. What does this closing shot tell us about Eddie?
- How is Eddie portrayed in *OK, Let's Talk About Me*?
- How do you regard Eddie after watching *OK, Let's Talk About Me*?

Down syndrome

Down syndrome is a congenital condition. It is a chromosomal accident and is recognisable at birth because of the physical characteristics that are typical of the syndrome. Individuals with Down syndrome have some degree of cognitive disability and other developmental delays.

Doctor John Langdon Down first described Down syndrome in 1866 but it was not until 1959 that the cause of the condition became known.

Since then medical research has established the implications of Down syndrome and developed treatments that have improved the health of individuals with Down syndrome.

People with Down syndrome strive to accomplish the same goals as everyone else. Many people are not sure how to respond to individuals with Down syndrome and how to include them in the everyday life of a community. As a society we must ensure that people with Down syndrome are accepted and are provided with the opportunity to achieve

their full potential.

- How does Eddie and his story inform our understanding of Down syndrome?
- What stereotypes are associated with Down syndrome?
- How does Eddie defy such stereotypes?

Eddie's family and friends

- What do we learn about Eddie's parents, Jan and Peter? How have they influenced Eddie's sense of self? How do the filmmakers portray Eddie's relationship with his parents?
- What do Eddie's parents tell us about Eddie the teenager and his need to separate himself from his parents. Is Eddie's desire to differentiate himself from his parents unusual?
- 'I don't think he's got a clue what's going to happen. I think he wants to be independent. And I think he wants to try and live his own life. I don't think he wants to be responsible for other people. I don't think he wants kids or a family or anything like that. But I think he just wants to leave school and have fun like everyone else.'

In *OK, Let's Talk About Me* Eddie is reunited with his older brother. Jack has been travelling for a year and has missed Eddie turning eighteen.

- What do Jack's comments reveal about Eddie and their relationship?
- What does the scene in the bedroom at home reveal about the brothers' relationship?
- Some of Eddie's friends have physical and/or intellectual disabilities, others don't. What do we learn about Eddie from watching him interact with his friends?
- Consider the photograph of Eddie with his mates that is taken at Club Slick. What does the photograph reveal about Eddie and his approach to life?
- What does *OK, Let's Talk about Me* reveal about Eddie's relationship with Ashlea, a student at Kensington Centre? Why have the filmmakers portrayed Eddie's friendship with Ashlea?
- 'Hurry up camera boy.' How does Eddie interact with the filmmakers? What do we learn about Eddie through these interactions?

Turning eighteen

'According to Eddie he woke up on his eighteenth birthday as a man ... Next year I'm gonna be eighteen, when I'm eighteen I'm gonna get my own place, have a car, have a nude girlfriend and you can come around to my place for pizza ... Well this year I'll do soccer training. Have a party. See my old friends. Sex with my girlfriends.'

- Why is turning eighteen important? Why is it important to Eddie?
- How is Eddie's story typical of every adolescent who is

about to turn eighteen?

- Eddie celebrates his birthday. First of all at his mum's, eating pizza and playing his new drum kit for family and friends. Then at Club Slick, a monthly rock and roll club run by the Down Syndrome Society of South Australia. What do these scenes reveal about Eddie turning eighteen?
- 'Eddie chose to celebrate being an adult by spending the weekend at the beach with his friends.' What do the shots of this weekend away reveal about Eddie?
- 'Well I'm gonna hang out with my old friends and I wanna do, um..go the pictures, or drive in or maybe...go to the hotel. Well you can do private, you can do drinking, you play pool tables. Oh, but first...beer first.' Why is buying a beer important to Eddie?
- What does Eddie see as the rites of his passage into manhood?
- Eddie has high expectations of turning eighteen. Are his expectations met?

Eddie's future

'To Eddie the future is full of possibilities and he has big ideas about what it means to be a man.'

