VIEWING GUIDE

AS I AM

L'ARCHE
INTERNATIONAL

EPISODE ONE

5,000 BROKEN GIFTS

AS I AM

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EPISODE ONE - 5,000 BROKEN GIFTS

FILM SUMMARY

The traditions of gift-giving are as diverse as the people who practice them. From birthdays and graduations to weddings and holidays, humans have found countless occasions to give gifts. Seldom, however, do people give a gift every single day. In this episode, we meet Mateusz, a man who has taken up gift-giving on a daily basis for the past 15 years (and counting). Mateusz and his mother share the story of his curious choice of gift and his inventive way of giving.

"EVERYONE IN MY HEART"

-Mateusz Jaworski

FILM THEMES

- **Worthy gifts, worthy recipients**

  A decorated, broken cassette might not seem like a very valuable gift. Nevertheless, everyone who receives one of Mateusz's cassettes cherishes it. One recipient refers to his collection of gifts from Mateusz as "brilliant treasures." Mateusz started by giving a cassette to his aunt but, in the film, we see him give to people he has just met (a store clerk and a clergy member). There is even a photo of him giving one to a Nobel Prize winner. The viewer is left wondering what makes a gift worthy? What makes a person a worthy recipient?

- **Unexpected gifts**

  When holidays or birthdays come around, we may expect to receive gifts. On a regular day, when we are just going about our business, we probably wouldn't expect any gifts. In the film, we see that when Mateusz gives someone a decorated broken cassette, they are surprised. Maybe they are surprised by

the timing, or the packaging, or the giver. His gifts are unexpected. This could be said about the actual gifts he prepares and about Mateusz himself. Too often, people like Mateusz are disregarded because of their disability, but Mateusz really enjoys surprising people with the vibrancy of his personhood.

- **Brokenness**

  The "gift in brokenness," is a reference to the gift and the gift-giver. As a person with an intellectual disability, Mateusz may be seen by some as imperfect, damaged, or useless. In his wisdom, Mateusz offers us a profound assertion of the truth. Something that is "broken" has a purpose. Someone who is considered "broken" has gifts, including the gifts of creativity and imagination.

- **Communication**

  In the film, it says "Since Mateusz uses language in ways we don't easily understand, he has never told us the full story behind the cassettes." Nevertheless, there are moments when Mateusz's way of communicating is very clear. Often, people invent ways to communicate when speech or language do not serve them. Mateusz, for example, uses certain sounds, gestures, facial expressions, and his book of pictures. There are many ways to communicate who we are and what we have to offer.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever received an unexpected and seemingly useless gift that you, in fact, really valued? What was it?
2. Think of a time when you were able to understand someone even though they didn't use words. What was that like? What are some ways you communicate without speech? Do you feel understood?
3. What would it mean to say that each person has a gift? Could we say that each person is a gift?
4. What can we learn from brokenness? What are other examples of beauty in brokenness? Consider different art forms that involve broken or imperfect materials (e.g. mosaics and the *wabi-sabi* aesthetic).
5. Mateusz didn't wait for an occasion — he gave someone a gift every day. If you could do that, what would you give every day?
6. Mateusz indicates that everyone is in his heart. What does it mean to be carried in someone else's heart, or to carry someone in your heart?

BEHIND THE SCENES

The broken cassette could be considered a double gift. In the film, Mateusz was as enthusiastic about making the gift as he was about giving it.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

What are your gifts? Do you share them with others on a daily basis? Be attentive to when others are sharing their gifts with you, especially when they are unusual or unexpected!

EPISODE TWO

NO LIONS IN PARIS

AS I AM
EPISODE TWO - NO LIONS IN PARIS

FILM SUMMARY

For centuries, travel writing has shaped the way we view the world. But when's the last time you heard from a travel writer with cerebral palsy? As we accompany Musa Kirokote on his journey from rural Kenya to urban France, we are not only introduced to a new place, we are also given the chance to encounter a new way of experiencing a place. In this episode, Musa takes us to where dogs dress like humans and humans eat like goats. His observations call into question certain features of daily life that some might consider "normal."

"I DIDN'T STAY TOO LONG BECAUSE...I HAD TO GO BACK TO THE ONES WHO LOVE ME THE MOST."

-Musa Kirokote

FILM THEMES

- **Animal vs. Human**

  Like most travel writers, Musa recounts certain striking food and dress traditions. While eating a salad, he remarks at the strangeness that people would want to eat like goats. While observing passers-by on the street, he comments on dogs wearing clothes. These observations raise questions about which behaviors and practices are distinctly human and which are distinctly animal. Some people might find these "mix-ups" amusing while others may not even notice them.

- **Cultural Enrichment**

  From handshakes and hugs to bows and even special ways of breathing, traditional greetings are wide-ranging. In the film, Musa talks about being greeted with a kiss on the cheek. When he returns home, he wants to bring that form of greeting back with him. Conversely, when it comes to food, Musa talks about carrying traditional dishes with him to France. Githeri, ugali and chapati are very popular dishes in Musa's community and he advises other visitors to come prepared with food from home. Musa's journey shows how opportunities for cultural enrichment abound when two different cultures meet.

