

HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH

# International Film Festival

## Education Programme 2005: Teaching Resource

### LIVING RIGHTS (Japan-Kenya 2004/60 mins)



Yoshi

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#### Formal Links

- Key Stage 4: PHSE/ Citizenship.
- Film, Media, Communications, Sociology , representation of disability, Critical Thinking, Third World Studies

#### Key issues

- Children's Rights, Disability (Autism and Aspergers Syndrome), Women's Rights (Africa).

#### Synopses

YOSHI is a 16-year-old with Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism explored recently in Mark Haddon's award-winning novel, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time'. Yoshi has been sent to a special school for children with a range of learning disabilities, but dreams of attending a mainstream secondary school. Following Yoshi as he expresses his feelings in monologues, drawings and talks with his family and teachers, his humour, wit and creativity make a strong case for us to believe he should. Japanese with English subtitles.

When TOTI was 11, her parents told her she would follow Maasai tradition and become one of the wives of a local man. In exchange, her family would receive cattle badly needed for them to survive. Toti ran away, going to live at a school for girls who have made the same decision and are housed and educated by a charity. She left her twin sister to be married in her place. 3 years later, Toti returns to her village, meeting her sister and her family, and trying to find some connection despite the situation. In Maasai with English subtitles.

#### Credits

Director	Duco Tellegen
Producer	Duco Tellegen
Photography	Peter Brugman, Danny Elsen
Sound	Vladimir Golovnitsky
Editor	Luce van de Weg

## **The Director: Duco Tellegen**

Duco Tellegen is the director of a number of documentaries, including *A Paradise* (1994), *Maybe I Will Never Wake Up Again* (1995), *Who Needs Us?* (1997) and *War is Over?* (2001).

*Living Rights* (2004) is a series in six episodes about the daily reality, conflicts and dilemmas concerning the rights of children, of which NISHA (nominated for the 2001 Silver Wolf film award) was the first episode. In 2004, four new episodes had their premières, including the stories of YOSHI, TOTI. The other two children are two entirely different stories, but all focusing on the issue of the rights of the child: ROY is a boy living in a village in Peru and digging for gold in small mines whose parents are talked to by a relief organisation trying to convince them that children should attend school and the work in the mine is bad for their health. 11-year-old LENA lives with her foster mother Galah in a village near the nuclear reactor of Chernobyl. Lena's real mother lives in Minsk, where radio activity readings are much lower. She is unable to take care of Lena, but perhaps the family in Italy where she already lodged twice may have her.

## **What is Asperger syndrome?**

As soon as we meet a person we make judgements about them. Just by looking we can guess their age or status, and by the expression on their face or the tone of their voice we can tell immediately if they are happy, angry or sad and respond accordingly.

Not everyone has this natural ability. People with Asperger syndrome find it more difficult to read the signals which most of us take for granted. As a result they find it more difficult to communicate and interact with others.

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism, a condition that affects the way a person communicates and relates to others. A number of traits of autism are common to Asperger syndrome including:

- difficulty in communicating;
- difficulty in social relationships;
- a lack of imagination and creative play.

However, people with Asperger syndrome usually have fewer problems with language than those with autism, often speaking fluently, though their words can sometimes sound formal or stilted. People with Asperger syndrome do not usually have the accompanying learning disabilities associated with autism; in fact, people with Asperger syndrome are often of average or above average intelligence.

Because of this many children with Asperger syndrome enter mainstream school and, with the right support and encouragement, can make good progress and go on to further education and employment.

From [www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)

## **Who are the Maasai, and how do they live?**

The Maasai, famous as herders and warriors, once dominated the plains of East Africa. Now however they are confined to a fraction of their former range. For the Maasai, cattle are what make the good life, and milk and meat are the best foods. Their old ideal was to live by their cattle alone – other foods they could get by exchange – but today they also need to grow crops. They move their herds from one place to another, so that the grass has a chance to grow again; traditionally, this is made possible by a communal land tenure system in which everyone in an area shares access to water and pasture. Nowadays Maasai have increasingly been forced to settle, and many take jobs in towns. Maasai society is organised into male age-groups whose members together pass through initiations to become warriors, and then elders. They have no chiefs, although each section has a Laibon, or spiritual leader, at its head. Maasai worship one god who dwells in all things, but may manifest himself as either kindly or destructive. Many Maasai today, however, belong to various Christian churches.

What problems do they face?

