



Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival

Education Outreach Program Screening: *Blindsight*

Director: Lucy Walker

104 minutes, rated PG

In English and Tibetan/German with English subtitles

Please use the below synopsis, study ideas/questions and helpful websites to lead your students in preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the film, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays (either all or select) must be sent to Cinema/Chicago.*

Synopsis: Set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Himalayas, *Blindsight* follows the gripping adventure of six Tibetan teenagers who set out to climb the 23,000 foot Lhakpa Ri on the north side of Mount Everest. A dangerous journey soon becomes a seemingly impossible challenge made all the more remarkable by the fact that the teenagers are blind. Believed by many Tibetans to be possessed by demons, the children are shunned by their parents, scorned by their villages and rejected by society. Rescued by Sabriye Tenberken - a blind educator and adventurer who established the first school for the blind in Lhasa, the students invite the famous blind mountain climber Erik Weihenmayer to visit their school after learning about his conquest of Everest. Erik arrives in Lhasa and inspires Sabriye and her students Kyila, Sonam Bhumtso, Tashi, Gyenshen, Dachung and Tenzin to let him lead them higher than they have ever been before. The resulting 3-week journey is beyond anything any of them could have predicted.

Recommended for: cultural and history studies, humanities, film/video students

Appropriate for: all 6-12 grade students.

Study Ideas/Questions:

1. As the film explains, in Tibet, being blind is often considered a curse, and those who are blind are looked down upon and shamed. Why do you think that is? How is that point of view the same of different in our society? Do we look down on people with disabilities?
2. People with disabilities, according to Sabriye, are often “swept to the side and forgotten.” Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think Erik says that he felt like a coward compared to Sabriye, despite the risks he takes as a blind mountain climber?

4. Being blind means that you have to place a great deal of trust in others. Sabriye and the students were willing to put their complete trust in Erik and the guides to get them safely up the mountain. Would you be willing to trust someone with your life like that? Why or why not?
5. How does Erik's blindness affect his relationship with the students? Do you think they would have still been inspired to climb with him if he had his sight?
6. Sabriye's main goal is to make the blind students feel that they are equal members of society. Do you think she succeeds in doing so? Why or why not?
7. Throughout the film, there is a lot of argument and debate amongst the leaders of the expedition about doing the right thing, and what that means in their situation. In the end, does it seem like they made the right choices and "did the right thing?" Would you have done anything differently if you were in charge of the group?
8. Why do you think that the director of the film chose to focus more on Tashi than any of the other students? Is Tashi's story memorable to you? Why or why not?
9. We see many different kinds of families in this film, from supportive families like Erik's to families like Tashi's who send him off to work for abusive strangers. How much do you think the support of your family plays a role in your success? Is it possible that lack of support could create a greater drive to succeed, and to prove something?
10. What have the filmmakers done to keep the audience constantly aware of the danger surrounding the expedition?
11. Sabriye talks about how being blind means that you have to constantly use your imagination. As someone with sight, do you still use your imagination on a regular basis? How do you think you would use it differently if you were blind?
12. Why did Sabriye care more about keeping the team together than reaching the summit?
13. A major theme in this film is journey vs. destination. Do you think that one is more important than the other? Which was more important in this particular story, and why?

Useful Links and Resources:

Film website: <http://www.blindsightthemovie.com/index.html>

Film trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMs97VVEvFs>

Erik Weihenmayer's website: <http://www.touchthetop.com/>

Information about Cinema/Chicago's Education Outreach Program:

<http://cinemachicago.org/education/>

*Schools who do not send in essay requirement will not be allowed to attend future Education Outreach Screenings.