

# GIRL TALK CURRICULUM

## CYCLE TWO



## **GIRL TALK STATEMENT (April 2011):**

*LOCKING GIRLS UP ISN'T GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUT WE STILL HAVE TO SUPPORT INCARCERATED GIRLS...*

### ***Introduction:***

Every night, between 25 to 50 girls lay their heads on pillows in 7.5 by 14.5 foot cells at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC). These girls have prior histories of sexual and physical abuse (Bloom et al 2003); they are suffering from depression (Obeidallah and Earls 1999); they are poor, disproportionately from racial minority groups (Moore and Padavic 2010); they transgress gender identity norms and are punished for it (Dang 1997); some are battling addiction; and many are under-educated. These are the young people that society has left behind and wants to erase from our consciousness. The most important thing that we can do then is to insist that young women in conflict with the law be made visible and that their voices be heard.

Across the United States, girls are the fastest growing youth prison population. Due to an over-reliance on the criminalization of social problems in the last two decades leading up to the twenty-first century, arrest and detention rates of U.S. girls soared to almost three-quarters of a million in 2008 (Puzzanchera 2009). By 2009, girls comprised 30 percent of all juvenile arrests. Many observers suggest that youth behavior has not changed during this period; it was society's response to such behavior that had changed. Regardless, the result of our punishing culture is that thousands of young women are shuffled through police stations, detention facilities and probation departments across the nation annually.

Until the 1980s, because the vast majority of arrests and detainees were boys, little attention was paid to young women deprived of their liberty. In the 1990s, policy-makers, criminal legal system stakeholders, and advocates began to press for what they termed "gender-responsive" or "gender-specific" programming to address some of the unique needs of girls in the system. Later the concept of "gender-responsive" programming was expanded to address the needs of LGBTQ youth in the system and of young men (who were also acknowledged to have gender identities).

### ***A Very Short Overview of Juvenile Gender-Responsive Efforts in Chicago***

Until the advent of advocacy for a particular anti-prison, pro-peace, multicultural feminist, anti-racist, restorative justice policy approach, the majority of groups who visited juvenile detention facilities (and still do) included evangelical church groups and public health specialists. These groups lectured to detained young women about sexually transmitted diseases, etiquette and pregnancy prevention, ignoring the complex issues and circumstances in these young women's lives.

Our project—Girl Talk—was originally founded in 1993 as a weekly program for girls ages 12-17, locked up at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago. It was led in its final years by the amazing energy and beautiful spirit of, now deceased, Wenona Thompson. Incarcerated herself as a young woman at the JTDC, Wenona provided first-hand knowledge of life in the JTDC as well as the ability to relate to the girls. **Girl Talk** disbanded as an organization in 2005.

In 2010, after a conversation with staff at the JTDC, a group of us decided to re-launch **Girl Talk** as a film screening and art-making program based on work that had been done by Laurie Schaffner and her University of Illinois at Chicago students in the summers of 2006 and 2007 at the jail. Currently **Girl Talk** consists of bi-weekly film screenings accompanied by an art project on Saturday afternoons in the Cook County JTDC. The films we have selected feature a young female protagonist who faces challenges and ultimately triumphs. After the movie concludes, the incarcerated girls and **Girl Talk** volunteers work together in small groups to discuss the movies' themes and work on related art projects. Currently our programming features such themes

## **Key Tenets of Our Work :**

### **Challenging the Popular Construction of Girls in Conflict With the Law**

Concern about girls' aggression and violence has never been higher due in part to the general public's perceptions that girls' violence is increasing at a remarkable rate. The media has played a central role in this perception, not only showcasing girls' violence, but also providing the public with various "explanations" for this perplexing "new" bad girl or "mean" girl phenomenon. Caricatures produced by the corporate media and Hollywood films such as the unwed pregnant teenager, the welfare cheat, the uncaring, crack-addicted mother, the teen girl in need of an abortion, the helpless rape victim, and the abducted innocent trafficked girlchild stimulate civic discourse and outrage. Yet the true experiences and opinions of girls in trouble with the law from low-income urban communities are often underrepresented and misrepresented in public policy, academic research, as well as the media. It is the central mission of **Girl Talk** to challenge the popular depictions of girls in trouble with the law by insisting that these young women narrate their own experiences in their own voices.

### **It is NOT "gender-responsive" to incarcerate girls**

**Girl Talk** believes that it is impossible to provide "gender-responsive" services and programming within an inherently oppressive system that exerts brutal social control over its charges. What we know for sure is that any contact with the juvenile justice system is bad for girls. We also take issue with typical "gender-responsive" programs that intend to redirect adolescent young women's socialization processes towards mainstream dominant norms for feminine, law-abiding behavior. The underlying position of the **Girl Talk** curricula is to honor young women and their abilities to grow into strong adults with self-love and purpose.

**Girl Talk** believes that locating the social problem of girls in conflict with the law as individual "poor choices" that girls make, misses the underlying social forces such as homophobia, violence, racism, sexism, and poverty in which young women live. Gender-specific intervention policies are not necessarily feminist, anti-racist, restorative or critical of the status quo. This is where **Girl Talk** enters the policy debates over "what is gender-responsive policy and is it good for girls?" Gender-focused programs fail to address the obvious racial disparity between those on the inside and those on the outside, as well as neglect to notice the violence that poverty inflicts in the lives of incarcerated girls. In so doing they miss the opportunity to provide places where young women can articulate their own truths and to find inspiring solutions to the very real challenges faced by young women who come to the attention of juvenile legal authorities.

Although "gender-specific policy" and "culturally appropriate" approaches to working with youth who have transgressed laws have become buzzwords in official juvenile legal system literatures, very little mention is ever made in juvenile detention facility practice and procedural manuals that pertain specifically to girls' unique challenges and strengths. Often the only place where girls are mentioned is in outlining specific nutrition needs for those who are pregnant or lactating. Furthermore, criminologist and juvenile delinquency literature authors focus on the individual offender and his/her (in)ability to make positive choices. Deploying a critical multicultural feminist model to understand youth in trouble broadens our perspective towards seeing youth as being *in* crisis, rather than youth being *the* crisis. Thus, our unit of analysis focuses on the juvenile legal system itself, and its punitive approach to dire situations in which children find themselves. This shift provides theoretical and analytic room to deepen our understanding of the ways that unmet social, cultural, educational, physical, mental, and emotional needs of girl children may be linked to later court-involvement.

