



Autism: Rain Man (Movie)

Est. Time: 2 Hours Viewing/45 Minutes Class

Synopsis

After his father's death, car salesman Charlie Babbit discovers that he has a grown brother, Raymond, who is autistic and has been living in an institution for more than 30 years. When Charlie further discovers that his brother is the actual inheritor of the vast majority of their father's estate, he becomes infuriated and kidnaps Raymond in an effort to get custody of him and thereby gain access to the inheritance. But as the brothers spend time together, Charlie develops a relationship with Raymond and realizes how important family and love truly are in life. Eventually Charlie returns Raymond to the institution, acknowledging his brother's need for professional care.

Activity

View the following movie and be prepared to discuss the questions below in class:

Title: Rain Man (1988)

Studio: MGM

Questions/Discussion Topics

1. Raymond has autism. What purpose do his numerous routines or compulsive behaviors serve?
2. What are Raymond's major obstacles outside of the institution? Are these challenges typical of those faced by individuals with autism? Explain.
3. How does Charlie help Raymond deal with the challenges he encounters throughout the film? How are these supports similar to those a teacher might need when incorporating students with autism into the classroom?
4. People with autism typically display unique characteristics in four key areas: social skills, communication, insistence on sameness, and unusual behaviors. (Examples of each of the four behaviors are listed in the following table.)



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Characteristics of Autism		
Social Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal attachments to parents, family members, or caregivers do not develop. • Friendships with peers fail to develop. • Cooperative or peer play is rarely observed. • Emotions, such as affection and empathy, are rarely displayed. • Nonverbal signals of social intent (smiling, gestures, physical contact) tend not to be used. • Eye contact is not initiated or maintained. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imaginative play is seldom observed • The lack of social-communicative gestures and utterances is apparent during the first few months of life. • Preferred interaction style could be characterized as “extreme isolation.” • Understanding of others’ beliefs, emotions, or motivations is greatly impaired. • Joint attention deficits (not being able to cooperate or share interest with others in the same event or activity) impair normal social reciprocation.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional language is not acquired fully or mastered. • Content of language is usually unrelated to immediate environmental events. • Utterances are stereotypic and repetitive. • Gestures, facial expressions, and nonverbal cues are poorly understood. • Conversations are not maintained. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneous conversations are rarely initiated. • Speech can be meaningless, repetitive, and echolalic. • Many fail to use the words, I and yes and have problems with pronouns in general. • Both expressive and receptive language are extremely literal. • Verbal turn-taking, choosing a topic, and contributing properly to a conversation are rare.
Insistence on Sameness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marked distress is typically experienced over trivial or minor changes in the environment. • Aspects of daily routine can become ritualized. • Obsessive and compulsive behavior is frequently displayed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to complete self-imposed, required actions is intense. • Stereotypic behaviors (rocking, hand-flapping) are repeated in cycles difficult to stop.
Unusual Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hypersensitive and/or inconsistent behaviors are the response to visual, tactile, or auditory stimulation. • Aggression to others is common, particularly when compliance is requested. • Self-injurious or outwardly aggressive behavior (hitting, biting, kicking, head-banging) is common and frequent. • Extreme social fears are manifested toward strangers, • crowds, unusual situations, and new environments. • Loud sounds (barking dogs, street noises) can result in startled or fearful reactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe sleep problems occur with frequency. • Noncompliant behavior to requests from others results in disruption to the individual and others (tantrums). • Self-stimulation (twirling objects, rocking) consumes a considerable amount of time and energy. • The ability to pretend is lacking.



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Using scenes from the film, identify two situations for each area in which you recognize these characteristics. How do the individuals around Raymond respond? Given your knowledge of autism, what types of responses would you recommend? Complete the following table.

Scene	Characteristic	Response of Others	Your Recommended Response
Communication			
Social Skills			
Unusual Behavior			
Insistence on Sameness			