- **Strange and Poor: A matter of perspective**

  On several occasions, Musa remarks at the poverty of Paris or of the French people. The viewer might be confused by such statements unless they consider Musa's perspective as a Kenyan man from a rural tradition. In Musa's experience, not having farmland is a mark of poverty. Because his traditional cuisine does not include snails, it seems as if it is a food choice made out of desperation. There are many examples of how Musa's unique perspective influences how he interprets and talks about aspects of his journey. Consider his comments about the "stomach" of the plane, free gifts from white people, and whether or not there would be lions in Paris.

- **Polite lies**

  When Musa said the snail tasted good but his facial expression revealed disgust, everyone at the table began laughing together. Musa had been caught telling a lie to be polite. The habit of protecting friendships by telling polite lies is particularly useful while traveling. Musa finesses some awkward experiences of cultural exchange when he uses polite lies to show he is a gracious guest. When we are faced with the prospect of hurting or offending someone, we may tell them something we expect they want to hear instead of the truth. Our verbal lie may not be convincing if our body language says otherwise. Luckily, in Musa's case, this was humorous and it built relationships.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are other examples of behaviors and practices that blur the lines between what is distinctly animal versus what is distinctly human?
2. In what ways does your identity and perspective influence your understanding of different cultures/ environments? What things do you think are normal that other people might consider strange?
3. When have you felt foreign?
4. When you visit some place, either locally or globally, that is new and different from your previous experiences, how does it affect the way you see your "home"?
5. When was a situation where you needed to tell a polite lie to preserve a relationship/friendship?

BEHIND THE SCENES

This film captures Musa's first experience traveling abroad. While most of the story is cheerful, being in an environment so different from his home was very difficult. Six months after the trip, when the director met up with Musa for a follow-up interview, unfortunately, one of the most prominent memories he had from the trip was how embarrassed and afraid he was after spilling the drink on the woman in the plane. As a foreigner and a person with a disability, there were times when Musa approached strangers for directions on the streets of Paris and they avoided him, looking at him with fear, pity, or even revulsion. Musa is known by his friends as supremely positive, but these looks eventually got to him. He really meant it when he said: "I have to return home to those who love me the most."

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

What shapes your view of different places and people around the world? How could you become more familiar with the unfamiliar? Consider which voices are informing your understanding of the world and seek out different perspectives. You may be surprised by what you find.

EPISODE THREE

LET THE BIRDS LOOSE

AS I AM

L'ARCHE INTERNATIONAL

AS I AM
EPISODE THREE - LET THE BIRDS LOOSE

FILM SUMMARY

Bogdan Senyk, from L'Arche Ukraine, grew up under a government that denied his existence. In this episode, he explains his method of civil resistance: joy. His choices each day, to release his birds from their cages, to joke with friends, to greet strangers on the streets, reveal the undeniable dignity and wisdom of a man who is determined to live a full and fulfilling life in the face of erasure from history.

"THERE ARE NOT MANY WAYS TO GHT A WAR WITHOUT CARRYING A STONE IN YOUR SOUL"

-Bogdan Senyk

FILM THEMES

- **Civic participation**

  Some scenes early in this episode show Bogdan voting in a local election. Access to a political and civic engagement has been denied to people with intellectual disabilities all around the world. In Ukraine, an article in the Constitution asserts that people deemed "incapable" by the courts shall not have the right to vote. This law permits an exclusion from political processes that contradicts the essence of equality captured in other articles of law on elections in Ukraine. Bogdan's participation in the election and his political views are especially significant in light of the historical and contemporary barriers that impede people with disabilities in exercising their rights.

- **Expectations**

  Bogdan has a physical disability that requires him to wear a prosthetic leg. The general expectation might be that someone with a prosthetic leg would comment on the difficulty of walking on steep inclines. In reality, Bogdan says that his feet are "meant for mountains." He experiences his body as especially suited for mountain walking even though he needs support while walking in the Carpathian Mountains.

- **Anger**

  Bogdan talks about how he chooses not to be angry because he does not want to "carry stones in his soul." He explains that anger can make one forget some of the joyful aspects of life. Furthermore, Bogdan believes that unchecked anger can even lead to death. Since our emotions change the way we experience the world, choosing to reject anger is a powerful and controversial method for managing one's experience.