## ***“We Don’t Want to Make Jails Nicer Places to Cage Young Women”:***

### ***The Paradox of Doing Work in Detention Facilities***

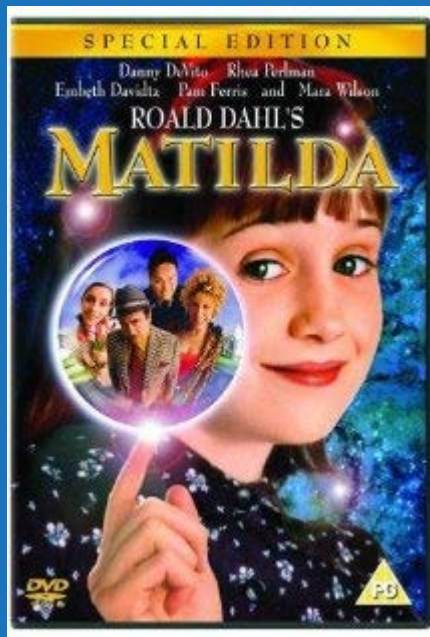
Many of us (though not all) who are part of the **Girl Talk** leadership team are prison abolitionists. We believe that supporting the prison-industrial complex is not the solution to street-level poverty and suffering. We recognize that a dual trend developed in the late 1990s that raised special public concern: a simultaneous rise in arrests of girls for violent crimes such as aggravated assault in tandem with girls coming to the attention of authorities with severe, chronic, and acute psychological and physical health care needs. Close to 100 percent of young women who come to the attention of legal authorities arrive with unhealed harm from having suffered sexual, physical, and emotional abuse (Acoca and Dedel 1998; Alder and Worrall 2004). The unique unmet health needs of girls being processed in juvenile corrections has emerged as a national crisis (Bloom et al 2002; Teplin et al 2006; Cauffman et al 2004). For example, of the 1,300 juvenile detention facilities in the nation, only 37 were accredited by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (Bell 2003). While **Girl Talk** is not designed to directly address this particular crisis among young women who are court-involved, we firmly believe that punishing them by locking them away in secure detention is exactly the wrong method to address the wrong-headed thinking of defunding schools, abandoning a welfare state, and adopting a permanent war economy that derails public funding for services for taxpaying families. The juvenile court system has inherited the results of failed educational, housing, health, economic, and other public systems and is ill-equipped to handle them. As we grow, **Girl Talk**, is committed to providing girl-positive places where, at minimum, these truths can be acknowledged. However, we remain conflicted by the fact that we are not interested in making jail a “nicer” place for girls to reside.

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### **Acknowledgements**

*CHICAGO GIRL TALK 2010 is gratefully indebted to the original sister founders and especially to the dearly departed Wenona Thompson. **Girl Talk** has been incubated, developed, and supported tirelessly by Project Nia, a grassroots organization that works to dramatically decrease the number of children and youth in Chicago who are arrested, detained, and incarcerated. **Girl Talk** received a 2010 grant from the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Institute on Research on Race and Public Policy. We have been co-sponsored by the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In April 2011, **Girl Talk** was the recipient of a very special and beautiful benefit event at Q4 Multi-Kulti Gallery thanks to Shiren Belle Rattigan.*



## **Matilda**

Film details: 1996, 98 minutes, Color, English, USA, Comedy, Rated PG. Directed by Danny DeVito. Screenplay by Nicholas Kazan and Robin Swicord, featuring Danny DeVito, Rhea Perlman, Mara Wilson and Embeth Davidtz.

### **Synopsis:**

Matilda is a brilliant, magical little girl who is completely misunderstood by her parents, bratty big brother, and evil principal. However through her own intelligence, courage and a little magic, Matilda is able to get back at her enemies. In the end Matilda discovers that family isn't determined by blood, but by those who love you.

### **Themes and Key Words:**

- *Different types of family*
- *Being extraordinary*
- *Don't get mad, get even*
- *The power of knowledge/education*

### **Background Context:**

*Matilda* was originally written by British author Roald Dahl and published in 1988. Dahl also wrote other children's classics that have been made into films including *James and the Giant Peach*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and *The Witches*.

### **Actors/Main Characters:**

- Mara Wilson — Matilda Wormwood (main protagonist)
- Danny DeVito — Harry Wormwood (Matilda's father)
- Rhea Perlman — Zinnia Wormwood (Matilda's mother; real-life partner of DeVito)
- Embeth Davidtz — Miss Jennifer 'Jenny' Honey (Matilda's teacher)
- Pam Ferris — Agatha Trunchbull (Matilda's principal)
- Miami Davael — Lavender (Matilda's best friend)

### ***Set-up/Pre-cautions:***

Although this is a light-hearted comedy, there are some elements that may bring up difficult themes with this particular population. One such theme is the issue of parental neglect and emotional abuse. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

### ***Discussion Questions***

#### **Level 1**

- What did you like about the movie?
- How was Matilda different from her family?
- How was Matilda able to get even with her family?

#### **Level 2**

- Do you think it was hard for Matilda to be different than her family?
- In a disagreement between adults and youth, why do grown-ups usually win?
- Why do you think Matilda and her teacher understood one another?
- What were Matilda's parents' opinion on college and education? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- The movie begins with the line "Everyone is born, but not everyone is born the same. Some will grow to be butchers, or bakers, or candlestick makers. Some will only be really good at making Jell-O salad. One way or another, though, every human being is unique, for better or for worse." Why do you think the movie began with this assertion?

#### **Level 3**

- Matilda discovered ways to make her own space and power despite her family. What are the ways that you can find power and space at home, in JTDC, in your communities?
- How do you define family? Is it bigger than just your blood relatives? What are the ties that bind us?
- In the movie it said that Matilda learned an important lesson from her father, "bad people need to be punished." Do you agree or disagree? Who defines a "bad person"?

### ***Art Project:***

Painted Picture Frames- Acknowledging that families can take on many different forms, the young women will paint balsa wood picture friends. If time remains they can paint, draw, or sketch their families on blank papers to place within the frame.

