

Warm Springs
Curriculum Guide
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A. Synopsis: *Warm Springs* is the inspiring true story of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fight against polio. It follows FDR from his life as a wealthy, aristocratic New York politician through the personal despair and depression that gripped him when he was paralyzed by polio, to becoming a successful and determined President who knew what it was to suffer. Forced to deal with prejudice against disabled people during the 1920s and 30s, he fought his way back to health with the help of Warm Springs, a Georgia resort that he turned into the nation's first polio rehabilitation center. Though FDR never regained full walking ability, his experience at Warm Springs helped him become a fiercely compassionate man who felt a kinship with struggling people all over the world.

B. Standards:

Discussion and exercises related to this film satisfy the following national (MCREL) standards in History, Language Arts, and Behavioral Studies:

U.S. History:

Era 7 (1890 to 1920)

Era 8 (1929-1945)

Topics:

14 (Changes in American life during the 1930s)

27 (Cultural continuity and change)

29 (Cultural movements in American 1920s)

52 (Family and gender roles)

64 ((Human and civil rights)

84 (Leaders and leadership styles)

85 (Leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt)

110 (Racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination)

117 (Rights and status of individuals and groups)

124 (Role of women)

126 (Roles of ordinary people in American democracy)

133 (Social change and development)

135 (Social class structure and interactions)

157 (Women's movement for civil rights and equal opportunities)

Language Arts:

Viewing and discussing the film meet the following standards:

Standard 8 (Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes)

Standard 9 (Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media)

Topics for both standards include

4 (Critical Listening)

6 (Critical Viewing)

7 (Critically evaluating written/spoken texts and visual media)

Behavioral Studies

Standard 1 (Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior)

Standard 2 (Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function)

Standard 3 (Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance, and physical development affect human behavior)

Standard 4 (Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions.)

C. Historical Background:

In presenting this film, here's some historical background that will help students place the events in context:

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was born in 1882 to wealthy parents in Hyde Park, New York. He married his second cousin, Eleanor Roosevelt, in 1905. His distant cousin, Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt, served as President of the United States from 1901-1909. Franklin and Eleanor had six children, and he became an ambitious, womanizing politician who served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy and ran unsuccessfully for Vice President in 1920. In 1921, he contracted polio, probably from contaminated water at a Boy Scout camp. His case was severe, and it appeared he would never walk again. After an initial bout of hiding and depression, he went to visit Warm Springs, which had been recommended as a place where a crippled boy learned to walk. He found that exercising in the warm water helped his mobility, and eventually he bought the resort, establishing the first polio rehabilitation facility in the nation. He restarted his career when he put Al Smith's name in nomination for the presidency in 1924, and became Governor of New York in 1928. In 1932, Roosevelt was elected the thirty-second President of the United States. He served for thirteen years, longer than any other president, bringing the US out of the Great Depression and leading the country through World War II. FDR died of a cerebral hemorrhage just weeks before the German surrender.

Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady, was an important historical figure in her own right. She was a shy, gawky girl who was terrified of public speaking, but after Franklin retired from public life because of polio, she took it upon herself to keep the Roosevelt name in play by facing her fears and speaking out. Highly educated and intelligent, she became a major force in government, championing civil rights and women's rights and, after FDR's death, becoming a leading voice in starting the United Nations. She was the first chairperson of the UN Human Rights Commission, and helped write the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

D. Key Terms/ Vocabulary

-Polio/infantile paralysis: Polio, also known as infantile paralysis because it affected mainly children, was a disease that affected the nerves of the limbs (arms and legs) and the respiratory system and, in its worst form, caused permanent paralysis. It was spread through contaminated water, though that was unknown at the time FDR contracted the disease. Polio was a scourge that came in epidemics, and from 1920 to the early 1950s, was the most dreaded childhood disease in America. Partly through the work of the March of Dimes—established by FDR once he was in office—a vaccine was developed by Jonas Salk in 1955, virtually wiping out the disease in the western world.

-prognosis: the expected course of a disease. The prognosis for FDR was that he would never walk again.

-constituency: the voters or residents living in a district represented by an elected official.

-valet: a personal manservant

-contagious: able to be passed from person to person by contact. Some people believed that polio was a contagious disease, and refused to be around polio victims even years after they had the disease, for fear of contracting it.

-rehabilitation: the process of healing through hard, repeated work.

-circulation: the circulatory system keeps blood and other fluids moving throughout the body, and keeps a constant temperature within the body. People with polio have poor circulation, so their hands and feet are often cold.

-the Klan (Ku Klux Klan): A secret organization in the southern United States that violently opposed rights of blacks, Catholics, and other groups that were not Protestant white men. They often terrorized black people who fought for equality as well as white people, such as Tom Loyless in the film, who stood up for equal rights.