- **Resistance**

  The threats posed by war elicit varied responses. Some rally behind the effort to fight while others protest, some rush to enlist while others are forcibly drafted. Bogdan believes in protecting the sovereignty of his country, especially given the history of foreign occupation. However, Bogdan wants peace. He is primarily concerned with resistance and survival. How can he avoid being a victim of the collateral damage created by war? He chooses to preserve his joyful habits: greeting people, playing tricks, and letting the birds loose.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From your perspective, what does it mean to "carry a stone" in one's soul?
2. Some of Bogdan's ideas and observations are surprising because they challenge general expectations. Think about examples in your life where expectations and reality are out of sync. What are some of your ideas or opinions that others have found surprising?
3. What are some ways that anger could destroy a person? What methods could one adopt to avoid being destroyed by anger? What are some actions or gestures we see Bogdan doing that serve as acts of resistance against anger?
4. Often, the public thinks of people with intellectual disabilities as naive. As you watched the video and read the subtitles, what was your dominant impression of Bogdan?
5. Bogdan mentions the things he cannot enjoy when he carries anger. What kinds of joys fade when you are carrying anger? How could such an emotion impact what you notice about your daily life?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Some might expect that a person with cognitive difficulties would be less capable of developing an informed political opinion. In reality, Bogdan shares his complex and cultivated political perspective with confidence, even when others disagree with him. Unfortunately, some people even cast doubt on whether these ideas are Bogdan's. They suggest that someone told Bogdan to say these things. The opening credits of the film refer to Bogdan as the writer. This was not a generous gesture. The director, who openly disagreed with Bogdan's ideas about anger, relied on Bogdan to draft the film script because of his clear positions and his ability to assert them.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

There are any number of wars going on in the world at a given time. Sometimes it is hard to perceive the impact of wars on our daily lives and sometimes it may seem as if the wars have no impact on us if our nations or even our relatives are not directly involved. If this is the case, think about smaller conflicts that you know of or have been involved in and that have the potential to arouse the kind of anger that is like a stone in one's soul. Spend some time considering the ways conflicts or wars affect your daily life. Name some choices you can make to preserve, find, or create joy for yourself or others affected by conflicts or war?

EPISODE FOUR

TAKE CARE OF YOU

AS I AM

L'ARCHE INTERNATIONAL

AS I AM
EPISODE FOUR - TAKE CARE OF YOU

FILM SUMMARY

In Bologna, Italy, a woman named Raffaella Monterosso lives a beautiful life. In this episode, she invites us to come visit Bologna, not for the famous porticos or delicious tortellini but simply because she is there. Raffaella reflects on the difficulties she is facing. She has Down Syndrome but that is not what is worrying her. Instead, she is greatly challenged by her aging father. In her attempts to accompany him, she finds it difficult to accept his disability.

"MY FATHER IS GROWING OLD AND I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT."

-Raffaella Monterosso

FILM THEMES

- **Who is disabled?**

  The viewer may or may not be quick to notice Raffaella's distinctive features that indicate that she is someone with Down Syndrome. Because Raffaella refers to the difficulty of accepting her father's disability, one is given the impression that she is not disabled. She is captured doing household chores and playing sports. The reality is that although Raffaella is a person with a disability, she does not experience her disability as a difficulty. However, when she is confronted with the physical immobilization of her father and his increasing dependency, she expresses how challenging it is for her.

- **Aging Parents**

  The need to care for ones' parents in their old age is universal. The natural order of things is that parents take care of their children when the children are young and children care for their parents when the parents are old. Of course, there are many circumstances that may affect this scheme. Disability may be

a factor that makes a child less capable of caring for their aging parent, however, with Raffaella that is clearly not the case. She observes that she lacks patience but her actions at the end of the film portray a deep awareness of the needs of her father and an active patience with his emerging physical disabilities.

- **Interdependence**

  Throughout the film, Raffaella refers to how her interactions with her father have changed since he began to slow down. She remembers going to football matches. Her joy was not tied to the outcome of the game but instead it came from being with him. Raffaella says, "I need him and he needs me." She reveals how her deep love for her father comes not from what he can do but his presence. Similarly, in her desire for patience and in their exchange at the end of the film, we see that her father also needs her presence.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Raffaella talks about finding it difficult to cope with the physical disabilities that her father acquired in his old age. Due to age, accident, or illness, some people acquire disabilities over the course of their life. Do you have a personal experience of witnessing someone you love become less able? What were some strategies you used to cope with their new needs?
2. The opening shot is of ripe grapes and raisins that have dried on the vine. The director intended this as a kind of foreshadowing. What could it mean that these grapes are found on the same vine? Did you spot any other images that offered insight into the themes of the film?
3. In the beginning of the film, Raffaella talks about how she feels something profound when she meets people. She says she thinks it is God. Have you ever had a mysterious feeling? How do you explain it?

BEHIND THE SCENES

The final moments of the film were choreographed by Raffaella. The director asked her, "How would you like the film to end?" Raffaella's answer was so specific and beautiful, the L'Arche community reached out to her family to see if it was possible to film those moments. This was a particularly challenging feat because, unbeknownst to Raffaella, her father was sick with cancer. He was in and out of the hospital and had to cancel the filming appointments 3 times before his health permitted him to come. When they finally had the time together, Raffaella led her father through the scene she had imagined. Two weeks after the filming, her father passed away. That exchange of tenderness at the end of the film were Raffaella's last with her father.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

Raffaella said there is nothing she can do about her father growing old but she does a very powerful thing by choosing not to let the obstacles inhibit her relationship with her father. Disability can be acquired through an accident, it can emerge as people age, and it can be something a person is born with. The responses to disability, to age, and to illness vary greatly. What does it mean to choose to build or preserve relationship when disability changes how we interact with each other?