### ***Activity Supplies:***

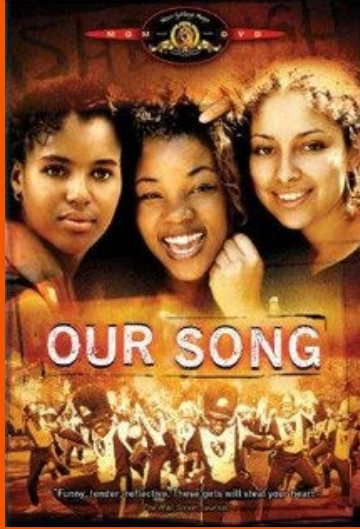
Balsa wood frames blocks

Paint

Glue

Beads, flowers, die-cuts, and other items to be pasted on

Colored pencils, crayons, markers



## **OUR SONG**

Film details: 2001, 95 minutes, Color, English, USA, Drama, Rated R. Directed by Jim McKay. Screenplay by Jim McKay, featuring Kerry Washington, Anna Simpson, and Melissa Martinez.

### ***Synopsis:***

This film focuses on the bond between three female (an African American female, a half African American half Latina American female, and a Latina American female) high school members of Brooklyn's "Jackie Robinson Steppers Marching Band." These Crown Heights girls face many choices once their school closes down experiencing the challenges of growing apart and growing up.

### ***Themes and Key Words:***

- Follow your dreams
- Coming of age
- Dealing with adversity
- Value of friendship

### ***Background Context:***

*Marching Band* is a physical activity in which a group of instrumental musicians generally perform outdoors and incorporate some type of marching (and possibly other movements) with their musical performance. Instrumentation typically includes brass, woodwinds, and percussion. Most marching bands use some kind of uniform (often of a military style) that include the school or organization's name or symbol, shakos, pith helmets, feather plumes, gloves, and sometimes gauntlets, sashes, and/or capes.

### ***Actors/Main Characters:***

- Melissa Martinez — Maria Hernandez (protagonist)
- Anna Simpson — Joycelyn Clifton (protagonist)
- Kerry Washington — Lanisha Brown (protagonist)
- Marlene Forte — Pilar Brown (Lanisha's mother)
- Raymond Anthony Thomas — Carl Brown (Lanisha's father)
- Rosalyn Coleman — Dawn Clifton (Joycelyn's mother)
- Carmen Lopez — Rita Hernandez (Maria's mother)

### ***Set-up/Pre-cautions:***

There are some difficult themes in the film. A teenage single mother commits suicide by jumping out of her apartment window while holding her baby, who also dies. Maria becomes pregnant, pressured by both her baby's father who is encouraging her to keep the baby and Lanisha who wants her to get an abortion. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

#### **Level 1**

- What did you like about the movie? What didn't you like about the movie?
- What do you think happened to Lanisha, Maria and Joycelyn?
- Which character do you relate to the most?

#### **Level 2**

- What do you think about the girls' friendship with each other? Is it similar or different from your friendships?
- The girls' deal with the death of a friend and her child, what do you think about how they dealt with what happened? How do you think it would make you feel?
- Maria feels pressure from the father of her child and Lanisha to make certain decisions about her future, has there been a time where you felt pressure to make a difficult decision?

#### **Level 3**

- Maria's mother wants her to focus on getting a job to help support the family instead of focusing on school, have you or anyone you know had to sacrifice their dreams and interests for other people?
- Lanisha deals with feeling caught between her divorced parents, how have you dealt with adversity within your family?

### ***Art Project:***

The concept of this art project would be to have a pre-drawn tree on a large piece of paper, and the girls would draw or write on pre-cut leaves different dreams they have, changes they are facing/have faced, or ideas of friendship. Once the girls are done drawing on the leaves, each girl would post their drawing on different areas of the tree. So in the end, there would be this tree with diverse concepts of dreams, change, friendship, and adversity.

### ***Supplies:***

Large white paper  
Pre-cut leaves  
Markers  
Glue





## WHIP IT

Film details: 2009, 111 minutes, Color, English, USA, Comedy, Rated PG. Directed by Drew Barrymore. Screenplay by Shauna Cross, featuring Ellen Page, Drew Barrymore, and Kristen Wiig.

### *Synopsis:*

In a town near Austin, Bliss Cavendar's strong-willed mom believes Bliss, at 17, can win pageants - the key to a happy life. Bliss isn't the beauty pageant type: she's shy, quiet, and has just one friend, Pash, her fellow waitress at a diner. Things change for Bliss when she discovers a women's roller derby league in Austin, tries out, proves to be whip fast, and makes a team. Now she needs to become someone tough on the rink, keep her parents from finding out where she goes twice a week, and do something about a first crush, a musician she meets at the derby. Meanwhile, mom still sees Bliss as Miss Bluebonnet. Things are on a collision course; will everyone get banged up?

### **Themes and Key Words:**

- Independence
- Friendship
- Follow your dreams
- Perseverance
- Family values

### **Background Context:**

*Roller Derby*- is a game based on formation roller skating around an oval track by two teams. Points are scored when the designated scoring player (the "jammer") of a given team laps members of the opposing team; hence offense and defense typically occur simultaneously. A roller derby takes place on a circuit track, on which players usually travel counterclockwise. The two teams each send five players onto the track — one *jammer* (scorer) and four *blockers* (defense), one of which counts as a *pivot* (a blocker who may become the jammer later in that jam). Helmet covers are used to display the players' positions: a cover with two stars is used for jammers, a striped cover is used for pivots and no cover is used for blockers. Penalties are given to skaters who skate or block illegally.

### **Actors/Main Characters:**

- Ellen Page — Bliss Cavendar (protagonist)
- Jimmy Fallon — 'Hot Tub' Johnny Rocket (Roller derby referee)
- Alia Shawkat — Pash (Bliss' best friend)
- Marcia Gay Harden — Brooke Cavendar (Bliss' mother)

## ***Set-Up/Precautions:***

The protagonist is cheated on by her boyfriend but no violent scenes are shown. The protagonist and her boyfriend get undressed before swimming but no nudity is shown. Bliss decided to go against her mother's wishes which may bring up similar issues for the young women. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and

based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

## ***Discussion Questions:***

### **Level 1**

- What did you like about the film?
- Have you ever gone roller skating? Can you skate like the women in the movie?
- What did Bliss' mother want her to do in life?
- What did Bliss want to pursue in her own life?
- Which character do you most identify with? Why?

### **Level 2**

- What do you think was the biggest obstacle for Bliss, going against her mother or training in roller derby?
- How have you asserted your independence?
- Why do you think Bliss' mother was more upset than her father when she found out about roller derby?
- If you were Bliss' friend, what would have been your advice?

