



Cinema/Chicago Education Program Screening : *Deaf Jam*

Director : July Lieff

70 minutes

In English/American Sign Language with English subtitles, not rated

**Please use the below synopsis, study ideas and questions, and helpful websites to lead your students in preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the film, students in the audience are required to respond to the screening with a one page essay that is sent to Cinema/Chicago. \***

**Synopsis:** *Deaf Jam* is a documentary film where American Sign Language (ASL) meets spoken word. A group of New York City deaf teens reveal their passions, frustrations, and senses of humor as they discover and explore ASL poetry - eventually stepping into the world of the youth poetry slams with their hearing peers. With ties to rap and hip hop culture, national poetry slams for youth have been gaining momentum but few, if any, deaf teens have ever been included in these contests. *DeAf Jam* chronicles young deaf poets witnessing and attempting to participate in these contests for the first time. Performing in ASL, a dramatic visual language, the poets use rhythm, movement and body language to create a cinematic equivalent to oral poetry. In the film, the poets use sign language and poetry not only to express themselves, but also to raise issues about disability and the future of ASL. Pitted against the journey of the poets and contributing to this bittersweet story, is a counter-narrative, which traces the increasing erosion of this indigenous art form in the face of technologies and the educational system 'serving' to mainstream the deaf into the hearing world. The film seeks to use innovative techniques to convey the beauty of sign language poetry to hearing audiences and to honor the wishes of most of the characters who do not want to be artificially voiced. - *Synopsis from [www.deafjam.org](http://www.deafjam.org)*

### **Study Ideas/Questions**

1. Aneta thinks that instead of defining the deaf as those who “can’t” hear, they should be defined as those who “don’t” hear. Why is this phrasing important to Aneta? What is the difference and significance between the words “don’t” and “can’t”?
2. Talk about language. How does it effect the subjects of the film? Do you know people who don’t use the same language as you? What challenges come with that difference, and how can you/have you overcome them?
3. Aneta is anxious about graduating high school. Why do you think she feels this way?
4. At her first slam performance, why do you think Aneta insists on performing without an interpreter?
5. If you were to perform a poem what would you want it to express? How could you share this without speaking and get your message across?
6. Think about the first time we see Aneta perform at the slam on her own without an interpreter, and when we see her perform with Tahini. How are

- the two performances different for Aneta? How are they different for the audience?
7. Look up other forms of art besides ASL Slam Poetry that don't necessarily use words to express a feeling or point of view (dance, painting, sculpture). Which is your favorite, and why?
  8. If you are deaf or hard-of-hearing, what misconceptions do people have about you/American Sign Language that you'd like to dispel. If you are not deaf or hard-of-hearing, what misconceptions might you have about the deaf community?
  9. Aneta and her classmates have a discussion about deafness. Aneta says she feels she is missing out much of the world because she is deaf, while her friend and classmate disagrees. Talk about the different sides of the debate. Where do you stand?
  10. The film mentions the concern that ASL might one day die out because of cochlear implants and/or genetic advances that might wipe out the "deaf gene." What do you think about this concern?

### **Useful websites**

<http://deafjam.org/links.html>

<http://www.deafillinois.com/>

<http://www.deaf.com/>

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

\*Teachers who do not facilitate the completion of this requirement will not be invited to attend future Education Program Screenings