EPISODE FIVE

GOOGLE LARRY

AS I AM
EPISODE FIVE - GOOGLE LARRY

FILM SUMMARY

In the 1990s, autistic persons began using the internet to build online communities, breaking the myth that autism imprisons people in a solitary existence. In this episode, however, Larry Gourley of Belfast, Northern Ireland finds a limit to the gift and reaches the edge of the internet. Though the internet does not have the answer he searches for, his efforts to find his baby photos find conclusion in a surprising correspondence with a cousin from Canada.

"[LARRY] FOUND THE LIMIT OF THE INTERNET... WHICH IS...IT CAN'T TELL ME WHO I AM."

-Neil Mullan, Larry's friend

FILM THEMES

- **Links between us**

  Humans as a species are deeply interested in their roots. Anthropologists find evidence of genealogy, the study of family ancestry, dating back thousands of years to the Neolithic Period. With the proliferation of online ancestry research, the drive to know how each of us is linked to another has become more visible. The story in the film shows how Larry's search for his baby photo is another expression of this profoundly human curiosity. Who am I? Who do I belong to? Who belongs to me?

- **New vs. Old**

  The Internet offers the quickest way to learn something. However, in Larry's search for his past, the most fruitful move he chose to make involved an antiquated form of communication: the handwritten, posted letter. The smartphone's "voice assistant" did not understand Larry's request and the Google searches kept producing irrelevant results. The idea that these newer technologies would fail where an old-fashioned letter succeeds is surprising and comical.

- **The Spectrum**

  Larry is autistic. Some of his behaviors may seem different from mainstream behaviors. For example, Larry enjoys jumping and flapping his hands while waiting for his tea to cool. Discerning viewers may notice that Larry avoids making left turns. In some ways, Larry's actions fit characteristics that are common among people on the spectrum. In other ways, Larry does not fit the characteristics. He makes friends and shares jokes with ease. Larry's autism and his love for electronics brought about an interesting and unique challenge for the film team. Though we don't see the evidence in the film itself, Larry is the only person in the As I Am film series to be interviewed with the drone camera. This meant that instead of a standard set-up with a camera on a tripod, the interview involved the director flying the drone at Larry's eye-level while an assistant facilitated conversation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Larry does not want to give up the search even when it seems unlikely he will find his baby photo online. Does the internet have limits? Have you ever found them? What were they?
2. The question "Who am I?" could take a lifetime or more to answer. Can you think of other questions that call for a lifetime of research? What question(s) would you spend your life researching?
3. How do we learn about ourselves? From whom or what or where? When you have questions about your heritage? Where do you turn?
4. At one point, Larry decides to stop looking for his baby photos. He does not want to write to his cousins to ask them about the photos, he just wants to connect with them and learn more about them. He chose to stop looking for the photos and then he ended up finding them. Have you ever experienced a similar twist of events?

BEHIND THE SCENES

The story of Larry's baby photos came together in pieces. No single person knew the whole path from the guessing game to the envelope of photos. As the different people who live with Larry reflected on the pieces they knew, the story became more intricate and, indeed, more mysterious. For example, Larry never mentioned the photos in his letter to his cousin. She sent them simply because she found them. The desire to discover more about his personal history spawned a connection with family that had emigrated to Canada. Following the letter exchange, Larry established an even stronger connection with his Canadian cousins and made a trip to visit them.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

When we learn about our personal and family history, we learn about the connections we share with others. Consider your own story. How are you connected with others? Does the internet help you maintain those connections and build new ones? OR Does it create barriers that distance you from others?

EPISODE SIX

IF I WERE A COLOR

AS I AM

L'ARCHE INTERNATIONAL

AS I AM
EPISODE SIX - IF I WERE A COLOR

FILM SUMMARY

People with disabilities are often more disabled by the societies they live in than by their bodies or diagnosis. In this episode, Nagat from Egypt explains how she and her brother faced societies' attempt to disable their humanity. Their lives were shrouded in a figurative and literal darkness. Though their circumstances improved substantially once they moved into the L'Arche community, both Nagat and her brother carried evidence of the trauma they endured. She could not stop crying and he refused to speak. Over time, Nagat found a way to achieve what she wanted for herself and for her brother.

"BECAUSE EVEN AFTER I AM IN PAIN, I CAN SMILE."

-Nagat Zaki

FILM THEMES

- **Abuse**
  People with intellectual disabilities around the world are subjected to a wide range of abuses. In some places they are treated as animals or worse. Nagat talks about her own and other people's experiences of physical abuse (being hit, Agaiby being burned with hot spoons) and psychological abuse (confined to a dark room, bricked up window). Overcoming challenges is a common theme among depictions of people with disabilities. This story, however, does not sensationalize her triumph. The fact that her tears persisted inexplicably, helps us see that she continued to carry the profound pain of abuse even after her circumstances improved.