### **Level 3**

- Bliss decided to pursue her passion through roller derby, despite going against her mother and the rules of the sport. She asserted herself and gained power from it. Do you think it is right to go against family and the rules when pursuing what you want? What is the limit?
- Bliss' mom thinks roller derby is an inappropriate activity for a girl, how have you dealt with someone telling you not do something because you are a girl?
- Roller derby is a rough sport. How have you defied people's expectations of you as a girl?

## ***Art Project:***

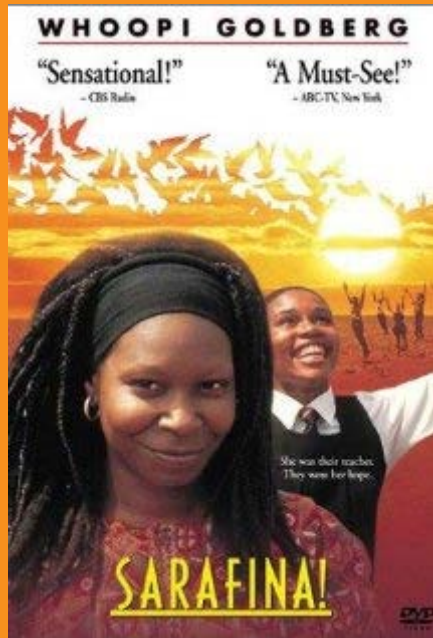
**Activity #1 skate talk-** We will bring in three pre-cut "roller derby skates", each with a theme written on them from the movie. We will all sit in a circle, and give each skate to someone. Based on the theme that is written on the skate, each person will briefly describe an experience related to that theme. For example, if a girl has a skate with the word independence on it, she can talk about an experience

related to becoming independent. After the three people have described their experience, they will pass the skate clockwise to the next person and they will describe their experience. If someone doesn't want to talk about any experiences, they can have the option to write or draw.

**Activity #2 dream box-** Girls decorate a box with all of their dreams and the obstacles they will overcome to reach those dreams. Using pre-ordered boxes (Can be different boxes; jewelry boxes cereal boxes, shoe boxes, etc.) the girls will use markers, cutouts, glitter, and anything else provided to write, draw, or express their dreams and obstacles.

**Activity #3 jerseys-** Decorate T-shirts to make roller derby jerseys with themes of strength, power, and perseverance.

Markers  
Paint  
T-Shirts (optional)



## **SARAFINA!**

Film details: 1992, 98 minutes, Color, English, USA, Drama, Rated PG. Directed by Darrell Roodt. Screenplay by Mbongeni Ngema, featuring Whoopi Goldberg, Leleti Khumalo, and Miriam Makeba.

### **Synopsis:**

The film begins with the following account: "In 1976, the South African Government declared a State of Emergency. For the next 13 years, school children adopted a campaign of resistance. Approximately 700 were killed, over 10,000 were arrested, many more were tortured and assaulted. This is the story of one young girl caught up in the struggle for freedom in South Africa just before the release of Nelson Mandela and the end of *apartheid*."

### **Themes and Key Words**

- *History of Struggle against racism*
- *Young people possess great power*
- *Teachers can make a difference*
- *Wherever you are, it is just one small place in the big wide world*

**Apartheid**- meaning "apartness" in the oppressive language of the Dutch colonizers, was a system of racial oppression in South Africa from 1948-1991 where a small minority of white Dutch colonizers established laws to keep dominance over the Black African majority. Apartheid included segregation laws that prevented whites and blacks from living together or going to school together and also kept the Black Africans in the worst schools and jobs. This system was enforced through beatings, torture, arrests, and murders."

**Amandla Awethu** - the equivalent to "Power to the People." (Have everyone chant it with fist raised—trying to yell as loud as possible! Repeat until everyone is yelling and energetic!)

**Boers**- the Dutch and Afrikaans word for farmer, which came to denote the descendants of the Dutch-speaking settlers of the eastern Cape frontier in Southern Africa during the 18th century. The term is also synonymous with "white" persons.

**Kaffir**- a derogatory term for Black Africans. The term was taken from the Arabs, who had used *Kaffir* to mean someone who was not a believer; in their case, a non-Muslim. Europeans then applied the term to Africans, as unbelievers in terms of the Christian faith. Comparable to the "n-word" in American English.

**Township**- In South Africa, the word originally meant a segregated town. Under Apartheid, the term *township* came to mean a residential development that confined non-whites (Blacks, "coloureds," and Indians) living near or working in white-only communities. Soweto ("SOuth-WESTern TOWnships") furnishes a well-known example.

## **Background Context:**

This film is based on the true story of the massacre of children in a “township” called Soweto, South Africa.

## **Actors/Main Characters:**

- Leleti Khumalo — Sarafina (main protagonist)
- Whoopi Goldberg — Mary Masembuko (Sarafina’s teacher)
- Dumisani Dlamini — Crocodile (Sarafina’s friend)
- Mbongeni Ngema — Sabela (Sarafina’s friend)
- Siphso Kuene — Guitar (Sarafina’s friend)

## **Set-up/Precautions:**

This session focuses on youth protest movements in order to allow young women to explore the power of their voices, think about the systems and surroundings they are embedded in, and learn to express their grievances. Additionally, this session will hopefully allow the young women to see how people live in another nation and learn the power of the youth movement in apartheid South Africa. It is vital that you stop the film before children are massacred. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

## **Discussion Questions:**

### **Level 1**

- Girls’ lives are important and interesting. What are some of the feelings that Sarafina experienced? How did she express them?
- Young people are very passionate and easily see injustice. What are some of the ways the young people in this film expressed themselves?

### **Level 2**

- What is apartheid? What is racism? In what ways are apartheid similar and different from racism and discrimination in the United States today?

### **Level 3**

- Describe ways that the children in the film organized and came together to work for a common cause of justice. What are some ways we could do that here in Chicago in our neighborhoods and schools?

## **Art Project/Activity:**

The girls will make protest posters then stage a mock protest by marching in a circle and chanting slogans such as “1, 2, 3, 4 we don’t want \_\_\_\_\_ no more!” “What do we want? \_\_\_\_\_. When do we want it? NOW!” and “Tell me what [sisterhood/girl power/youth power/justice/equality] looks like. This is what [sisterhood/girl power/youth power/justice/equality] looks like!”

