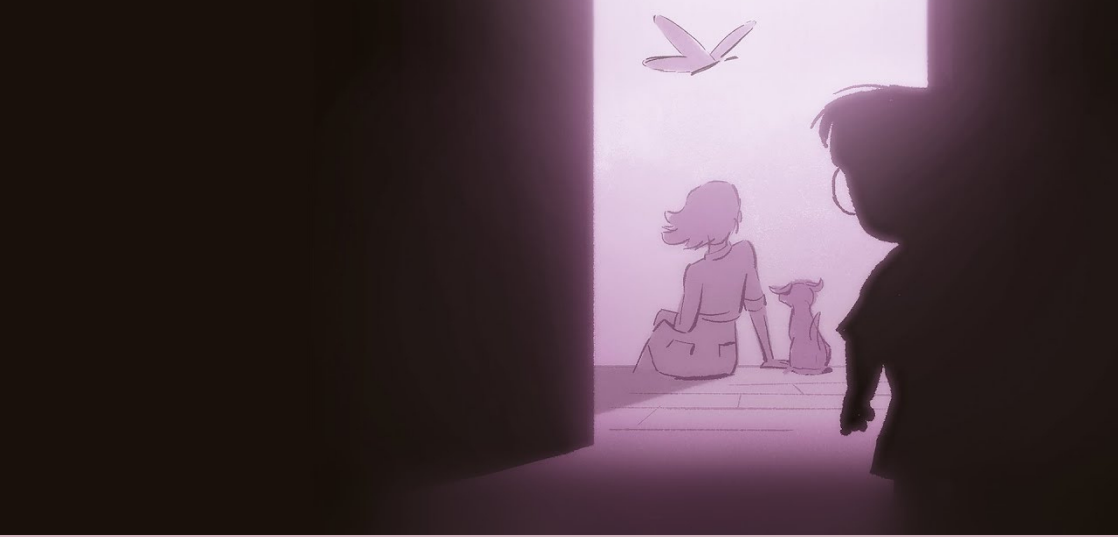


Freebird

study guide



L'ARCHE®
canada



Freebird

synopsis

Freebird is the coming-of-age story of Jon, a boy with Down Syndrome who learns to navigate the world with a loving mother, an absent father, a classroom bully, and a life-long crush. In just five minutes, we see windows into 45 years of his life.



Freebird

study guide

Watch Freebird:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mf_4dsQJAXE

Questions 1, 2, 3 & 4 are for debriefing and general discussion of the film.

1. What do you remember from this film? What captured your attention?
2. How did this film make you feel?
3. What meaning did you take from the film? What lessons does the film convey?
4. What does the film teach about leadership? How might you apply the leadership lessons in this film to your own work as a leader?



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At this point teachers or facilitators can engage their class or group in the specific content of the film using the questions below.

- a) Why do you think the film is titled “Freebird”?
- b) The film opens with the main character, Jon, taking care of his mother. What is the significance of this opening scene?
- c) Early in the film, there is an image of Jon in his mother's womb. What is the director trying to convey by this image? – The director is juggling the happiness which comes with the news of expecting a baby with the news that the baby will be born with Down Syndrome.



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d) Jon's father leaves his mother when he realizes Jon will be born with Down Syndrome. At that moment in the film the song lyrics are "I want to fortify without fossilizing. Redefine all the people I have been."

How do you interpret these lyrics?

How might Jon's mother relate to the lyrics?

How might Jon's father relate to these lyrics?

e) *In the film we watch Jon growing up and all seems well until Jon goes to school. At school he is bullied. Why?*

f) *How would you handle a situation where a student was being bullied?*

g) *How can students and teachers best convey the message that our classrooms are communities where everyone belongs?*



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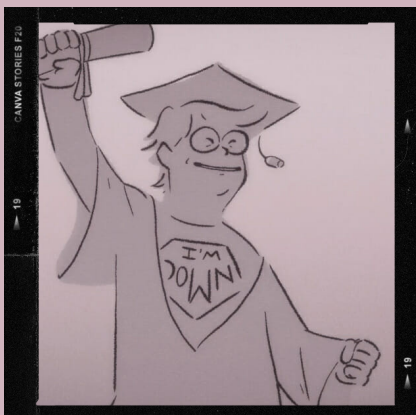
study guide

h) At about the mid-point in the film, in the teenage years in Jon's life, the lyrics of the song cry out with the refrain "Trying to find my freedom."