- What are Eddie's expectations of his future? Are they realistic?
- What do Eddie's parents' think about his turning eighteen and becoming independent?
- 'I wanna be a security guard. Get my machine gun.' Hyde questions him about how he can become qualified for such a job. What do his answers reveal?
- 'I'm gonna be ... a security guard. And you behave yourself.' 'I'm gonna be commander. With a black mask. And a machine gun. Commander Eddie Jenkinson, and I'm gonna be in the army. And a professor too. I'm gonna be a boxer one day.'

After working hard at the Carclew Youth Arts Centre, Eddie tells the staff that he wants a different job. He speaks at length about his career aspirations. What do Eddie's comments reveal?

- 'Everybody hopes that when Eddie leaves school he gets a job he can do, in a work place he likes.'

The documentary shows Eddie working at Bedford Industries, a supported work place, where Eddie could possibly work full time. Hyde tells us that this may not be Eddie's path as the job may not be fulfilling in the long term. What does this comment suggest about Eddie? What do the shots of Eddie at work reveal?

- Jan explains to Eddie the importance of cooperating while at Carclew Youth Arts Centre. How does Eddie respond? Why? What does Eddie's behaviour tell us about his attitude to change?

Production values

- What does the opening sequence tell us about Eddie? What expectations does the opening create? How are you positioned as a viewer?
- Describe Eddie's relationship with the viewer. How do the filmmakers ensure the audience engages with and responds to Eddie?
- What is the impact of the filmmakers' off-camera questions?
- Why have the filmmakers used still photographs of Eddie as a baby, child and teenager?
- Eddie's comments are subtitled. Why?
- Consider the use of different settings and explain what each setting contributes to the telling of Eddie's story.
- How does music shape our response to *OK, Let's Talk About Me*?
- Watch the credits. Why include Eddie interacting with the filmmakers in this part of the documentary?
- *OK, Let's Talk About Me* is a short documentary. Its running time is 26 minutes. As a class discuss the demands of crafting such a film.
- Candid. Intimate. Informal. These adjectives have been used to describe *OK, Let's Talk About Me*. Do you agree with this assessment of the documentary? Why? What other adjectives describe the way *OK, Let's Talk About Me* tells Eddie's story?
- What are the 'politics' of telling the story of someone with a disability? How have the filmmakers decided to portray Down syndrome?

Extended responses

- 'OK, Let's Talk About Me offers us an insight into someone who lives their life from a different perspective.' Discuss.
- 'Eddie is a complex young man, defined as much by his abilities and relationships as by Down syndrome.' Discuss.
- Why is Eddie Jenkinson remarkable?
- 'OK, Let's Talk About Me emphasizes that a life with Down syndrome is one of challenges and achievements for the individual, for their family and for the community.' Discuss.
- 'OK, Let's talk About Me teaches us that adolescents with Down syndrome are like other adolescents. They share the same interests and face similar difficulties.' Discuss.

Going further

- In most States and Territories of Australia there is a branch of the Down Syndrome Association. Ask students to use a search engine to access this organisation. Spend time considering the information offered by the different branches of the organisation.
- Invite a speaker from the Down Syndrome Association in your area to visit your class.

- Use the Internet to find stories of individuals with Down syndrome. Share the stories with the class.
- Working in small groups, determine the challenges: for a baby, child, adolescent and adult with Down syndrome; for family and friends; for the community.
- What do you think people should know about Down syndrome. Create a multimedia presentation that educates the community about Down syndrome.
- Research what support groups exist to assist individuals with Down syndrome.
- Club Slick is an opportunity for young people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities to socialise and develop skills that will enable them to participate in a range of community activities. Use the Internet to find out more about Club Slick. Investigate other community groups which facilitate the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in recreational activities.
- Research the opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to pursue education and employment .

Some web sites of interest

- Closer Productions: www.closerproductions.com.au
- Australian Down Syndrome Associations: www.dsansw.org.au/info/Australian.html
- Down Syndrome Society of South Australia Inc.: www.downssa.asn.au/
- Down Syndrome NSW: www.dsansw.org.au/
- The Down Syndrome Association of WA: www.dsawa.asn.au/
- Down Syndrome Association of QLD, Inc.: www.dsaq.org.au/

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