## **Supplies:**

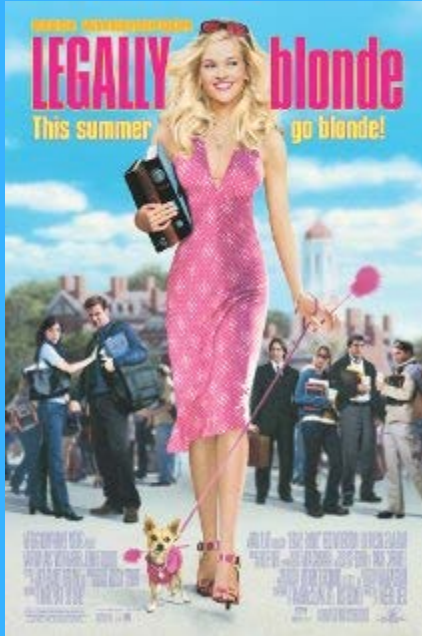
Non-toxic markers (approximately 10 for every table of 6 girls)

Sharpened pencils with erasers

Poster boards (Be sure to have extra for girls who make mistakes and request new boards.)

Pre-made protest board samples made by Facilitators.

Photos of protest posters



## **LEGALLY blonde**

Film details: 2001, 96 minutes, Color, English, USA, Romantic Comedy, PG-13, Directed by Robert Luketic and written by Kirsten Smith and Karen Lutz, featuring Reese Witherspoon, Luke Wilson, and Selma Blair.

### **Synopsis:**

Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon) has it all. She's the president of her sorority, a Hawaiian Tropic girl, Miss June in her campus calendar, and, above all, a natural blonde. She dates the cutest fraternity boy on campus and wants nothing more than to be Mrs. Warner Huntington III. But, there's just one thing stopping Warner (Matthew Davis) from popping the question: Elle is too blonde.

Growing up across the street from Aaron Spelling might mean something in LA, but it means nothing to Warner's East-Coast blue blood family. So, when Warner packs up for Harvard Law and reunites with an old sweetheart from prep school, Elle rallies all her resources and gets into Harvard, determined to win him back.

But law school is a far cry from the comforts of her poolside Los Angeles mansion and the mall. Elle must wage the battle of her life, for her guy, for herself, and for all the blondes who suffer endless indignities everyday.

### **Themes and Key Words:**

- *Be yourself*
- *Be confident in your abilities*
- *Don't judge others by looks*

**LSAT**-This is the entrance exams that soon to be college graduates take to get into law school.

**Internship**- a volunteer or paid position that allows one to learn job skills in a professional environment under a mentor.

### **Background Context:**

This movie has been made into a sequel, *Legally Blonde 2: Red, White, and Blonde* as well as a Broadway musical.

### **Actors/Main Characters:**

- Reese Witherspoon — Elle Woods (main protagonist)
- Luke Wilson — Emmett (Elle's supporter and later love interest)
- Selma Blair — Vivian (Elle's nemesis and later friend)
- Matthew Davis — Warner (Elle's ex-boyfriend)
- Jennifer Coolidge — Paulette (Elle's friend)
- Holland Taylor — Professor Stromwell (Elle's professor and supporter)

### ***Set-up/Precautions:***

In the film *Elle* Woods is sexually harassed by her boss. She denies his advances, but her colleague thinks that Woods is having a sexual relationship with him. However Woods uses this experience to fight harder in her legal case and to show her boss that she is more than a pretty face. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

#### **Level 1**

- What did you like about the movie?
- What were your first impressions of *Elle*? Why?
- *Elle* had many different kinds of friends, how did each help her along the way?

#### **Level 2**

- People thought that because *Elle* was blonde and pretty that she wasn't very smart. Have people ever thought something about you that wasn't true? How did you prove them wrong?
- *Elle* had some pretty crazy outfits. Have you ever judged someone by their clothes or appearance?

#### **Level 3**

- When *Elle*'s boss sexually threatens her, why does Vivian shun *Elle* and not believe her?
- Why do people believe that they can threaten others and not get in trouble? What are some examples?
- In the end *Elle* proved her case because of her in-depth knowledge of hair care and fashion, do you think the ending undermined the movie's message that pretty girls can be smart?

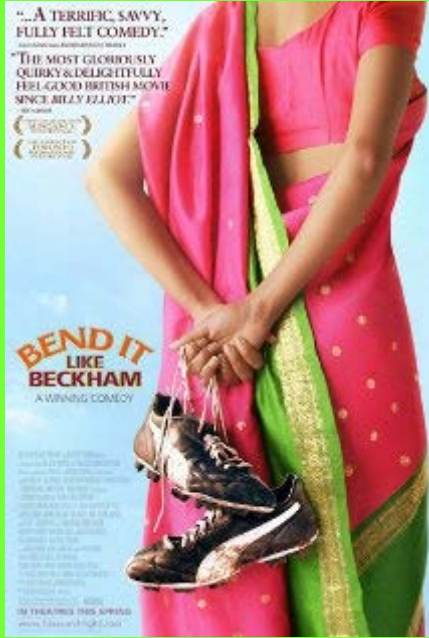
### ***Art Project:***

Activity #1: Draw/Illustrate how they have proved someone wrong who judged them based on appearances

Activity #2: Use pictures of people from magazines, put them on pre-made masks, and have other girls "judge" the picture based on appearances, then the person wearing the mask will take it off and tell them positive qualities about the picture.

### ***Supplies:***

Markers  
Colored Pencils  
Glue  
Pre-made masks  
Pre-cut magazine pictures



## **BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM**

Film details: 2003, 112 minutes, Color, English, U.K., Comedy Drama, Rated PG-13. Directed by Gurinder Chadha. Screenplay by Gurinder Chadha and Guljit Bindra, featuring Parminder Nagra, Keira Knightley, and Jonathan Rys-Meyers.

### **Synopsis:**

Who wants to cook Aloo Gobi when you can bend a ball like Beckham? The daughter of orthodox Sikhs living in England rebels against her parents' traditionalism by running off to Germany with a football team (called soccer in the United States). This comedy is about bending the rules to reach your goals. It explores the world of women's football, from kick-about in the park to free kicks in the Final. Set in Hounslow, West London and Hamburg, the film follows two 18 year olds with their hearts set on a future in professional soccer. Heart-stopping talent doesn't seem to be enough when your parents want you to hang up your football boots, find a nice boyfriend, and learn to cook the perfect chapatti.

