



Radio presents a lesson in tolerance and acceptance

This is a true story and may yet be unfinished because in 2006 James Robert Kennedy, also known as Radio and then in his 50s, was hard at work at his high school in South Carolina. The special features on the DVD introduce the real Radio and his coach Harold Jones.

In 1976, high school coach Harold Jones (played by Ed Harris) took a young man with mental disabilities (played by Cuba Gooding, Jr.) under his wing and changed not only both of their lives but those of all the students in Hanna High School. They called the young man Radio because of his fascination with radios. For years he was seen trudging behind his grocery cart not speaking to anyone, lost in his own simple world. One day, some of the boys on the football team thought it would be a great joke to tie him up and leave him in the equipment shack. Coach Jones didn't find this joke funny. He gave the guilty a penance of long, hard running. He also befriended Radio.

Eventually, he had Radio assisting on the football

field in many different small ways. Later, he had him come to his high school classes and help in the classroom. Initially, people were puzzled by the coach's behavior. Why would he want to spend so much time and attention on a mentally challenged black boy, especially when he was spending little or no time with his wife (played by Debra Winger) and his teenage daughter. The townspeople thought his actions a bit strange and one of them complained to the school board who tried to block Radio from coming to the school. The principal (played by Alfre Woodard) stood by Jones, though she didn't pretend to understand why.

In time, however, everyone warmed to Radio. His infectious good humor and kindness to all were hard to resist. He happily read the lunch menu over the intercom and did many small jobs for the teachers and students. He was a constant at football games and became sort of a mascot for the team. Everyone, including most of the townspeople, learned to love him.

There are no earthshaking events in the story. The team wins some and loses some. Radio is mistakenly arrested, a sure case of profiling, by a new city cop who didn't know him. His mother dies of a heart attack, devastating him. The story doesn't ever really bog down and eventually we learn why Coach Jones feels compelled to help Radio.

All in all, it's a simple, heart-warming story that will make your students think about how they treat mentally challenged individuals and why.

Activities for *Radio*:

1. Have students do a survey of their school or their city or town. How accessible is it for physically and mentally challenged individuals? What services are available? Are they accepted into the mainstream? Are they given the dignity and respect every human being deserves?
2. Arrange for students to spend some time

helping out in a home for mentally challenged people or in the Special Olympics program. They are always looking for volunteers.

3. Have students in groups define the words *inclusive* and *exclusive*. Have them list organizations, businesses, schools and other institutions under each word that appear to fall in that category. Discuss the groups' lists as a class.
4. Have students investigate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). When was it passed and what does it require of public buildings and institutions?
5. Ask them to conduct an experiment. Have students spend a week making an extra special effort to treat all people, even those they don't like, with dignity and respect. Discuss what kinds of behavior this might involve. It would mean listening attentively when people spoke to them, regardless of who that might be. It would mean fairness and equity in all relationships, and a change



in numerous negative behaviors some teenagers do without thinking. When the week is over, have them discuss whether this kind of attitude made a difference in their feelings. Could they detect a difference in the way others treated them and in the way they thought of themselves?

6. Distribute Handout #2 Prejudice Questionnaire. Allow time for students to answer the questions. Have students discuss their responses in small groups.

Handout #1 Discussion/Writing Questions for *Radio*:

1. Why do you think people make fun of disabled people, particularly mentally challenged individuals? Though they would never think of laughing at a person in a wheelchair or with a seeing-eye dog, they often think nothing of making fun of a person with mental difficulties.
2. In your opinion, is your school's treatment of disabled students as it should be? Are the other students accepting of them or does some ridicule or mistreatment occur? Have you ever engaged in or witnessed mistreatment? Tell about it. What could the school do to improve conditions?
3. Coach Jones's wife and daughter suffer the same neglect of many wives and children in our society. Fathers are often too involved in their work and play lives to spend time with their families. What are the obstacles families face in spending quality time together? Many don't even eat dinner together. What is the solution? Is there one?
4. The coach's wife says, "It's never wrong to care about someone." Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
5. What made Radio so likable? Could an average person adopt these qualities or do they only work for some? Explain.
6. Many special education experts have "mainstreamed" their students, which means they have placed them in regular classes. Others believe special ed. students should remain in a single classroom with others who have problems similar to their own. Which method do you think might be the better? Explain why.
7. Why do you think small towns, especially those in the South place so much attention and value on their sports teams, notably the football team? What does the football team do for the community? Explain.
8. Cite several examples of blatant discrimination against Radio. Tell whether you think they were against his race or his disability or both?
9. Cuba Gooding, Jr. has always portrayed smart, handsome, "cool" characters in his films. What does this role tell you about him? Why do you think he took such a challenging role?
10. Why do you think filmmakers saw Radio's story as good material? It had neither violence, special effects, mystery, or romance. What does the film offer? Does it succeed in your opinion?

Handout #2 Prejudice Questionnaire

Prejudice: the act of judging a person based solely on his/her membership in a group

Stereotype: a mind-set describing the characteristics of a certain group of people

Answer the following questions. Use the back of this sheet if you need more space.

1. Have you ever participated in or witnessed an act of prejudice against an individual?
Describe the situation.

2. In looking back on this event, do you wish you had acted differently or do you feel you did the right thing?

3. Check below all the groups of which you are a member:

Male	White
Female	Hispanic
Short	Black
Tall	Asian
Thin	Bi-racial
Fat	English as a Second Language
Foster child	Low income
Only child	Wealthy
Homeless	Sexual Orientation
Teen	Religious
Gifted	Disabled

4. Have you ever experienced prejudice due to your membership in any of these groups?
If yes, describe them and tell how you responded – your thoughts and your actions.