

Smile Pinki Discussion Guide

FILM SUMMARY

Smile Pinki tells the story of Pinki Sonkar, a five-year old girl born in rural India desperately poor and with a cleft lip. The simple surgery that can cure her is a distant dream until she meets Pankaj, a social worker traveling village to village gathering patients for a hospital that provides free surgery to thousands each year.

Pinki and the other children in the film have their young lives devastated by the physical challenges and social stigma of a cleft lip and palate, one of the most common and most curable of birth defects. While the exact cause of clefts is not known, rates are higher among poor families, and in developing countries most clefts go un-repaired. It is estimated that one million children in India suffer with un-repaired clefts.

Smile Pinki takes you inside GS Memorial hospital, a place where the quality of care is met with a depth of compassion and respect. GS Memorial is located in the sacred city of Banaras, Uttar Pradesh, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on the planet located on the banks of the Ganges River. Its surrounding region suffers some of the world's worst health indicators. The hospital is one of 160 centers in India supported by the Smile Train, a U.S.-based non-profit that empowers local doctors in 76 countries to provide free cleft surgery. To cure a cleft it takes a simple surgery of less than an hour. As you see in the film, the challenge is often reaching children and their families to let them know that a cleft is a common and completely curable birth defect that can be fixed quickly and for free. The results are life-changing.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This discussion guide can help start conversations and further understanding about the film and the issues that it raises. The following pages include helpful descriptions about cleft lip and cleft palate as well as details about the area in which the film takes place. The guide also includes discussion prompts and suggested activities intended both to promote the understanding of differences both physical and cultural, and to help you identify ways you or someone you know can make a difference in your community.

QUICK IDEAS FOR DISCUSSIONS

- Cleft is one of the most common birth defects in the world. While children with clefts in the U.S. can get treatment with relative ease, those in developing nations such as India have greater difficulty getting clefts repaired even though the surgery can cost as little as \$250. Using examples from the film, talk about why this problem persists.
- Some of the children profiled in *Smile Pinki* feel shame because of their un-repaired clefts. How do you think children with cleft lip or palate would be treated in your community? Can you think of times when you or people you know have been judged because of a physical defect, disability, or not fitting society's idea of 'normal'? Have you ever made comments about a person's appearance that were based on a stereotype? What sorts of assumptions did you make?
- *Smile Pinki* shows doctors and social workers from GS Memorial hospital working together to treat children with cleft who live all over India. Why is it important that these caregivers have an understanding of the local context in which their patients live? How might the treatment have been different if the doctors and social workers hadn't been from Uttar Pradesh?

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Section 1: Film and Media



MIDDLE SCHOOL

Smile Pinki might be different from most of the movies you've seen because it follows real people as they go through their lives. Unlike many movies and all cartoons, *Smile Pinki* is not made up; rather, it is documenting real life as it happens, a type of movie called a documentary film.

Discussion Prompts

1. What are subtitles and why does *Smile Pinki* have them? Do you think *Smile Pinki* would be different if there were no subtitles? Could the story be told with subtitles in another language, like Spanish?
2. Why did the filmmakers choose Varanasi, India if children all over the world suffer from cleft?
3. Even though this is a documentary, it still follows a story from start to finish, a basic narrative structure of beginning, middle, and end. Can you identify the key points of the story? How does the story unfold?

Additional Exercises

1. Give the students a disposable camera (one to each student or in groups), and have them document what they see during the day by taking pictures. After they are developed (or uploaded) have each student make a photo-documentary that they can share with the class, either through individual presentations, or by switching photo-documentaries with each other.
2. Have the students watch another film or cartoon and identify the parts of the story.

HIGH SCHOOL

Smile Pinki is a documentary film that follows Pinki and Ghutaru as they embark on a life changing mission to receive free cleft surgery. Unlike many popular documentaries you may have seen, the filmmakers behind *Smile Pinki* do not directly interview their subjects. A local newspaper does conduct an interview in the film, but the filmmakers maintain a "fly on the wall" approach to telling Pinki and Ghutaru's story. This style is often associated with Cinéma Vérité: the French words translate directly to "cinema of truth."

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Discussion Prompts

1. Often in a fiction film or novel, information about a character is slowly revealed as the plot reveals their story. How does *Smile Pinki* introduce you to Pinki and Ghutaru? How is the story structured?
2. Whose voice tells the story? What are the moments in the film where you feel like you learn something about Pinki and her family? How would the film be different if it had interviews or narration? What sort of information would you like to have included that isn't? Are there other ways to find out that information?
3. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to focus on the children? How would the film be different if she had focused on adults instead?
4. Do you generally act differently when someone is filming you or taking your picture? Is there a paradox in trying to capture the truth of a moment on film? Can you think of any examples?
5. A film is made up of both images and sound that work together, and sometimes against each other, to tell a story, create a sensation in the viewer, or sometimes both. What kinds of images are in *Smile Pinki*? What kinds of sounds? Do you hear music? Do you hear a voice over? Do you see any text? Do you see any graphics or drawn images? Is there anything that you hear or see that is not a part of the scene as it unfolds, for example music playing when there isn't a radio or anyone playing an instrument on screen? What kind of an effect do these sounds and images have on the story? What kind of an effect do they have on you?

