

IN A DIFFERENT KEY: THE AUTISM UNDERSTANDING TOOLKIT

AUTISM'S "DISCOVERY"



INTRODUCTORY CONTEXT

(suggested)

Today autism is more recognized than ever, especially with the data suggesting that 1 in 36 kids qualify for a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. But actually, the diagnosis is fairly new, so new that the man known unofficially as “autism’s first child” appears in a documentary called *IN A DIFFERENT KEY*, which tells the story of how he came to be called “Case 1” in the first medical article that fully described autism as a diagnosis. He was born in 1933, and a lot was different when he was growing up. This part of *IN A DIFFERENT KEY* tells his story, where we can see how much has changed. It starts with Donald driving around the small town in Mississippi where he lived his entire life. It’s a place called Forest.

KEY THEMES

- The behaviors that revealed Donald as autistic
- The history of Donald’s meeting Dr Leo Kanner, the “father” of autism
- Misdiagnosis before autism was recognized
- Past attitudes concerning neurodivergent people
- How autistic people in particular were perceived before autism was a recognized diagnosis
- The role of parents in supporting autistic children

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are some reasons that autism is such a relatively new diagnosis?
- What does Donald’s story reveal about the power of the medical profession?
- Why did institutions become such harmful places?
- How might Donald’s life turned out if his parents had not stood up for him?
- Have attitudes toward neurodivergent people changed over the course of Donald’s lifetime?