



For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities



Roger Ross Williams

From Academy Award® winning director Roger Ross Williams, **LIFE, ANIMATED** is the story of Owen Suskind, a young man who was unable to speak as a child until he and his family discovered a unique way to communicate by immersing themselves in the world of classic Disney animated films. This emotional coming-of-age story follows Owen as he enters adulthood and takes his first steps toward independence.

The subject of his father Ron Suskind’s New York Times bestseller, Owen was a thriving three year old who suddenly and inexplicably went silent—and for years after, remained unable to connect with other people or to convey his thoughts, feelings, or desires. Over time, through repeated viewings of Disney classics like THE LITTLE MERMAID and THE LION KING, Owen found useful tools to help him to understand complex social cues and to re-connect with the world around him.

LIFE, ANIMATED evocatively interweaves classic Disney sequences with scenes from Owen’s life in order to explore how his identification and empathy for characters like Simba, Jafar, and Ariel gave him a means to understand his feelings and allowed him to interpret reality.

Owen’s story is a moving testament to the many ways in which stories can serve as a means of persevering through the dark times, leading us all toward the light.



“A RADIANT, UPLIFTING STORY.”

- DUANE BYRGE, THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

“DEEPLY MOVING,

A WARM TESTAMENT TO A FAMILY’S LOVE AND RESILIENCE.”

- JUSTIN CHANG, VARIETY



FROM ACADEMY AWARD®-WINNING DIRECTOR
ROGER ROSS WILLIAMS

LIFE, ANIMATED

BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING BOOK BY RON SUSKIND

HIS IMAGINATION UNLOCKED AN AMAZING NEW WORLD

THE ORCHARD and A&E INDEFILMS presents A MOTTO PICTURES production "LIFE, ANIMATED" WRITTEN BY DYLAN STARK, T. GRIFFIN DIRECTED BY MAC GUFFE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS TOM BERGMANN PRODUCED BY CAROLYN HEPBURN CHRISTOPHER CLEMENTS PRODUCED BY RON SUSKIND ASSISTANT PRODUCERS MOLLY THOMPSON, ROBERT DEBITETTO, ROBERT SHARENDOV DIRECTED BY DAVID TEAGUE PRODUCED BY JULIE GOLDMAN PRODUCED BY ROGER ROSS WILLIAMS

PG PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
MOTTO PICTURES
A&E
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The Arc has positions on many of the issues raised in the guide, learn more at

thearc.org/who-we-are/position-statements.

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General Discussion Questions

- ▶ What part of the story was the most powerful and why?
- ▶ If you could ask a person in this film a question, whom and what would you ask?
- ▶ Owen’s parents used words like “vanish” and “kidnap” when describing Owen’s autism. How did you react to that?
- ▶ Cornelia and Ron discussed what it means to have a meaningful life. What does that look like for you?



Owen’s Love of Movies

- ▶ Owen’s interest in movies influences every aspect of his life, including his development of communications skills, creating social connections, and landing a job. What interests do you have that are a part of many or all aspects of your life?
- ▶ Many people with and without disabilities look for jobs that are connected with things they are interested in, like movies. How can people with I/DD be better supported to find a job by pursuing their interests?

The School Years

- ▶ Owen attended several private schools and was home-schooled. What do you think about Owen’s family choosing for him to go to a private school, with only students with disabilities, rather than going to public school?
- ▶ Are there ways that Owen could have been better supported to receive an inclusive public education?
- ▶ Owen was being bullied in a segregated day school, one that was touted as having a supportive environment. Have you experienced bullying? If so, how have you handled it?

Where to Live

- ▶ Owen and his family put a lot of thought and effort into preparing him to lead an independent life, and they have chosen a setting for him to live in that they feel is right for him, for now. He currently lives in a complex that is only for people with disabilities. What’s your reaction to this?
- ▶ It’s a challenge to find appropriate and affordable housing options. What can we do to create affordable housing in our communities for people with I/DD?
- ▶ Many people with I/DD live in integrated settings in the community. What are some options for integrated living in your community? For your information, The Arc has resources on this topic here: futureplanning.thearc.org/pages/learn/where-to-start/deciding-where-to-live

Owen’s Relationships with Friends and a Girlfriend

- ▶ What did you think of Owen’s approach to creating a Disney club to forge friendships?
- ▶ Owen’s relationship with his girlfriend Emily was front and center in the film. What is your reaction to how the family and the paid staff members supported Owen and Emily during their relationship?
- ▶ Have you experienced a relationship with ups and downs? If so, how have you handled those?
- ▶ What other support or information do you think people with disabilities should have about being in romantic relationships?

Owen and Walt—The Sibling Relationship

- ▶ Owen’s relationship with his brother, Walt, was featured in the movie. What did you think about their interactions?
- ▶ For those of you who are a sibling of a person with I/DD, could you relate to Walt?
- ▶ For those of you with I/DD, could you relate to Owen and his relationship with his brother?
- ▶ Are there are ways you’d like to change your relationship with your sibling(s)?

From the Parent’s Perspective

- ▶ What did you think about Ron’s and Cornelia’s approach of following Owen’s lead and using the Disney movies to communicate with Owen in the manner they did?
- ▶ Owen’s doctor discouraged them from thinking that the few words Owen was repeating had any meaning. How did you react to that?
- ▶ Owen is taking a big step in his life. And it’s a big adjustment for his whole family. How are you feeling about this approaching stage of life? Or if you have already experienced it, talk about it.