Additional Exercises

1. Give the students a disposable camera (or one to each student) and have them document what they see during the day by taking pictures. After they are developed (or uploaded) have each student make a photo-documentary that they can share with the class, either through individual presentations, or by switching photo-documentaries with each other. Have the students discuss why they took each picture, the way they did, how the pictures tell a larger story, how taking the picture might have changed the subject and the outcome of what they were taking the picture of.
2. Have the students watch another film, either fiction or documentary, and discuss the concepts they discussed for *Smile Pinki*.

Resources

'History of Documentary' by Michael Rabinger <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/>

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Section 2: Clefts and Birth Defects

What is a Cleft Lip and Palate?

By Smile Train

A cleft lip is an opening in the upper lip between a newborn's mouth and nose. A cleft palate is created when the roof of the mouth has a hole in it. Babies can be born with a cleft lip or palate or both. A bilateral cleft is when there are two openings in the mouth whereas a unilateral cleft is one opening. Here is an example of a unilateral cleft on Angelica Joy Fabroa from the Philippines, a young girl helped by the group Smile Train:



Having a cleft lip and palate is one of the top birth defects in the world. There are millions of children suffering with cleft lip and palate, and more than 200,000 cleft births a year in developing countries.

In most western countries, such as the United States, children who are born with a cleft lip receive surgery when they are just a few months old. Children in developing countries who do not receive the surgery, face severe hardship and life-long suffering: They are unable to eat or speak properly and not allowed to attend school. They are unable to find jobs or participate in society. They are kept hidden in shame by families/communities.

Poverty—not medicine—is the primary barrier to treatment; patients and their families are sometimes too poor to pay for surgery and doctors and hospitals are too poor to offer free surgery. In many cases, struggling governments also don't consider clefts a life or death issue.

Discussion Prompts

1. Do you know anybody who has a birth defect? How do you and others relate to them? In what ways do you think they might have been judged in the past because of their defect? Have you ever made comments about a person's appearance that were based on a stereotype? What sort of assumptions did you make?

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2. In *Smile Pinki*, the social worker Pankaj asks Pinki's parents what they think about Pinki's future after the surgery and her mother replies "It will lift a huge burden from my head." What did she mean by that?
3. Only some children in poor countries receive these services. Why is so? What can be done to address this problem?

Resources

Smile Train <http://medpro.smiletrain.org/library/Library.html>

American Cleft Lip & Palate Association <http://www.cleftline.org/>

American Cleft Palate – Craniofacial Association <http://www.acpa-cpf.org/>

Kids Health Resource Guide http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/ears/cleft_lip_palate.html

Family Doctor <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/children/parents/special/birth/034.html>

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Section 3: Varanasi & Uttar Pradesh

People

Uttar Pradesh (translated as 'Northern Province') is the most populous state in India. Of the more than 190 million people in the state, the majority of the population is connected to the agricultural sector and belongs to the socially and economically depressed sections of India's caste system. Literacy rates are lower than the national average and Uttar Pradesh also lags behind other states in health indicators. According to the World Health Organization, life expectancy is 55-60 yrs. (national average 65 yrs.) due to "literacy, differential income levels and socio-economic conditions and beliefs."

Pinki and Ghutaru live in Varanasi one of the Hindu religion's most important holy cities. Despite its rich history, Varanasi is one of the poorest places in the world: the average person makes 23 cents a day and children as young as five often work to help support their families. In fact, nearly half of all children and adults are malnourished, which is one of the reasons why there are so many children suffering with clefts.

Religion

Uttar Pradesh is "considered to be the birthplace of Hinduism" and is home to some of the religion's holiest cities such as Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura, and Allahabad – where the Ganges and Yamuna rivers meet. At the turn of the millennium, over 80% of the population in Uttar Pradesh was Hindu. The other major religion is Islam (18% of the population) with the remaining population consisting of Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jains.

Sources

<http://www.smiletrainindia.org/index.php>

<http://planning.up.nic.in/apd/hdr-2006/chapter-1.pdf>

http://www.searo.who.int/EN/Section313/Section1519_10855.htm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttar_Pradesh

Discussion Prompts

1. Why do you think the families of Pinki and Ghutaru believed that if they did not receive the surgery, they would not be able to attend school or get married?
2. In what way is your life similar to the lives of Pinki and Ghutaru? In what ways is it different?
3. *Smile Pinki* shows how non-governmental organizations can empower local doctors and social workers to work directly with those in need in their communities. What are the benefits and disadvantages of this localized model of medical care?

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Section 4: You Can Make A Difference!

