

Autism Spectrum Disorder: Rain Man (Movie)

Est. Time: 2 Hours Viewing/45 Minutes Class Time

Objective

Gain a better understanding of characteristics that some individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) exhibit and how they can impact daily life.

Overview

After his father's death, car salesman Charlie Babbit discovers that he has an adult brother, Raymond, who has autism and has been living in an institution for more than 30 years. Charlie becomes infuriated when he learns that his brother is the actual inheritor of the vast majority of their father's estate. In an effort to get custody of Raymond and thereby gain access to the inheritance, Charlie kidnaps Raymond. However, 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

Individuals with ASD typically display unique characteristics in three key areas: social interaction, social communication, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior. Review examples of each of these characteristics in the table on pages 3 and 4 to help answer the following questions.

1. What compulsive behaviors and routines did Raymond exhibit? What purpose did they serve?
2. Raymond encounters major obstacles outside of the institution.
 - a. List at least three of these major obstacles.
 - b. Are these challenges typical of those faced by individuals with autism? Explain.
3. Complete the table below. For each of the three key areas in which individuals with ASD typically display unique characteristics:
 - a. Identify two instances in the film for each area in which you recognize these characteristics.
 - b. For each instance, describe Raymond's behavior.
 - c. For each instance, describe how the individuals around Raymond respond?
 - d. Given your knowledge of ASD, what types of responses would you recommend?

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Instance	Raymond's Behavior	Others' Response	Your Recommended Response
Social Interaction			
Social Communication			
Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behavior			

5. How does Charlie help Raymond deal with the challenges he encounters throughout the film?
6. How do the supports that Charlie provide compare to the supports a teacher might use when supporting a student with ASD to help him or her access the general education curriculum?

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Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder		
Characteristic	Specific Behavioral Criteria	Examples
Social Interaction & Social Communication	<p>Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by all three of the following, currently or by history:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity. 2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction. 3. Deficit in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation • Reduced sharing of interest, emotions, or affect • Failure to initiate or respond to social interactions • Poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication • Abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and uses of gestures • Total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication • Difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts • Difficulties in sharing, imaginative play or in making friends • Absence of interest in peers
Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behavior	<p>Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities, as manifested by at least two of the following, currently or by history:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech. 2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple motor stereotypes, lining up toys or flipping objects • Echolalia or idiosyncratic phrases • Extreme distress at small changes • Difficulties with transitions • Rigid thinking patterns • Need to take same route or eat same food every day • Strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects • Excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests

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Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder		
Characteristic	Specific Behavioral Criteria	Examples
Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behavior [CONT]	3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus. 4. Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apparent indifference to pain/temperature • Adverse response to specific sounds or textures • Excessive smelling or touching objects • Visual fascination with lights or movement

Source: American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.)*.