- **Sibling support**
  Nagat explains how she was concerned for her brother Hany when he was left alone in the dark. Once they joined L'Arche, she was the only one who could interpret for Hany when he stopped speaking for 2 years. The support she gave him allowed him to flourish and that has made her proud. The link between the siblings is part of how they achieved healing.

- **Transformation**
  The transformation from darkness to light is a repeated theme throughout the film. Hany and Nagat went from an experience of confinement to freedom. They went from not working to having paid jobs, from being considered a burden to being considered an asset, and from a violent environment to an environment of love. Though it is important to note that this did not make all of their troubles disappear, the transformation of their life was significant and overwhelmingly positive.

- **Labels**
  Being labeled disabled has led to pain and power for Nagat. It meant that someone could abuse her with impunity, but it also meant that she could move into a new home and be offered work. When she says, "They say we are disabled" she seems to be distancing herself from that label. She is being simultaneously bold and timid with her question, "Can I say the ones who care for us?" She is presenting a kind of accusation but asking permission first. Her comment refers to how people who assist her make a point to announce her disability. Often times, this is done innocently to make passage through a checkpoint smoother or secure support. Her conclusion is, "They are wrong. They are right." She seems to hear it as a label that captures something true about her and something untrue about her. It is interesting that when given the chance, Nagat chooses not to name, not to label. For example, instead of identifying the person who hit her she says, "she knows who she is."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The footage of a baby goat is woven throughout the storytelling. In the beginning of the film, when Nagat refers to being hit, we see the baby goat knocked by a bigger goat. What are other scenes that use the imagery of the goats? What are the links between the experiences of the goats and the experiences Nagat describes?
2. What does it mean to be disabled by society? How could someone's humanity be disabled by society?
3. Think about the lives of the people in this film. What "abilities" make life harder? Easier? What "disabilities" make life harder? Easier?
4. Nagat says that her brother thinks if she were a color she would be the color white. How does this comment illuminate aspects of Nagat's personality that she does not reveal herself? What color would you be and why?
5. When someone cries, we expect they are sad. When they smile, we expect they are happy. However, tears and smiles can also be ways of expressing or suppressing the opposite emotion. Nagat smiles a lot these days. We see that in the montage toward the end of the film. Do you think Nagat's smiles are revealing happiness or covering sadness? Explain your response.
6. What are other ways to interpret Hany's silence and Nagat's tears?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Whenever the interviewer asked Nagat about herself she would talk about other people (Samah says, Mamdoh says, Marcel says, Hany says)…She was not used to reflecting on her own desires. She seemed to always be thinking of the needs of others. There were several occasions where she was asked, "What do you want?" This question stood out among the others because she had very poignant responses: "I wanted to stop crying… I wanted Hany to speak."

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

This is story about enduring the indignities brought on by the labels ascribed to you and finding ways to preserve your humanity. Nagat was able to help her brother Hany even as she was suffering. Hany, in turn, was empowered to help Agaiby. The injuries to his humanity did not disable his capacity to help another. What is something in your life that you felt stymied by but someone else stepped in and showed you the way? Have you ever been able to return that gesture by empowering someone else? Imagine ways to turn the help you receive into the help you share.

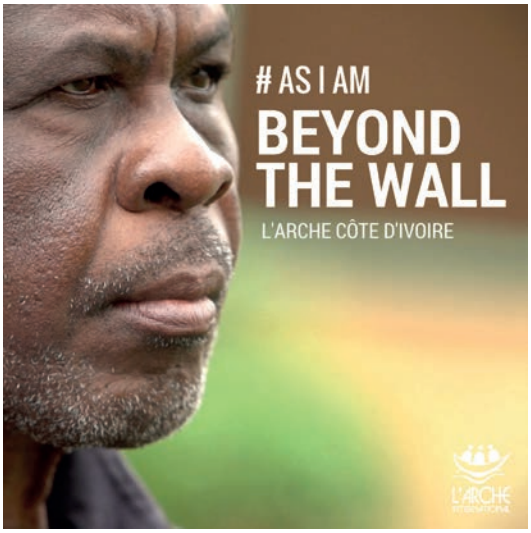
EPISODE SEVEN

BEYOND THE WALL

AS I AM
EPISODE SEVEN - BEYOND THE WALL

FILM SUMMARY

When wars break out, many heroes go unnoticed. In 2002, a conflict erupted in Côte d'Ivoire between the government and rebels based in Bouaké. This episode shares a story of that time and introduces you to Yobouet N'Da Pierre. When the violence of the conflict intensified, no one was allowed in the streets. N'Da risked his life to go beyond the wall, out onto the streets, and greet his friends. His decision to climb the walls that divide us sent a powerful message to his friend Adrien and echoed throughout the relationships of his community.



"THE COLONEL IS SOMEONE WHO NEVER FORGETS HIS FRIENDS."

