

Lesson plan

Disability



This lesson plan lesson plan is based around a man called Graham Hicks who enjoys extreme sports. At first, the lesson gets students thinking about risk taking, and encourages them to imagine what it might be like to be someone else. As the story develops, and students find out that the initial scenario really happened, the discussion will move onto an entirely different topic – disability.

This resource is divided into three phases. Each phase provides nuggets of information for discussion and reflection, and encourages students to think creatively. There are several optional activities that can be completed during the lesson or as homework.

The [social model of disability briefing](#) for teachers is a useful preparation tool for this lesson plan.

Age group

This resource is designed for 7 to 14 year olds, but can also be used with older students.

Timings

You should be able to cover phases 1 (15 minutes) and 2 (25 minutes) in one lesson, leaving students to do the phase 2 activity as homework. You can then follow up with phase 3 in the next lesson. However, the resource is flexible, and by omitting the optional activities you

will be able to run the lesson plan in a single class.

Learning outcomes

- > Students will attempt to imagine what it is like to be someone else.
- > Students will appreciate that, just like everyone else, people with disabilities and impairments have unique wants and goals, but that there may be barriers to these being fulfilled.
- > Students will think about the lives and needs of a person with a disability and explore why everyday tasks can be very challenging, especially without the right support.

Phase 1

Ask your students to imagine the following:

You have signed up for a fundraising challenge to support a charity. You are going to jet ski across the North Sea from Norfolk to the Netherlands, with a tough time limit. But on the day of the challenge you arrive at the shore to find thick fog lying across the water. You can see virtually nothing – not even your hand held up in front of your face.

Do you go ahead with your challenge, or cancel?

Ask students for their initial thoughts and reactions, either as a whole class or in smaller groups, and encourage them to consider the following:

How would you decide what to do? Many people have pledged money in support of your big adventure. But going ahead with it could mean failure, as well as putting your own safety at risk. What factors are most important? Who would you listen to before deciding what to do?

Encourage students to think about what the dangers would be. Are there any precautions they could take to make it safer? Might there be devices to help them navigate despite not being able to see the way? What else might help?

You might choose to extend the discussion with the following, or use it as a short writing activity:

Imagine yourself standing on the shore in your wetsuit, looking out into the vast, wet greyness ahead. Your jet ski is there, ready to go. Friends and relatives have turned up to see you setting off. You are weighing up your options – going home, or jet skiing to the Netherlands in thick fog. What thoughts are going through your mind? How do you feel? What do you decide to do, and why?

Ask students to write down their final decision – to jet ski or not to jet ski – and any safety measures they would take.

Phase 2

Reveal to students that this situation happened:

Someone did decide to jet ski from Norfolk to the Netherlands without being able to see a thing. But the poor visibility wasn't due to fog – the person is blind. Graham Hicks is also profoundly deaf.

Get students' reactions. Are they surprised? Impressed? Why? Talk about disabled people doing extreme physical challenges. Is there any logical reason why someone with an impairment shouldn't enjoy speed and extreme sports? Discuss what senses a deaf or blind person would rely on most for discovering and enjoying new things – touch, feel, sight or hearing. What about someone who is both deaf and blind? What sensations would they be aware of when jet skiing, for example?

Some people love extreme sports like skydiving or bungee jumping. Maybe a student, or someone they know, has tried one. Who would

like to, and why? Who would rather go shopping or hang out with friends at home? Does this give an idea of character differences within the group?

Revisit students' jet ski decision. Who decided to head home? Who decided to go for it? Invite students to consider whether there might be similar differences in likes and dislikes among people who are deaf or blind or both. Discuss whether a liking for extreme sports like jet skiing is dependent on your personality or your physical ability to do it.

Invite students to think about Graham Hicks again. How does he manage to jet ski without sight or hearing? What support must he need? How might he get around the times when he needs to see or hear when he's jet skiing? How does he know where to steer, whether to accelerate or slow down, how to avoid obstacles? Ask students to imagine Graham's solutions.

