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***Akeelah and the Bee* (2006) dir. Doug Atchison**

Topic: Hidden T-A-L-E-N-T. Discussion of *Akeelah and the Bee*

Age group: 11-13

Duration:

- 110 minutes – screening time (*alternatively: students are provided with a digital copy of the film and watch it by themselves*)
- 45 minutes – the lesson

Goals of the lesson:

- students learn how to justify their positive or negative opinions
- students are familiarized with positive representation of African American communities (white students reflect on the difficulties their peers of color are facing systemically in white-dominated societies)
- students consider the importance of role models/mentors in their lives
- students reflect on and discuss their uniqueness and hidden talents
- students participate in a spelling bee competition with no winners
- students learn that there are individuals and groups they can reach out to for support, and leave uplifted by the teacher and each other

Methods:

- discussion
- group work (2-4)
- spelling bee competition

Materials:

- *Akeelah and the Bee* (2006)
- printed flashcards (*only during an in-person class*)

Discussion

Time: 25 minutes

Warm up (4 minutes): students are encouraged to express their opinion about the film and justify it. Did they enjoy it? Was it predictable? Was it heartwarming? Did it make them emotional? If so, why? The teacher directs the conversation to the issues of systemic racism and class distinction.

Discussion (20 minutes): students are asked the following questions. In case there are no volunteers, the teacher picks students who are known to be comfortable with speaking in public or provides hints of the answers.

- Why does Akeelah hide her abilities at school? How did the school bullies make you feel?
- What obstacles does she face as a Black girl from a lower class neighborhood while trying to win the competition?
- How do the parents influence the friendship between Akeelah, Javier and Dylan?
- Why isn't Akeelah's mother supportive of her passion at the beginning?
- What do you think about the relationship with her siblings?
- What is the role of photographs of the dead in the film? How does the memory of Akeelah's father influence her and her choices?
- Why does Dr. Larabee teach Akeelah that knowing the meaning of words guarantees power?

Quote (1 minute): The teacher reads the quote recurring in the movie (introduced by Dr. Larabee), which inspires Akeelah to focus on her goal. The quote is used to spark a conversation between the students in the next part of the lesson.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be?"

Marianne Williamson (*A Return to Love*)

Group work

Time: 10 minutes

The students are asked to work in groups of two to four (in case of direct teaching, it depends on the way they are seated, while during an online semester they are grouped earlier by the teacher – the teacher has to make sure everyone is comfortable with their group). The goal of this part of the lesson is to reflect on the importance of role models in the students' lives and on their own unique talents that they may not be aware of. A conversation with their peers enables to see themselves from a different perspective. The protagonist of the film often skips school and refuses to do homework. Many students might similarly struggle with specific subjects or school in general, which often leads to their low self-esteem and feeling of worthlessness in a winning-obsessed culture. The answers are not discussed in front of the entire class, but the teacher joins certain groups and suggests some ideas based on their observation.

- Do you have a mentor in your life like Akeelah (the term is broad, as it can be anyone: siblings, parents, teachers, neighbors, friends)? If so, how does that person support you? Can fictional characters or celebrities be symbolical role models?
- What are you good at? How can you use that skill in your daily life or possibly in the future?

Spelling bee competition

Time: 10 minutes

A spelling bee is held to check everyone's spelling skills and guarantee some fun memories. Students can be grouped again, go individually in alphabetical order or volunteer. There is no winner, and each participant's activity is noted.

acceptable	garden	tongue
delighted	jaw	consequently
flights	doubtful	adolescent
recover	pleasure	vaccinate
newspaper	suitcase	flamboyant
Wednesday	comfortable	emphasize
disappear	captain	obedient
libraries	vacuum	privilege
together	temperature	necessary
zoo	appearance	vulnerable

Homework: homework is optional.

- Write a review of *Akeelah and the Bee* to improve your writing skills and practice justifying your opinions. Include any observations that were not discussed in class. Write between 150 and 200 words.
- Write a short review online (submit screenshots to the teacher). Start a conversation about the film with your friends.