-Konan N'Guessan Adrien N'Da's friend

FILM THEMES

- **Walls**

  The wall that N'Da climbed was a physical barrier but it symbolizes multiple things in the context of the film. It served to keep the people inside safe and offer them peace of mind but being deprived of contact with his friends was a hardship for N'Da. Walls protect by dividing one thing from another. What happens when the kind of protection we desire is in community with others? The wall is both harmful and helpful, it provides protection and it confines.

- **Life in a time of war**

  The dire circumstances of living in a place engulfed in violence goes beyond the threat of direct violence. They survived bullets coming through the windows, but they were living in a constant state of insecurity. The dwindling supply of food and medicine made it impossible for the members of the L'Arche community to remain in Bouaké. However, leaving could be just as dangerous as staying. Something as simple as receiving a visitor's greetings could provide a vital reassurance.

- **Ordinary Heroes**

  The film is full of examples of ordinary heroes. The assistants in the community refused to leave unless everyone could go. This way of prioritizing the community over the individual is heroic but it also speaks to the way of things. It is ordinary. Consider the way the community all got together and voted to decide whether or not to leave. Similarly, there are the heroic acts of Gabriel and Kuame when they offered to walk so that those who cannot walk could escape and Adrien's decision to drive back to find them. Adrien says, "It's perfectly normal that I would return and find them." This reminds us that, from the perspective of the people in the community, these acts are ordinary. The film focuses on how N'Da's determination to see his friends resonates as the model for how to be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. N'Da is nicknamed the Colonel. What do you think is significant about this name?
2. Petit Koffi, the narrator at the beginning of the film, found some of the living conditions during conflict to be quite comical. What is your first response to this? Why do you think the director chose to open the film this way?
3. The film was shot with the help of three other people with intellectual disabilities. Petit Koffi assisted with sound, Honorine assisted with GoPro footage, and Grand Koffi assisted with filming and direction. Does this information change your thoughts about the film? Why or why not?
4. Reflect on the title of the film. Why do you think the word "beyond" was used? What other words could be used? What other titles could this film have?
5. Adrien says that when faced with the idea of going back into the violence, he had to borrow N'Da's courage. Every day, people make heroic decisions that impact the lives of others. Sometimes it is easy to see where they get their strength and courage from and sometimes there is no explanation. Have you ever made a courageous choice? Who or what did you borrow courage from?

BEHIND THE SCENES

It was difficult to capture N'Da's personality on camera. In the film, he is only recorded saying one word. This is not because he does not speak. In fact, N'Da tends to share his thoughts very energetically, even forcefully. People who know N'Da often describe him as both gentle and brutal. His determination to visit his friends although many people were trying to flee must not be mistaken as a lapse of judgement or indication of his intellectual disability. Climbing the wall was a perfectly sound decision for a man as tough and loving as N'Da.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

There are times when the "walls" in our lives are necessary and times when we need to climb over them and go beyond. What are some of the "walls" in your life? What would it mean for you to go beyond those "walls"?

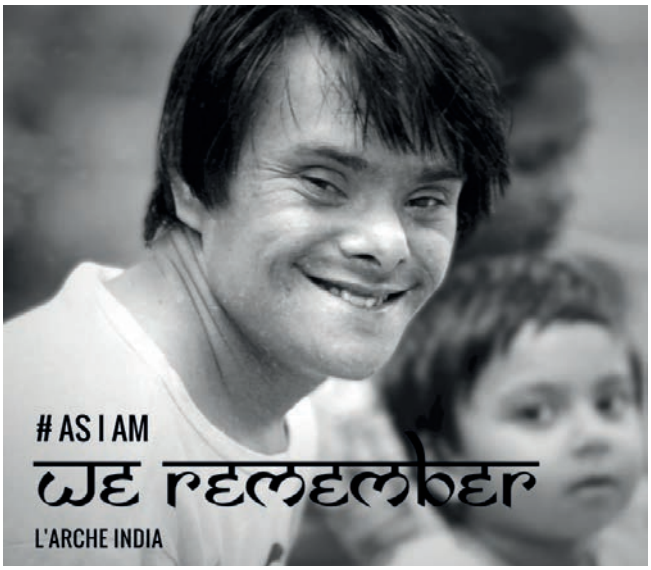
EPISODE EIGHT

WE REMEMBER

AS I AM
EPISODE EIGHT - WE REMEMBER

FILM SUMMARY

When a life is over, we grieve. But there are certain lives, even certain populations, which society would have us forget. Bapi Sarkar, a man with Down Syndrome from India, lived with the daily experience of being dismissed, disrespected, and forgotten. Bapi's message to those who would tease him was, "We are all human beings." This film is a collection of affirmations that attest to that truth. Through the memories of Bapi's friends and, most significantly, through Bapi's self-affirmation, we learn that every human life deserves the dignity of being remembered.



"WE ARE ALSO HUMAN BEINGS."