What freedom(s) is Jon searching for in his teenage years? (romantic relationship, job, leadership role--running for school president)

i) After graduation Jon marries his lifelong crush. At their wedding, Jon's father writes a note to Jon's mother. What did the note say? ("You were right. He's perfect.") What is the significance of this note?

j) The epilogue of the film makes suggestions about what other people wish to have the freedom to be. What do you wish to have the freedom to be?





Freebird

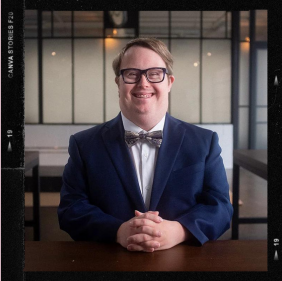
the film: behind the scenes



Freebird creative team

Nicholas Herd

CREATIVE DIRECTOR



With over a decade of experience in the film industry, Nick Herd has lent his artistry, vision, and passion to the creation of what is likely the first animated music video to feature a protagonist with Down Syndrome. As a major film buff and fan of animation, Nick had never seen anyone from his neurominority group animated on screen. "Until now," Nick said. "For me, it's phenomenal to feel that feeling, to see the world as I would describe it!"

Michael McDonald

WRITER, PRODUCER, DIRECTOR



Michael Joseph McDonald is a writer, filmmaker, and disability activist. Before filmmaking, he worked as a ghostwriter in Kenya, publishing four nonfiction books on social justice and receiving an Academy of American Poets Prize. He's best known for his animation Freebird (2021), which qualified for the 94th Academy Awards, and his documentary 6,000 Waiting, which was screened in the White House and led to the creation of Georgia Senate Bill 208. From 2015-2018, he traveled the world, co-directing films with people with intellectual disabilities on six continents and co-developing a more inclusive method of filmmaking called "adaptive filmmaking."

Freebird creative team



Jordan Hart

SCORE AND LYRICS

Growing up in the thriving folk music scene of Alberta, Jordan Hart learned to respect the power of an honest story told through a simple song. The natural beauty of Alberta can still be heard in Hart's music which draws images of guitars strummed by birch fires and mountain lakes surrounded by pine trees.

As a young performer Hart developed a deep love for busking which led him to play on the streets of many major cities. He attributes his raw, compelling live performances to his experience of playing for people on the street and claims busking is the highest form of performance education he has encountered. Though he has been selling out venues for a few years now, you can still catch him playing for unexpected crowds on the streets of Toronto, where he currently resides.



Joe Bluhm and Tonic DNA

DIRECTOR AND ANIMATION STUDIO

Specializing in storytelling, Joe is a director and a designer. Freebird was produced by the award winning studio, Tonic DNA.



About L'Arche Canada

Across Canada and around the world, L'Arche creates communities of friendship and belonging. In L'Arche, people with and without intellectual disabilities live, work, learn, and grow together. L'Arche demonstrates that when persons with intellectual disabilities take their place at the table, they contribute to a more just, compassionate, and vibrant world for all.

The beauty and diversity of Canada shine through in L'Arche Canada's 28 communities and two projects. Spread across the country, from East to West coasts, our communities are integrated into small and large urban centres. While a few communities are bilingual, most are either English or French speaking.

L'Arche Canada is recognized as taking a leading role in the movement for belonging and inclusion and is collaborating with a broad range of partners. We believe communities that embrace diverse identities and offer a variety of opportunities are our best hope for building a more just and human society where each person can contribute their gifts.

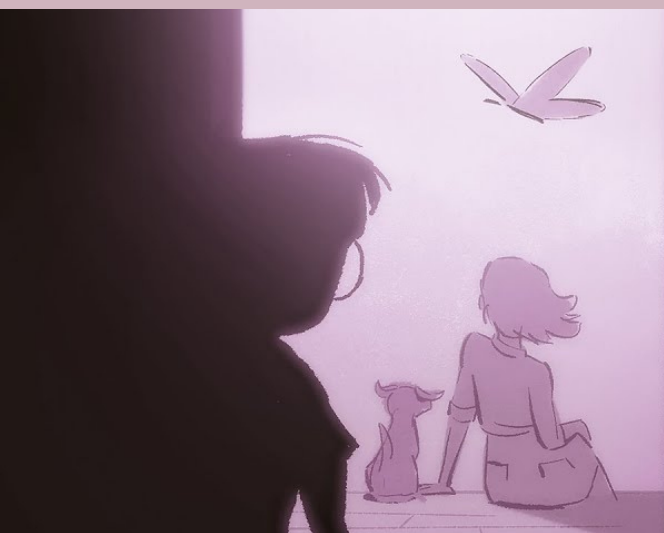




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