### **Themes and Key Words:**

- *Diverse friendships*
- *Challenging traditional gender roles*
- *Following your dreams*
- *To introduce the world of girls' sports as a great place to put your energy*
- *To encourage a strong spirit and tenacity in girls and women*
- *To see how young women around the world live*
- *To witness how young women struggle to rebel but still love, please, and respect their parents*
- *Sometimes we want to do stuff our parents or guardians don't want us to.*

**Gender-** is a range of characteristics distinguishing between male and female, particularly in the cases of men and women and the masculine and feminine attributes assigned to them. Depending on the context, the discriminating characteristics vary from sex to social role to gender identity.

**Southeast Asia-** is a sub region of Asia, consisting of the countries that are geographically south of China, east of India and north of Australia.

**Sikhs-** Sikhs follow a religion called Sikhism. They are largely from the Punjabi region that straddles India and Pakistan. The men can sometimes be distinguished by the large, unusually wrapped turbans they wear.

**Football-soccer**

**Aloo gobi-** a delicious Indian dish with cauliflower, potatoes and curry spices

## ***Background Context:***

Today we are going to watch a film set in England. Many of the people of color and immigrants in England are from Pakistan. Football (what we call soccer in the United States) is a national passion. The girls in the film want to play, but the main protagonist's family wants her to become a traditional Pakistani wife.

## ***Actors/Main Characters***

- Parminder Nagra — Jesminder 'Jess' Kaur Bhamra (main protagonist)
- Keira Knightley — Juliette 'Jules' Paxton (best friend)

## ***Set-up/Pre-cautions:***

There are no particularly difficult scenes in this movie. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

## ***Discussion Questions:***

### **Level 1**

- Do you like to play any sports? Why or why not?
- Have you ever played any sport? If you could play any sport, what would it be? Why?

### **Level 2**

- Why should girls be supposed to learn to cook and marry as their primary goal in life?

### **Level 3**

- If we want to do something different than what our parents want us to do, does that mean we don't love them?
- How can we explain to people what we want to do without them getting upset with us?

## ***Art Project:***

Activity #1 Make a collage of family, things we love, our culture, our passions.

Activity #2 Traditional gender role charades. The young women break into groups and decided to pantomime a traditional gender role that girls and women are supposed to do. Everybody else guesses that action. Some example could be: clearing dishes from the table, getting married, shopping, caring for children, cooking and serving dinner.

## ***Supplies:***

Glue  
Construction paper  
Pre-cut magazine pictures





## **JUNO**

Film details: 2007, 96 minutes, Color, English, USA, Comedy, Rated PG-13. Directed by Jason Reitman. Screenplay by Diablo Cody, featuring Ellen Page, Michael Cera, Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman.

### **Synopsis:**

A tale told over four seasons, starting in autumn when Juno, a 16-year-old high-school junior discovers she's pregnant after one night with her best friend, Bleeker. The quirky, confident teenager decides to place the child with an adoptive couple. In the nine months that follow Juno with the help of her dorky boyfriend, supportive dad, and no-nonsense stepmom humorously navigates her pregnancy.

### **Themes and Key Words:**

- *Pregnancy and parenting*
- *Dealing with the unexpected*
- *Dreams and expectations*
- *Different kinds of families*

### **Background Context:**

Juno won the Oscar in 2008 for best original screenplay for the screen. It was also nominated for Best Achievement in Directing, Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Performance by an Actress in a Lead Role. It was also nominated for Golden Globes for Best Picture, Best Screenplay, and Best Actress in a Lead Role.

### **Actors/Main Characters:**

- Ellen Page — Juno MacGruff (main protagonist)
- Michael Cera — Paulie Bleeker (Juno's boyfriend/best friend)
- Jennifer Garner — Vanessa Loring (Potential adoptive mother for Juno's baby)
- Jason Bateman — Mark Loring (Potential adoptive father for Juno's baby)
- Allison Janney — Bren MacGruff (Juno's stepmother)
- J.K. Simmons — Mac MacGruff (Juno's father)

### ***Set-up/Pre-cautions:***

In this movie the adoptive father has an inappropriate relationship with Juno. Also for many young women they may have recently learned that they are pregnant although this movie is light hearted try to be sensitive to their experiences. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

#### **Level 1**

- How did Juno deal with the problems in her life?
- How was Juno's pregnancy similar or different than other people you have known that have been pregnant?

#### **Level 2**

- Juno used humor to deal with the hardship in her life. When have you used to laughter to help you through a difficult situation?

#### **Level 3**

- Initially when Juno found out that she was pregnant she was going to have an abortion, but upon going to the clinic she decided to give her child up for adoption. Do you think she made the right decision? How would her life be different if she decided to have the abortion or keep the child herself?

### ***Art Project:***

Personal Calendars- The movie *Juno* takes place over four seasons, Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. Looking at your own life draw and color the various seasons you have experienced.

### ***Activity and Supplies:***

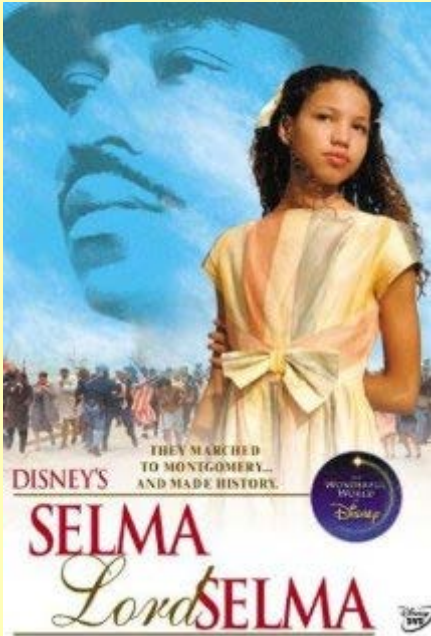
Calendar sheets

Glue

Beads, flowers, die-cuts, and other items to be pasted on

Colored pencils, crayons, markers

Paper



## **SELMA, *Lord SELMA***

Film details: 1999, 94 minutes, Color, English, USA, Comedy, Not Rated. Directed by Charles Burnett. Screenplay by Cynthia Whitcomb, featuring Mackenzie Astin, Jurnee Smollett, and Clifton Powerll.

### ***Synopsis:***

In 1965 Alabama, an 11 year old girl (Jurnee Smollett) is touched by a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. (Clifton Powell) and becomes a devout follower. But her resolution is tested when she joins others in the famed march from Selma to Montgomery.

### ***Themes and Key Words:***

- *Protest*
- *Strength*
- *Bravery*

***Civil Rights Era***- a historical era in the United States from approximately 1955-1975 where African American fought for equal privileges as citizens including the right to vote, better jobs, and adequate housing.