-Bapi Sarkar

FILM THEMES

- **Mourning**

  When someone dies, loved ones often enter into a period of mourning. Different cultures around the world have customs that dictate how to mark and move through the grief that accompanies death. The people who knew Bapi experienced grief at his passing. Tridib mentions continuing to make his bed each night. Binod talks about being sad ("big sad"). Bapi's death was unexpected and the film was made less than a month after it happened so many of Bapi's friends were in the early stages of mourning.

- **Faith**

  There are several lines in the film that give insight into Bapi's faith life. His friend says, "I don't know to which god he is praying but he prays." His other friend talks about going to temple AND church with Bapi. Although he did not practice any single religion, his cremation followed Hindu traditions and his friend explains that his ashes were put in the Ganges to ensure his passage into rebirth.

- **Memories**

  Memories are the things we hold onto when we lose our loved ones. Those memories are preserved in

stories and photographs. During the interviews, Bapi's friends share vivid details to bring Bapi to life. The photographs scattered throughout the film also help us envision Bapi's love for dance, his sense of humor, and his tenderness.

- **Human value**

  The film opens with a list of things typically talked about at someone's funeral. If, from the society's perspective, that person had nothing to show for their life, what do we say? The observation is designed to raise questions about what determines human value. Are human beings valuable because they produce things? Are they valuable because they know things? What does this mean for people who are living in destitution or people with intellectual disabilities?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a society, who do we mourn? Why?
2. In your opinion, did Bapi leave a legacy? If so, what was it? If not, why not?
3. What do you think Bapi's friend was expressing when he said, "Bapi died. I die more."?
4. What does it mean to value the human person?
5. Throughout history, the question of who counts as human has been debated in many forums. Various identity factors have been used to deny the status of human being to certain people. During Aristotle's day, one of the biggest debates was whether women have souls or not. Up until the late twentieth century, political factions still debated the full humanity of certain ethnic groups. There are currently debates among medical professionals about whether certain people with profound intellectual disabilities should be considered fully human. Why do you think some people are not considered human beings?

BEHIND THE SCENES

In the process of making this film, the director was told countless stories about Bapi. If this film were longer, it would include the story of Bapi's illnesses and recoveries and how he changed the environment of the entire floor of the hospital where he was being treated. With the strength of his charisma, he converted service providers into friends. Nurses would come and work with Bapi during their lunch breaks and doctors waived the fees to Bapi's complicated surgeries. When Bapi died, people from all over the world sent letters of love and condolence to the community. This is perhaps even more remarkable when we consider how Bapi's life began. Bapi was orphaned as a child. He was taken in by Saint Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity when they found him on the streets. Their ministry at the time was heavily focused on their "home for the dying" and Bapi was full of life and vibrancy. When the L'Arche community came to visit the Missionaries, Bapi followed them around and even attempted to board their van. He repeatedly showed a desire to spend time with the L'Arche community. His determination eventually paid off and he was invited to live in the L'Arche community.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

The general population has an endless attention span when it comes to celebrities, politicians, musicians, athletes, and the like. The simple act of paying attention to people who are forgotten can have a transformative effect on the world. Think about your local area and make a list of people who seem forgotten. How can you practice remembering those who are actively forgotten about? When human dignity is honored, all of us benefit.

EPISODE NINE

NINETEEN PAPER CRANES

AS I AM

L'ARCHE INTERNATIONAL

AS I AM
EPISODE NINE - NINETEEN PAPER CRANES

FILM SUMMARY

Sachiko Tanaka is a woman with disabilities in Japan. She lives a simple and peaceful life in the L'Arche Japan community. One day, her country woke to the news that she is disposable. In this episode, we see how Sachiko's community responds to the largest mass murder in their country since World War II.

"WHY DOES THE WORLD ASSUME THAT A DISABLED LIFE IS NOT PROFOUNDLY BEAUTIFUL?"

FILM THEMES

- **Vulnerability**

  In his letter, the assailant explained his logic for killing. If these people are miserable and the people who care for them are miserable, then they are better off dead. He only took those who were the most fragile, the most vulnerable. In this way vulnerability presented a condition worthy of violence instead of tenderness.

- **Eugenics**

  Though eugenics as a concept and practice have been around since the time of ancient civilizations, many countries have had thriving eugenics programs in modern times. Japan is just one country that has advocated and legislated for improving the hereditary qualities of a human population. These policies and practices call for regulation of the birth and life of "undesirable" people, like people with physical or intellectual disabilities. Though these ideas went through a period of major decline following WWII, some have identified a resurgence as science and technology around genomic studies advances.

- **Deaf**

  Sachiko goes to taiko practice even though she is deaf. She listens to the vibrations with her whole body. As the film goes silent, we are invited to contemplate what it means to listen without hearing. This presented another reminder that, despite mainstream notions, having disabilities is not synonymous with having less joy or less happiness.