Since the colonial period, most of what used to be Maasai land has been taken over, for private farms and ranches, for government projects or for wildlife parks. Mostly they retain only the driest

and least fertile areas. The stress this causes to their herds has often been aggravated by attempts made by governments to 'develop' the Maasai. These are based on the idea that they keep too much cattle for the land. However, they are in fact very efficient livestock producers and rarely have more animals than they need or the land can carry. These 'development' efforts try to change their system of shared access to land. While this has suited outsiders and some entrepreneurial Maasai who have been able to acquire land for themselves or sell it off, it has often denuded the soil and brought poverty to the majority of Maasai, who are left with too little and only the worst land. (From [www.survival-international.org](http://www.survival-international.org))

### **Maasai ceremonies**

There are many ceremonies in Maasai society. *Enkipaata* (senior boy ceremony), *Emuratta* (circumcision), *Enkiama* (marriage), Eunoto (warrior graduation), *Eokoto e-kule* (milk ceremony), *Enkang oo-nkiri* (meat ceremony), *Orngesherr* (junior elder ceremony), etc. Also, there are minor boys and girls rituals such as *Eudoto/Enkigerunoto oo-inkiyiaa* (earlobe), and *Irkpirat* (leg fire marks) that boys and girls must undergo before circumcision. However, many of these initiations concern men while women's initiations focus on circumcision and marriage. Men will form age-sets moving them closer to adulthood.

Women do not have their own age sets but are recognized by that of their husbands. Ceremonies are an expression of our culture and self-determination. Every ceremony is a new life. They are rites of passage, and every Maasai child is to go through these stages of life. To be initiated, the family and community must examine and prove the status of their son or daughter before engaging in a new life.

(From <http://www.maasai-infoline.org/>)

### **Before watching the films -**

- What do you know about Asperger syndrome, or autism? Where have you found out about it? How common do you think it is? Read the description above – how easy would it be to 'tell' if someone had Asperger syndrome?
- How often is autism represented on screen in mainstream feature films? Think about *Rainman* (1988), *Little Man Tate* (1991) and *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993). How were people with autism represented, and for what purposes within the storyline of the film?
- What do you know about the Maasai people? Read the short descriptions above, and investigate further on the websites they are taken from. What is the traditional role of women in this culture, and why might it be changing?
- Toti runs away from her family at the age of 11 to escape an arranged marriage to an old man, a local farmer. What are your views on arranged marriage? Why is it common in many traditional cultures – what is its role within a culture?
- The short films within *Living Rights* are documentaries made by a filmmaker with extensive experience of filming with young people in sensitive or difficult situations. What do you think he would have to bear in mind when making his films, in terms of research, attitude to his subjects, and use of the camera equipment?
- The film is called *Living Rights*, and each story within it is preceded by words from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Read through the main points of this at [www.therightssite.org.uk/html/kyr.htm](http://www.therightssite.org.uk/html/kyr.htm). How does this affect Yoshi and Toti's lives, and the lives of young people in the UK?

### **After watching the films -**

- Look back to the questions from before the films. Have your views and opinions changed in any ways?
- In both films, the adults have a range of influences on their children's lives, from parents to teachers. Which adults are the most important for Yoshi and Toti. Why do you think this is?
- Yoshi and Toti present themselves in different ways – Yoshi with more confidence and in a range of ways, Toti more quietly and tentatively. In what ways did the director capitalise on their characters, and their stories and settings, to make 2 very different films? How did this increase our understanding and empathy for their lives?

- For Toti, the balance of tradition and the desire to lead her own life and be educated is a huge decision. At the end of the film, how do you think she feels? What do you think may happen to her in the future?
- For Yoshi, he gains an important victory in his quest to share exam recognition on a level with other young people his age. How far do you think he will be able to change things in a professional working world, in order to be seen as equal, as he gets older?
- In what ways did these 2 stories reach out to universal issues experienced and understood by young people all over the world?
- Do you think films like these will change people's views? How?

### Online Resources

[www.girlsrights.org](http://www.girlsrights.org)

UNICEF's Working Group on Girls – 80 international and national NGOs in more than 1000 countries working at grassroots level.

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

Works in over 70 countries, in research, practical projects and advocacy for children in UK and overseas.

[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

Reports on issues to do with women and children's rights worldwide,

[www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)

National Autistic Society. Includes information on types of autism including Asperger syndrome, links to related sites, advice.

[www.survival-international.org](http://www.survival-international.org)

Helping tribal people decide their own futures, defend their traditions and protect their lands.

<http://www.maasai-infoline.org/>

Website presented by a Maasai.

Teaching Resource compiled for HRWIFF Education London by Corinna Downing and Alicia Blum-Ross

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