***Racism***- is the belief that there are inherent differences in people's traits and capacities that are entirely due to their race, however defined, and that, as a consequence, racial discrimination (i.e. different treatment of those people, both socially and legally) is justified

***Jim Crow***- were state and local laws in the United States enacted between 1876 and 1965. They mandated *de jure* racial segregation in all public facilities, with a supposedly "separate but equal" status for black Americans. In reality, this led to treatment and accommodations that were usually inferior to those provided for white Americans, systematizing a number of economic, educational and social disadvantages. De jure mainly applied to the Southern United States. Northern segregation was generally de facto, from blacks predominately living in urban ghettos.

***Slavery***- a labor system based on race in the United States which forced African Americans to work without pay and very limited personal freedoms

***Segregation***- a practice which kept blacks and whites apart from one another such as schools, churches, or public facilities.

***White Privilege***- is a way of conceptualizing racial inequalities that focuses as much on the advantages that white people accrue from society as on the disadvantages that people of color experience.

## **Background Context:**

*Selma, Lord, Selma* is a 1999 American film based on true events that happened in March of 1965, known as Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama. The film tells the story through the eyes of an 11-year-old African American girl named Sheyann Webb (Jurnee Smollett). It premiered as a television movie on ABC on January 17, 1999.

## **Actors/Main Characters:**

- Jurnee Smollett — Sheyann Webb (main character)
- Clifton Powerll— Martin Luther King, Jr. (civil rights activist)
- Ella Joyce — Betty Webb (Sheyann’s mother)
- Yolanda King — Miss Bright (Sheyann’s teacher)

## **Set-up/Pre-cautions:**

This movie took place during the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham. Consequently there is violence as well as racial discrimination. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

## **Discussion Questions:**

### **Level 1**

- Think back to how the Reverend Jonathan Daniels spoke and interacted with different people. Now think about how other people interacted with each other. What are the differences?

### **Level 2**

- What would you have done if you were born during Jim Crow Era?
- What does it mean to vote?
- What is the importance of protest songs?

### **Level 3**

- What does slavery, segregation, etc. mean to you?
- What do you think about non-violence as a way to create change in unjust systems?

## **Art Project:**

Write and perform protest poetry.

## **Supplies:**

Pens  
Paper



## LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

Film Details: 2006, 101 minutes, Color, English, USA, Comedy/Drama, Rated R, Directed by Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris, written by Michael Arndt, featuring Abigail Breslin, Steve Carell, Toni Collette and Greg Kinnear.

### **Synopsis:**

Young Olive dreams of being the next Miss USA. Her family determined to her into the finals of a beauty pageant take a cross-country trip in their VW bus, and truly discover the meaning of family.

### **Themes:**

- *Determination*
- *Success after failure*
- *Believing in yourself*
- *Reaching for your dreams*
- *Understanding family*

### **Actors/Main Characters:**

- Abigail Breslin — Olive Hoover (main protagonist)
- Greg Kinnear — Richard Hoover (Olive's father)
- Toni Collette — Sheryl Hoover (Olive's mother)
- Paul Dano — Dwayne Hoover (Olive's brother)
- Alan Arkin — Grandpa Edwin Hoover (Olive's grandfather)
- Steve Carrell — Frank Ginsberg (Olive's uncle)

### **Set-up/Pre-cautions:**

Although this is a dark comedy, there are some elements that may bring up difficult themes with this particular population, particularly the death of the grandfather, who is addicted to heroin or cocaine, and the uncle's suicide attempt. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

## ***Discussion Questions:***

### **Level 1**

- Did you expect Olive to be into beauty pageants? Why or why not?
- Did you think the movie was funny?
- Did any parts make you sad?

### **Level 2**

- Olive stays determined regardless of what is happening? What helps her to stay on task?
- What is the purpose of beauty pageants?
- Olive's grandfather was so nice to her. Sometimes we don't appreciate our elders enough. What do you think?

### **Level 3**

- Think back to the scene in which the family is at the diner. Olive's father tries to get her to not eat the ice cream because other beauty queens do not. How would this affect Olive's self-esteem? Why is this an oppressive statement on her father's part?
- How do beauty pageants play a role in oppressing women?
- Even one young girl has the power to bring family together? Are there ways that you could do that with your family?

## ***Art Project:***

**Activity #1 Talent Show.** Provide space for the young women and facilitators to show off a talent that they have. Each of us is an expert in some area. Each of us has a talent for something. We need to make time to find that talent. Given that many people are worry about standing in front of others to talk, the project should begin with the young women in small groups with at least one facilitator in each group. The group should brainstorm ideas together. Facilitators need to participate too! Additionally, the activity needs to be prefaced carefully and explicitly with some directions for the audience. Negative comments should be kept quiet. Everyone involved should know that each other is courageous for even standing in front of everyone.

**Activity #2 Breaking down barriers.** Using "Lincoln Logs" or some similar material (or even better, creating a similar material), construct barriers that we face and stop us from reaching our goals. On each log/material, each person should write a barrier that keeps her from reaching a goal. As we create the logs, start to build them up. At the end of the activity, we will break them down!

## ***Activity and Supplies:***

Props

Lincoln Logs or blocks



## **mad hot** *Ballroom*

Film Details: 2005. (Rated PG; 105 minutes, Color, Documentary, English, USA, Directed by Marilyn Agrelo).

### **Synopsis:**

*Mad Hot Ballroom* is a documentary that was filmed in New York City about students enrolled in an after-school dance program founded over ten years ago and currently in more than sixty New York public schools. During this eleven-week program, fifth graders from Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island learned the fox trot, merengue, rumba, tango, and swing dancing in an "American Ballroom Theater Dancing Class." After completing their training, students from each class were chosen to represent their school in statewide competitions.

### **Themes and Key Words:**

- *Focusing youthful energy on fun and beauty*
- *Learning to respect boys and girls*

**Washington Heights:** A Dominican neighborhood in upper Manhattan. This area is currently experiencing a wave of crime but is also known as one of the most important bases for Dominican empowerment.

**Bensonhurst:** A working-class neighborhood located in Brooklyn, traditionally known for its Mafia connections. It is currently settled by mainly Jewish, Italian, and Chinese families and has significantly contributed to the entertainment arena in the US.