Phase 3

Tell the group more about Graham Hicks:

Graham Hicks is in his 40s. He went blind at the age of 3 and deaf aged 6. He has poor balance and needs to be guided and supported when he moves around. He “hears” through letters traced onto the palm of his hand and speaks with his own voice. A Braille display computer enables him to communicate via email.

Graham gets a kick out of physical challenges. In 2003 he set a Guinness World Record for the longest jet ski journey by speeding from Norfolk to the Netherlands in six hours. He broke his own record two days later by travelling 127 miles in under six hours on his return trip.

Now reveal how he manages to jet ski:

Graham is the driver of the jet ski, and he has another person who sits behind him. The pillion rider uses a system of touch signals to tell Graham when to adjust their course to the left or right, to slow down and go faster. They can also use the deafblind manual alphabet, but this is difficult with the motion of the jet ski, so they usually stop if they want to talk.

Had students guessed that he rode with another person? Talk about how a simple touch signal system has made it possible for Graham to go jet skiing.

Broaden the discussion by thinking of other inventions that help people with physical impairments – hearing aids, Braille, a door bell that activates a fan. What about glasses? Millions of people with bad eyesight couldn't in the past do ordinary things like read and write. With the invention of glasses, their sight was corrected. Do we think of people with glasses or contact lenses as disabled? Why not?

Talk about how these inventions improve disabled people's quality of life. Think about the importance of independence – wanting the freedom to live your own life and make your own choices doesn't change just because you have an impairment. But it might be a lot harder if you don't get the right support.

Many people with impairments feel disabled by society. What do students think they mean? A wheelchair might enable you to get out and about, but what if your local train station has stairs and no ramp or lift? What if a shop door is too narrow to get through? How would it feel to be barred from huge sections of society, such as public transport, shops, cafes, clubs, schools and sports?

Complete the story about Graham:

Graham works for an organisation called Deafblind UK. He enjoys extreme challenges and uses them to raise funds and awareness of deafblindness. He said about his jet skiing World Record: “I wanted to demonstrate that being deafblind does not stop you from doing even the most challenging of things and also that deafblind people can be part of a team with able bodied people – in this case I was the leader.”

Why might Graham want to raise awareness of deafblindness? Talk about negative stereotypes of disabled people, for example, as helpless, tragic victims. How is Graham's portrayal of disabled people different?

Stress that not all deafblind people are as outgoing, successful, and well supported as Graham. Many find everyday tasks – getting dressed, getting out, shopping, keeping up with the news – challenging enough. And many get very little support. How well is society organised to meet the needs of a deafblind person? What could be done to make things easier for them, and for other disabled people?

Optional extension – fingerspelling

Also known as fingerspelling, the Deafblind Manual Alphabet is a method of spelling out words onto a deafblind person's hand. A particular sign or place on the hand represents each letter. Look at the [letter chart](#). Read [tips](#) on communicating with deafblind people.

Give students a copy of the fingerspelling alphabet and let them experiment with each letter. After a few minutes, ask them to try communicating in pairs, only using the alphabet. They can look at the chart, but not at their hand, and they can't talk. Can they understand each other?

Why is it important for people who are not deafblind to be able to communicate with deafblind people? Discuss how everyone has a

part to play in making society more welcoming and adapted to disabled people's needs. For deafblind people, being able to communicate on their own terms with strangers makes a world of difference to what they can do. Why?

Ask students to imagine that they are fluent in finger spelling and come across a deafblind person for the first time. What would you ask him or her? What might their answers be? This can be a creative writing activity, possibly including some research into deafblindness; a role play activity based on a script and including some finger spelling if students feel up to it; and you could consider inviting a deafblind speaker to your school to give students the opportunity to talk to him or her about their experiences.

Visit [Deafblind UK](#) for more information.

This lesson plan is part of the humanitarian education programme produced by the British Red Cross. Teachers and other educators are free to use it, copy it and circulate it for their work. Please always include this notice and the contact details below.

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