Altruism/Volunteerism/Community Service/Philanthropy

In *Smile Pinki*, we see doctors offering their services for free to children with cleft. This is made possible through donations made by people around the world, like Georgie Exarchakis - a fifth grader from Monroe Township, New Jersey. Georgie showed *Smile Pinki* to his school and church. After they watched the film, he suggested that everyone help kids like Pinki. They collected their loose change and the results were amazing. By the end of the week, they raised enough money to help four kids.

In this case, both kids and doctors had an interest helping children like Pinki not because they expected to receive something in return but because they wanted to help them have a better life. *Altruism* is defined as the unselfish concern for the welfare of others. It can take many forms. Some volunteer their services to a community. Others donate their resources and their time. What each of these activities has in common is an interest in helping others who might be in need. Through these efforts, we can also connect with communities large and small, near and far, and hopefully build awareness and understanding.

Examples of Volunteerism

Cleaning up public gardens/empty lots/beach shore
Planting a garden
Helping at a homeless shelter/soup kitchen/animal shelter
Teaching a skill to others
Spending time at a senior center
Organizing a Fundraiser

Fundraising Ideas

Invite your friends to a screening party and use the discussion guide to lead a conversation after the film. Go to www.Smilepinkimovie.com or www.hbo.com/docs/programs/smilepink/ for additional information and to find out how to view the film.

“A-thon” (i.e.: dance-a-thon, read-a-thon, jump-a-thon, bowl-a-thon, hike-a-thon)

Penny/spare change drive...or a “Penny War” among the different classes or grades to see who can raise the most funds

Dress down day (i.e.: if you donate a \$1, you can wear a hat, shorts, jeans, etc)

Create a poster that shows your fundraising goals and timelines of reaching those goals...maybe put smiley face stickers/drawing to show how far from your goal you are.

Have a yard sale / garage sale of used items

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Discussion Prompts

1. Have you ever volunteered before? How can you make a difference in your community...the world? Provide some examples.
2. What is philanthropy? What is a fundraiser? What types of activities are involved? Who does this? Why? Where and when can this happen?

Exercises

1. Organize and complete a volunteer project with your teacher and your peers.

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2. Create a journal of your experiences. What did you learn? How did you feel when you were volunteering? Did you meet people you've never met before? Did you try something different? Was it challenging or scary at any time? How did you address these challenges?
3. Make a collage from multi-colored paper and magazines illustrating the kind of volunteer project you created.
4. Make up a skit with three others showing the different obstacles you experienced as a volunteer.

HIGH SCHOOL

Discussion Prompts

1. What are you passionate/excited about? What kinds of skills do you have that you could share with others? Who in your immediate community would benefit from your particular skill set? How can you help those in other parts of the country? The world?
2. What types of service work do you see in pop culture? When volunteer opportunities are portrayed on television or in the movies, how does this change the experience? Does it encourage more people to help out in the long run or is it considered a fad? How would you like your volunteer experience to be portrayed in the media?
3. There are organizations that focus on long-term commitment to service (like the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps Vista, The Smile Train, etc.). What are the results of having an ongoing volunteer presence in communities around the world?

Exercises

1. Organize and complete a volunteer project with your teacher and your peers.
2. Have students research and write essays comparing three different organizations that focus on volunteerism as part of their main objective/mission.
3. Have students create a volunteer curriculum for your school. If your school already has Community Service requirements, take a look at them and create a schedule with your students for meeting the requirements.

Resources

Smile Train fundraising tips and ideas

http://www.smiletrain.org/site/PageServer?pagename=donate_infokit&printer_friendly=1

American Friends Service Committee <http://www.afsc.org/>

American Society to Prevent Cruelty to Animals <http://www.aspca.org/>

AmeriCorps Vista <http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista.asp>

Bide-a-wee (Animal Shelter/Hospital) <http://www.bideawee.org/>

Big Brother Big Sister <http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.diJKKYPLJvH/b.1539751/k.BDB6/Home.htm>

Food Bank NYC <http://www.foodbanknyc.org/go/how-you-can-help/volunteer>

Global Youth Action Network <http://www.youthlink.org/gyanv5/index.htm>

Green Peace <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/>

Habitat for Humanity <http://www.habitat.org/>

Henry Street Settlement http://www.henrystreet.org/site/PageServer?pagename=inv_volunteer_opps

Hunger Project <http://www.thp.org/>

Idealist.org <http://www.idealists.org/>

Park Pride <http://www.parkpride.org/>

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Recycle A Bicycle <http://www.recycleabicycle.org/>

Search engine for NYC organizations <http://www.commoncents.org/>

Teach for America <http://www.teachforamerica.org/>

Tree People <http://www.treepeople.org/vfp.dll?OakTree~getPage~&PNPK=4>

The Value of Volunteering <http://www.schoolfamily.com/school-family-articles/article/9406-middle-schoolers-can-see-the-value-of-volunteering>