

IN A DIFFERENT KEY: THE AUTISM UNDERSTANDING TOOLKIT

FRIENDSHIP



INTRODUCTORY CONTEXT

(suggested)

The makers of the documentary *In A Different Key* always say, “It’s not that hard to have the back of someone who is different.” To make that point, their film tells the story of Donald Triplett, the first child diagnosed with autism, who was born in 1933, and whose little Mississippi town always accepted and supported him, thinking of him as “our guy.” The people of that town set a beautiful example. But the film tells another story of real friendship, this one set in the present-day, in a pre-school. And in this story, the beautiful example comes from two little boys, named Benny and Jensen. As you watch, think about the surroundings Benny and Jensen are in, and how important a role those play in the connection these two boys have.

KEY THEMES

- How difference need not be an obstacle to friendship
- How early intervention is critical in shaping kids’ attitudes
- How the environment can send signals of acceptance
- How relationships between people on and off the spectrum work in both directions

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Could you tell which boy was autistic? Did it matter?

Why is it so important for children to learn early that ‘difference’ is a part of life?

What are some ways to shape positive attitudes among neurotypical children?

What is the difference between “being charitably nice” and being a friend?