

NOTES

SHAFT OF LIGHT

SYNOPSIS

This is a symbolic, nine-minute video animation which takes place in a setting reminiscent of a mine. Ranks of workers, identified as “carriers,” are stopped in their tracks by a shaft of light which obstructs their path. Their supervisors, annoyed by the work stoppage, proceed to ridicule the carriers. As the supervisors begin to build a canopy to shield against the light, one of the carriers offers a different solution. “Why don’t we just go around [the shaft of light]?” he says. For his suggestion, the carrier is beaten. The shield is built and work continues. The film ends with the collapse of the shield and, once again, the shaft of light blocks the path of the carriers.

THEMES/CONCEPTS

Classism	Power
Consequences	Stereotyping
Dehumanization	Systemic change
Obedience to authority	Taking a stand
Oppression	Teasing

AUDIENCE

High school students, parents, teachers, employees in a workplace setting.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. With whom do you identify more, the carriers or the supervisors? Why? Do you have sympathy for the carriers? For the supervisors?
2. What evidence is there that the carriers have been beaten down? (e.g. skeletal bodies and bent-over posture, whispered voices, acceptance of no control)
3. What are examples of the dehumanization of the carriers? (e.g. The supervisors say, “What did **it** say?” “**What** said that?”; the beaten carrier is put in wheelbarrow like an object or a pile of junk)

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4. What gave the one carrier the confidence/courage to suggest a new idea? What were the consequences for the carrier who spoke up? Think of a time in your own life when you took a stand about something? What gave you the strength to take a stand? What happened when you did? Do you do this frequently? What happens when you do?
5. How would you describe the world in which these characters live? Do you know of any other place or system which might compare to this?

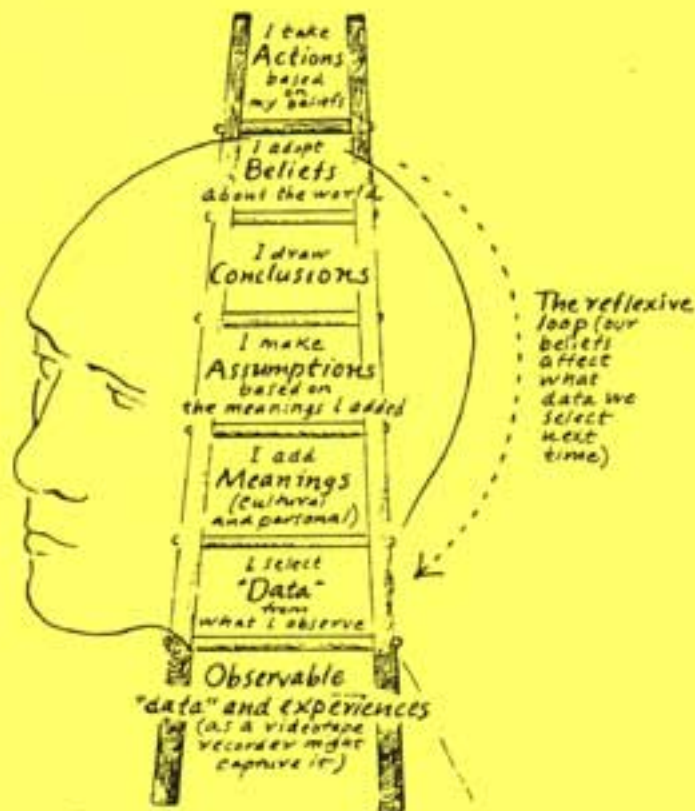
ACTIVITIES

- 1A. After one viewing of the film, ask for student volunteers to reenact the scenario presented in "Shaft of Light." When they have finished presenting their "skit" to the class, pose the following questions to the performers:
 - a) what did it feel like to play a supervisor?
 - b) what did it feel like to play a carrier?
 - c) what did it feel like to play the carrier who spoke up?

Ask the class audience to discuss how the student performance differed from their recollection of the film. Then, view the film again and have the students take notes on differences they see between the film and the student performance. Discuss why these changes occurred. Did the student performers remember the sequence of events selectively? Did they make any assumptions in their presentation?

- 1B. Chris Argyris, an educator and corporate consultant, developed a tool called the "ladder of inference" (see illustrations on next page). Very often, we see things and draw conclusions based on assumptions we make about the things we see. We then take action based on those conclusions. The conclusions begin to form the foundation of our "belief system." Next time around, we may see only those things which fit into our belief system and ignore information which might give us a truer picture of what is going on.

As a class, fill out the ladder of inference from the perspective of the supervisors in the film. Then, ask the class to consider situations in their own lives in which they may be jumping up the ladder of inference. Have each student fill out the ladder of inference based on a personal experience. Then have them answer the following questions:



LADDER OF INFERENCE

- a) Why did I make the assumptions that I did?
- b) Did my thoughts and actions hurt anyone, myself included?
- c) Does my experience help me to understand why other people might behave as they do towards me?

[Making the Home Connection: Give students several copies of the ladder of inference to take home. Encourage family members to choose a common family experience and have each person fill out the ladder. Then, have family members compare their results. Did everybody see things the same way? Did everyone draw the same conclusions?]

2. The film "Shaft of Light" presents a picture of a system. We see two groups in the system, the carriers and the supervisors. In addition, the supervisors talk about how, "They won't be happy...they would have our heads." They do not appear in the film but apparently are above the supervisors and therefore are part of the system. As a class, chart out everything you know about each group in the system. View the film again, if necessary. See the example below.

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As a class, discuss/summarize the dynamics of this system. What is life generally like for each of the groups? Does this system function well? Does it treat all members of the system fairly? Do you think it needs to change? Is it open to change? How might you try to change it?

Ask each student to pick one of the following systems: family, peer group, classroom or school, city, country. Ask students to write an essay or draw a picture or create a diorama which responds to the following questions:

- a) Are there "carriers" in the system? Who are they?
- b) Are there "supervisors," "managers?" Who are they?
- c) What is life generally like for each of the groups?
- d) Does this system function well?
- e) Does it treat its members fairly?
- f) Do you think it needs to change?
- g) Is it open to change?
- h) How might you try to change it?

THE CARRIERS	THE SUPERVISORS	THE MANAGERS
Can't speak up Value being on time Try to do a good job Work hard Are in danger of being beaten Have been stopped before Have no options	Make fun of carriers Have technical information which carriers don't have Are afraid of the people above them Are afraid of losing status and becoming carriers Seem to enjoy putting carriers down	Expect the work to be done Will hold the supervisors responsible for carriers' mistakes Have the power to make supervisors into carriers Are not involved in the physical work

3. Ask the class to try to summarize what they think the film is about. A symbol is something used to represent something else. In the film "Shaft of Light" the characters and the setting could be considered symbols. In this activity, students will attempt to assign meaning to the symbols employed.

Divide the class into groups of no more than five students each. Ask each group to brainstorm what these symbols could stand for.

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Then have each group pick its top choice. Bring the class together and ask each group to report its results. Record the ideas in a four-column chart for all to see. Review the chart and discuss the following questions:

THE SKELETAL FIGURES	THE SETTING	THE SHAFT OF LIGHT	THE CANOPY

- a) What similarities or differences do you see in what each group proposed?
- b) Which symbols seem the most powerful? Why?
- c) Think about the people in your life, the places you go, the things you do and the feelings you have. What symbols would you use to talk about these aspects of your life?

OPTIONAL: Ask students to write a story about an experience in their lives using symbols instead of real people and places.

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