- **Origami cranes**

  To commemorate the lives of the people killed at the Sagamihara institution, the L'Arche community made cranes and presented them at the memorial site. There were many discussions about what the community would like to do, the final decision was made to turn the pain of the letter into cranes that could "carry the souls to paradise."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After watching the film, how did you feel?
2. "Out of our assumptions, we made 19 deaths." What does this mean to you?
3. Examine your own assumptions about a disabled life. Where do you think these assumptions come from?
4. Some people have sided with the assailant because he considered his act a form of compassionate killing for people whose profound disabilities made life unbearable while others have argued that he took the lives of innocent, vulnerable people. Discuss both of these arguments and explain where you stand and why.
5. What stood out to you about Sachiko's life? Why?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Sachiko has an active sense of humor. The scene where she pretended to be choking is one of her classic jokes. Because her body appears weak and off balance, people who meet her for the first time are often concerned that she will come in harm's way. She chooses to use jokes to make people more comfortable with her fragility.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

What happens when the desire to improve lives leads to activities that end lives? What are the differences and similarities between this event and other events you have seen on the news? Take time to examine the social conditioning that allows some lives to matter more than others. What would it take to respect and protect the lives of the vulnerable?

EPISODE TEN

ON MY OWN?

AS I AM

L'ARCHE INTERNATIONAL

AS I AM
EPISODE TEN - ON MY OWN?

FILM SUMMARY

When Katherine Black of L'Arche Australia was 57, she lost her mother. This was the year when everything in her life changed. She felt her aloneness in a new and deep way and decided it was time to take care of herself by herself. For Katherine, this meant moving out of a flat in the L'Arche community, where she had lived until then, and moving into her very own apartment. She worked out a plan to live independently at last. Her desire to stand on her own two feet, all on her own has led her down a rousing road of busking, gambling, and kitchen disasters. Statistics may indeed show that independent living can be particularly difficult for people with disabilities, but Katherine relies on her resourcefulness and her relationships with friends to avoid the usual pitfalls.

"I WAS THINKING OF WANTING TO BE ON MY OWN FOR A CHANGE."

-Katherine Black

FILM THEMES

- **Independence**
  In the past, people with intellectual disabilities have been confined, segregated, and altogether deprived of their independence. In the film, the line in the popular TV show "Gilligan's Island" refers to this reality. "Skipper, it's against the law to lock somebody up without telling them what they did." These words are a lighthearted way of drawing attention to something that is deeply unjust. One response to this injustice has been to support the movement that promotes independent living for people with intellectual disabilities. While this would appear to be the logical response to such injustice, statistics in Australia have revealed that it is not always the better solution. Independent living can also expose people to harmful levels of isolation. The loneliness that accompanies independence can be just as dangerous as the constraints of dependence.

- **Community**
  Just as a person's right to independence must be respected, so must their relational rights also be respected. Katherine's story deals with the experience of living in community. There are many values in community life: receiving support, nurturing relationships, avoiding isolation; L'Arche communities

are defined by a shared experience. Even so, many efforts have been made to support its members' aspirations for independence. There is no formula to create a perfect balance between shared life and independent living. Katherine's community has supported her efforts and, together, they work to accomplish her plan.

- **Lonely vs. Alone**
  Being lonely is largely considered an unpleasant emotion, but Katherine delights in her alone time. This draws attention to a distinction between being lonely and being alone. She enjoys certain activities with others but upholds her right to decline invitations and visitors. Mainstream media tend to pathologize behaviors that minimize social interaction, but Katherine needs freedom to choose when to be social and when to enjoy just being by herself. When she describes being as "free as a bird" she is referring to a freedom to exercise her will not a freedom from social activities. Yet, Katherine's pet birds, in their birdcage, can subtly remind one that certain challenges and restrictions may indeed limit one's freedom but in fact they are there to protect, not confine.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the filmmakers chose to put a question mark at the end of the title of the film? What other titles might be well suited for this film?
2. Her mother's death prompted Katherine to imagine a life on her own. When have you been prompted to make a change in your life? What led to that change?
3. Katherine had a plan to live independently. If you had a similar plan, what activities would you include? What activities do you do that make you feel independent?
4. In the cooking scene, Katherine writes "No" in every box that asked if she needed help when in fact, she does call for help. She is determined to prove herself independent. How does this differ with the end of the film?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Katherine's decision to not organize betting among her friends in the community was a challenge for the film crew. The crew even considered for a while doing an alternative story with a different protagonist, but they kept running into her around town, practicing her independent living. One example was washing her laundry; she had access to a washing machine in her apartment in the L'Arche community, but she still preferred to go out to do her laundry in town. In many situations, Katherine insists on her independence and then asks for the assistance of another person. It is not contradictory to be independent and yet need help. Another example of this is when Katherine missed the bus and got lost in town. She decided to handle this situation "on her own" by going into a nearby movie theater and asking to use their phone. In fact, she did not have the phone number she needed, and yet she was able to get the theater employees to reach her friends in the L'Arche community. Her ability to obtain assistance from others is part of the success of her quest for independence.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

The vulnerability that comes from relying on others can be uncomfortable, but it also reminds us that we are not alone. How can you create space to experience the benefits and joys of both dependence and independence?