E. Active Listening

Before viewing the film, discuss the historical background and terms described in sections C and D. Then discuss the following questions:

-What are the most important traits in a good president? As you watch the movie, see whether you believe FDR demonstrates these traits at the beginning of the movie, and at the end.

-What are your own attitudes about people with physical and mental disabilities? Should they be part of everyday public life?

After discussing students' own responses to people with disabilities, make connections between the struggle for disability rights and other struggles for equality in our nation's past (establishing the right to vote for women and black people, the civil rights era and

end of segregation) and in our present (equal rights for gays and lesbians, rights of immigrants, right to an equal education for all, rights for people with mental and emotional disabilities.) What do all these struggles have in common? After the movie, you may return to these topics to discuss how FDR's example can inspire others who were told their causes were hopeless.

-If desired, stop them after the scene in which Sara Roosevelt, FDR's mother, and Eleanor Roosevelt, his wife, have the following discussion about FDR's future after the doctor says he will never walk again. Eleanor believes he should reenter political life; Sara strongly disagrees.

Sara: What kind of a life is it to be pitied and stared at?

Eleanor: What kind of a life is it to be hidden away?

Whom do you agree with, and why? And is it significant that Sara and Eleanor were trying to make these choices, instead of Franklin himself? Note that many blind people complain that they're spoken to as if they are children, or their companions are asked questions such as "What would your friend like to eat?" Do you treat disabled people you know as fully competent people able to make decisions about their own lives?

F. Post-Viewing Discussion Questions and Extended Projects

Discussion/Essay Questions:

1. At the very end of the film, Eleanor is asked by a reporter, "Do you think polio has affected your husband's mind?" Eleanor replies, "Yes, I do. I certainly do."

In what way has polio affected FDR's mind and heart? What has he learned from his struggle with the disease, and from the friendships he has established with other polio victims? Trace the journey he makes from the careless young man he was pre-polio to the man he was at the end of the film, and discuss why and how the disease had such a big impact on his later life.

2. Eleanor, too, expands her horizons as a result of FDR's disease. She starts out as a shy young mother who discovers her husband is having an affair with the beautiful young secretary, but his illness forces her to grow stronger. How do we see her growth throughout the years the film covers?

3. Why was the young man, Fred Botts, forced to ride in the baggage car on his way to Warm Springs? What was it about that event that got FDR to change his mind and return there instead of heading home as he had intended? (Historical note: Fred Botts is a real person who became the long-time administrator and admissions director at Warm Springs.)

4. One of FDR's major achievements as President was helping to establish the March of Dimes—a campaign in which every family was asked to send a dime to the White House

to support research finding a cure for polio. (The search was successful, as a vaccine all but wiped polio off the map of the western world in 1955.) That represented the first time the entire nation was asked to come together to raise funds for a disease. Consider the disasters that have occurred in your lifetime, particularly 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. How did the first national campaign against polio establish a blueprint for the way ordinary people came together in these more recent events?

Projects:

1. What were the lives of people with disabilities like in the early days of the United States? How has that changed in the past hundred years? The past twenty? What cultural and political factors have influenced these changes? Using at least three sources including websites, first-person accounts, and other written material, trace a history of the way people with disabilities were treated in the United States from its early days to the present. You may present this as a **time line**, **power point presentation**, or **oral report**.

2. Imagine yourself as a patient at Warm Springs. What would your life have been like before you got there? What would it have been like at Warm Springs, and after you returned home with the effects of polio remaining? **Through a series of diary entries, write a story about a fictional but historically accurate character who was stricken with polio in the 1920s or 30s.**

3. Franklin Delano Roosevelt is perhaps the most famous American historical figure with serious disabilities. However, many Americans with disabilities have made tremendous contributions to our society. Who are some of these people? How have they managed to turn their struggles to overcome physical or mental illness into the strength to accomplish great things? Some people to research may include Senators Max Cleland of Georgia and Daniel Inouye of Hawaii (amputees); musicians Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles (blind); athletes Jim Abbott (a one-armed baseball pitcher), Muhammed Ali (boxer, Parkinson's disease) and Greg Louganis (Olympic diver, dyslexia, AIDS) and countless actors and actresses who overcame learning disabilities and speech impairments.

G. Further Resources:

There are many excellent online sources of information about FDR and people with disabilities.

For a list of famous people with disabilities, go to http://www.tampagov.net/dept_Mayor/Mayors_Alliance/famous_persons

For information about the history of the March of Dimes, and about progress currently being made to help people born with physical disabilities, go to www.marchofdimes.com/aboutus

For an overview of the history of disability rights, go to the Smithsonian Museum Disability exhibit website: www.americanhistory.si.edu/disabilityrights

For information about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, go to the official Presidential site: www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/fr32/html

For additional information about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, go to the PBS site: www.americanpresident.org/history/franklindelanoorosevelt