Raising Renee:
A Study Guide for Social Work Educators and Students

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Introduction

This guide has been developed to assist social work educators and students in using films from the CSWE film festivals in their classrooms. It is one in a series of CSWE curriculum resources designed to enhance the teaching and learning of social work concepts.

We welcome your comments as the library of these resources is refined and expanded.

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Overview: Raising Renee

Film Information

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<th>Title: Raising Renee</th>
<th>A Film by: Jeanne Jordan and Steven Ascher</th>
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<td>Running Time: 81 minutes</td>
<td>Distributor: West City Films, westcityfilms.com</td>
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Context: Artist Beverly McIver made a promise to her mother that she would take care of her mentally disabled sister after her mother died. The film catalogs the 6-year experience of Beverly and her sister, Renee. The film illustrates a number of themes related to career advancement, family dynamics, caregiving, assisted living/independence, as well as mental disability and care.

Overall Themes:
1. Disability/Ability
2. Caregiving and Sibling Responsibilities
3. Grief
4. Identity

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<td>Ambivalence, disruption of life, caregiving, living will</td>
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<td>13:00–23:56</td>
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<td>Grief, faith, survivorship, family planning</td>
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<td>Respite</td>
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<td>Community supports, transition, independence, checking-in</td>
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Topics

Who Will Take Care of Renee?  
Time Code: 7:19–12:59

Central Quote: “She didn’t know who was going to take care of Renee after she was gone.”

Themes: Ambivalence, Disruption of Life, Caregiving, Living Will

Abstract: The complex relationship between Beverly and Renee is revealed. Beverly admits to the promise she made to her mother. Beverly made the promise without realizing that it may require keeping.

Learning Objectives
1. Identify some life disruptions that may occur when caregiving duties are undertaken.
2. Articulate how life disruptions may cause and different feelings in the caregiver.
3. List a number of considerations that must be made when planning to become a caregiver.

Discussion Questions
1. Do you think Beverly's ambivalence is warranted? Why or why not?
2. What role (if any) did the relationship between Renee and Beverly play in Beverly's ambivalence?
3. What concerns would you have if you were asked to accept care for a sibling?

Suggested Readings


It Looks Like Cancer

Time Code: 13:00–23:56

Central Quote: “I’m tired of being nice.”

Themes: Grief, Faith, Survivorship, Family Planning

Abstract: The matriarch of the family enters the hospital. Beverly is faced with the reality that her mother may not survive. She has the additional consideration that Renee will become her responsibility.

Learning Objectives
1. Explore individual, family, and community responses to grief.
2. Identify the stages of grief displayed in the film.
3. Identify the complex role of face in grief and survivorship.

Discussion Questions
1. Compare and contrast the roles played by family, church group, and neighbors during this portion of the film. How could a social worker utilize these systems of support?
2. If you were Beverly's caseworker, what would you make important to monitor in her treatment plan?
3. What do you think Beverly meant by her comment, “I’m tired of being nice”?

Suggested Readings


Transition

Central Quote: “My life as an artist is gone down the tubes.”

Themes: Career Disruption, Solitude vs. Engagement

Abstract: Renee moves in with Beverly. The progress made by Beverly in her career appears to be in danger of being sidelined. Plus, another actual human now lives with her, “invading” her space.

Learning Objectives
1. Identify the concept of secondary loss in grief counseling as new responsibilities result from a death.
2. Outline the physical transitions that accompany new caregiving responsibilities.
3. List self-care ideas that Beverly could implement.

Discussion Questions
1. Think of a transition you have had to make in your own life. What actions did you take in order to maintain a sense of “normalcy”?
2. Consider the transition from living alone to living with a sibling. What challenges could you foresee?
3. Are you able to identify any benefits that may result from a sibling moving in?
4. How sympathetic are you to Beverly's sense of secondary grief at the perceived loss of her career?

Suggested Readings


The Big Family Secret

Central Quote: “Whoa! He knows the truth.”

Themes: Father-Daughter Relationship, Marital Infidelity, Economic Perspective

Abstract: Further details are provided about the family story, including the “illegitimacy” of Beverly’s birth. Beverly’s father is introduced. Through him, a different view of success is presented, placed in a historical context.

Learning Objectives
1. Explore sibling relationships in the context of “half-sisterhood.”
2. Compare and contrast Baby-Boomer views of success vs. the views of their children.
3. Reflect on the relationship between a daughter and a father in a scenario where the two meet for the first time when the daughter is 16 years old.

Discussion Questions
1. What, if anything, do you feel Beverly’s parentage has to do with her relationship with Renee?
2. Describe what you believe to be the best characteristics of a father-daughter relationship. Compare and contrast Beverly’s experience.
3. What do you read into the fact that Beverly’s painting of her father is kept in his closet? What do you think is the impact, if any, on Beverly?
4. Why do you think Beverly painted her father?

Suggested Readings


Escapism to Blackface

Time Code: 40:15–51:51

Central Quote: “That history…just doesn’t go away.”

Themes: Racial Divide, Socioeconomics, Marginalization, “Ticket Out”

Abstract: Beverly provides a historical context for her art. She reveals her personal struggle to establish identity while attempting to fit in. Her art is shown to be an acceptance of her history and a lesson to others.

Learning Objectives
1. Explore the racial identity formation.
2. Contrast socioeconomic differences in neighborhoods.
3. Identify ways that one's socioeconomic status may support feelings of marginalization.

Discussion Questions
1. When you explore the historic context of blackface, would you take the risk of replicating the images in your artwork?
2. Compare and contrast family and neighborhoods by socioeconomic characteristics. What solutions to inequality can you list?
3. How would you propose to integrate and empower all groups in society? What do you feel are keys to social and economic justice?

Suggested Readings


Respite

Time Code: 55:30–1:11:28

Central Quote: “Every once in a while I have to get away and just paint.”

Themes: Independence, Separation Anxiety, Guilt

Abstract: Renee stays with the other sister when Beverly attends an art retreat. Beverly’s ambivalence is made clear—she cherishes the freedom while feeling some weight of separation from Renee. In addition, Renee is Beverly’s new muse.

Learning Objectives
1. Articulate the value of respite in caregiving.
2. Define self-care as a vital habit in caregiving.
3. Explore the ambivalence felt by caregivers when they take advantage of respite opportunities.

Discussion Questions
1. Do you think Beverly really missed Renee? Why or why not?
2. What do you think Renee’s time with her other sister was like?
3. Do you think you would miss Renee? Why or why not?
4. What other options could you identify for respite or self-care for caregivers?

Suggested Readings


New Transition

Central Quote: “It’s lonely around here without Renee.”

Themes: Community Supports, Transition, Independence, Checking-In

Abstract: Renee moves out and into independent living. The considerations of independent living are revealed. Beverly mourns the loss of both her cat and her sister’s presence in the home.

Learning Objectives
1. Identify community supports for semi-independent living.
2. List considerations in launching a cognitively impaired individual into independent living.
3. Reflect on the challenge of transitioning to a state of less responsibility.

Discussion Questions
1. Do you think Beverly is keeping her promise to her mom as Renee moves into semi-independent living? Explain your answer.
2. What would be your monitoring plan if you were Renee’s caseworker?
3. What community supports can you identify that would be helpful to Renee?
4. What supports could you recommend for Beverly?

Suggested Readings