### **Background Context:**

Ballroom dance refers to a set of partner dances, which are enjoyed both socially and competitively around the world. Because of its performance and entertainment aspects, ballroom dance is also widely enjoyed on stage, film, and television. In competition ballroom, dancers are judged by diverse criteria such as poise, the hold or frame, posture, musicality and expression, timing, body alignment and shape, floor craft, foot and leg action, and presentation. Judging in a performance-oriented sport is inevitably subjective in nature, and controversy and complaints by competitors over judging placements are not uncommon. The scorekeepers—called scrutineers—will tally the total number of recalls accumulated by each couple through each round until the finals.

### ***Set-up/Pre-cautions:***

It is best if facilitators stick with classical ballroom dance, otherwise popular dances are often too sexual. The purpose of the young women to try new dance step is to 1. learn about the importance of dance as expression, an art form, and a source of exercise. 2. (re)introduce various forms of music and dance from other places around the world and from past eras and finally 3. allow the young women to cut loose, laugh, and dance before returning to their units. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

**FACT:** Anthropologists have found that every single culture that has survived has traditional dance. That is to say, there is not ONE culture in the world that doesn't have dancing as part of their culture.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

#### **Level 1**

- Do you like to dance? What kinds of music do you like to dance to
- Have you ever been interested in trying something new like yoga or learning to swim?

#### **Level 2**

- The kids in the movie used dance as a way to have fun, relieve stress, and challenge themselves. What are the ways that you do this in your own life?

#### **Level 3**

- Why do you think the boys and girls thought it was gross to touch one another at the beginning of the movie?
- As schools receive less and less funding many art and music programs get cut. Do you think that music, dance, and art are important in schools? Why?

### ***Art Project:***

The young women will learn a variety of dance steps that the students in Mad Hot Ballroom competed in.

### ***Activity and Supplies:***

CD of dance music (bring something Caribbean for Limbo, something for the Electric Slide, some country for Line dancing.)

Broom or stick for the Limbo





## GRACIE

Film details: 2007, 97 minutes, Color, English, Drama, Rated PG-13. Directed by Davis Guggenheim.

Written by Lisa Marie Petersen and Karen Janszen. Featuring Elisabeth Shue, Carly Schroeder, Dermot Mulroney, Jesse Lee Soffer, Andrew Shue, and Trevor Heins.

### **Synopsis**

A 15-year-old girl growing up in New Jersey in 1978 overcomes the loss of her brother by convincing her family and school to allow her to play varsity soccer on an all-boys team.

### **Themes and Key Words:**

- *Challenging Expectations*
- *Overcoming adversity*
- *Believing in yourself*

**Sexism-** a form of discrimination or devaluation based on a person's sex, with such attitudes being based on beliefs in traditional stereotypes of gender roles. The term *sexism* is most often used in relation with discrimination against women, but can apply to both sexes.

**Title IX-** The law that states that all schools and universities receiving federal funding must allow equal access to educational and athletic programs, regardless of a person's sex;

**Varsity Team-** the highest ranking athletic teams representing a college or university, high school, or middle school;

**Junior Varsity Team-** athletic team whose members are not the main players in a competition

### **Background Context:**

*Gracie* is a 2007 American historical sports drama film directed by Davis Guggenheim. It stars Carly Schroeder as Gracie Bowen, Dermot Mulroney as Bryan Bowen, Elisabeth Shue as Lindsay Bowen, Jesse Lee Soffer as Johnny Bowen, and Andrew Shue as Coach Owen Clark. *Gracie* takes place in New Jersey, United States in 1978 before Title IX (which was passed in 1972) had a chance to take effect and when organized women's soccer was still very rare in the United States

Elisabeth Shue and Andrew Shue are real-life siblings, and this is their semi-autobiographical story. Andrew Shue also played soccer professionally with the Bulawayo Highlanders and was the only white person on the team.

**Cast:**

- Carly Schroeder--Grace Bowen (main protagonist)
- Dermot Mulroney -- Bryan Bowen (Gracie's father)
- Elisabeth Shue as Lindsay Bowen (Gracie's mother)
- Jesse Lee Soffer as Johnny Bowen (Gracie's brother)

**Set-up/Precautions:**

As it is mentioned in the synopsis of the film, viewers should be prepared for the death of Gracie's brother, Johnny, in a car accident. Below you will find a bullet-pointed list of leveled discussion questions. The first level is basic fact and opinion driven inquiries. The second level encourages the women to think more critically about the kinds of oppression taking place in the movie. The third and final level asks the young women to take this critical assessment and apply it to their own lives/communities. Foreground these questions at the beginning of the film and based on the reception of the young women after the film, approach these topics more in depth.

**Discussion Questions:****Level 1**

- What did you think of the movie?
- What was Gracie's relationship with her older brother like? How was she impacted when he died?
- What was Gracie's relationship with her parents like? How did those relationships change over the course of the movie?
- What did Gracie have to do in order to fulfill her dream of playing varsity soccer?

**Level 2**

- How come Gracie wasn't allowed to play soccer like her brothers?
- How did Gracie's classmates (boys and girls) treat her when she decided she wanted to play on the boys' soccer team?
- What was it like for girls who wanted to play sports in the 1970s?
- Why do you think Gracie's mother never became a surgeon like she hoped to be?
- Gracie's mother tells Gracie that "not everything's possible" for her because she is a girl. She says, "It's just a lot harder... For us girls, life is one big shit sandwich, and we all gotta take a bite." Do you think that statement is true? Why or why not?

**Level 3**

- Have you experienced sexism at any time in your life? What was it like for you? How did you handle it?
- Gracie's mom says to her, "If you want to limit yourself fine... but don't let other people do it for you." Gracie did not let herself be defined by society's gender roles. She broke out of the stereotypical box and pursued her dream to play soccer, even though girls were not expected to play sports. How do you define yourself? Have you ever felt pressure to be someone else because your family or community expected you to be? What did you do in that situation?
- In earlier times, it was nearly unimaginable to see a girl playing sports on a varsity or professional level. What roles in society have women not yet fulfilled? Do you think that will change in the near future?

**Art Project:**

**Activity #1 Jersey Decoration:** The jerseys that athletes wear signify their commitment to their passion and their team. The young women at the JTDC will have the opportunity to decorate their own jerseys to represent their identities, passions, and commitments.

**Activity #2 Sneaker Decoration:** Tennis shoes propel us forward and keep us moving. The young women at the JTDC will have the opportunity to decorate their own sneakers with personal slogans and images that motivate them to keep moving and pursuing their goals.

**Supplies :** Old sneakers and/or t-shirts; fabric paints, sequins, beads, feathers, and ribbons