

chuskit

A FILM BY PRIYA RAMASUBBAN



CURRICULUM GUIDE

CFI EDUCATION

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GRADES 4 - 8

SUBJECTS

- Language Arts
- Media and Technology
- Social Studies
- Global Studies
- STEM

THEMES

- Storytelling
- Ability
- Education
- Technology
- Family
- Identity



USING THIS GUIDE

The film CHUSKIT is a powerful story about a girl with a disability who is determined to get an education. This multi-disciplinary guide is designed to help educators use the film to introduce students to the power of storytelling to build empathy and inspire action. Standards-aligned lessons encourage students to think about the ways ability can determine access to education and opportunity in a variety of places around the world. Teachers can select from a range of discussion questions that best fit their curriculum goals as well as activities that use media, technology, and service learning to help prepare students to live in a world filled with diverse abilities.

ABOUT THE FILM

In a remote Himalayan village, sprightly Chuskit's dream of going to school is cut short when she is rendered a paraplegic after an accident. She's confined to life indoors in the company of her strict grandfather, Dorje. Chuskit continues to harbor hopes of school but Dorje tries to make her understand that school can't handle her needs. As life at home gets harder, her battle with her grandfather exacerbates. Caught in between their struggle are Chuskit's parents and her enterprising brother who want to respect the old world views that Dorje represents, but also want to keep Chuskit's spirit alive. Chuskit will have to get her grandfather to yield or she will have to accept the reality he has chosen for her.



FROM THE FILMMAKER

Conversations with my sister, Vidya, sowed the seeds for my film CHUSKIT. Vidya has worked with the differently abled in Ladakh for almost a decade. She was instrumental in sending Sonam, a nine-year-old with cerebral palsy, to school despite the arduous terrain in her remote Himalayan village.

While working with Sonam, Vidya learnt of other such children who yearned to lead as normal a childhood as they could. Their stories were filled with pathos and hardships, yet not one of the children gave up their quest to go to school. That is why I shaped Chuskit's character to be unrelenting and gave her the spunk to triumph over adversity.

For most children outside the West, life as a differently abled person is tough at best and excruciatingly hard at worst. My wish is that a small measure of hope and inspiration will stay with audiences when they walk away from my film.

– Priya Ramasubban, Director



FOR THE EDUCATOR

Your school or classroom will likely have students with a variety of abilities. Some disabilities are visible, as in Chuskit's case, but some are not as easily visible. Activities in Lesson 2 review different types of disabilities in order to help students be knowledgeable participants in a world filled with diverse abilities. If a student in your classroom or school has a disability, they should be able to choose if they want to talk about it with the class—some may welcome the opportunity to share their experience, while others may not want to stand out. Journaling can always be substituted for participation in a class discussion if students feel hesitant to share.

This study guide primarily uses the phrases “people with disability” or “differently abled people.” Your class discussion is an opportunity to help guide students toward using respectful language to talk about disability. The American Psychological Association offers some suggestions.

To support teachers in designing accessible classroom activities, the DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) Center at the University of Washington provides a helpful model for teachers to think through the needs of students with different abilities.

BEFORE THE FILM

Set up the film and prepare students for viewing by establishing a foundation of information relevant to CHUSKIT.

Read the synopsis of CHUSKIT in the About the Film section of this guide to introduce students to the film and its story.

Help set the scene for CHUSKIT by establishing the location of the film in the Himalayas. A map can be found here on PBS Nature.

Pick a few film facts to share with your students:

- The film was shot entirely in the Ladakh region, which is in the northwestern part of the Himalayas.
- The Himalayas have some of Earth's highest peaks, including Mount Everest—located in the eastern part of the Himalayas.
- The Ladakh region is in the area known as Jammu and Kashmir, which is administered by India. It lies along the borders of India, Pakistan, and China and has been the subject of a land dispute for decades.
- The culture of the Ladakh region is similar to Tibetan Buddhism. The film prominently features the Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala ritual. If time allows, you can introduce the ritual to students by showing this video (Runtime: 3:17).
- The traditional language is Ladakhi—a Tibetan language. It is the language used in the film, which is subtitled in English.
- The girl who plays Chuskit in the film, Dewa Lhamo, is from the Ladakh region. The filmmaker held a casting call with a local theater group where she auditioned for the film.

- The film was inspired by the true story of Sonam, a nine-year-old with cerebral palsy living in a remote Himalayan village. The filmmaker's sister, who works with differently abled children in the region, helped make it possible for Sonam to attend school.
- The film was directed by Priya Ramasubban, a filmmaker from India who has made films for National Geographic, Discovery, and the History Channel. You can also show students [this interview with the filmmaker](#) (Runtime: 1:37).



AFTER THE FILM

After watching the film, it can be helpful to allow students time to organize their thoughts by journaling for five minutes. Make sure to be clear if and how you plan to review or grade journals. If students need writing prompts, here are some suggestions:

- What was the main idea of the film?
- What did you like about the film?
- Is there anything you would change about the film if you were the filmmaker?
- What was your favorite scene from the film? Why did you like it?
- Would you recommend this film to a friend? Why or why not?

LESSON 1: THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

This lesson helps students identify key elements of a story and asks them to think about the choices the filmmaker of CHUSKIT made in storytelling. Activities encourage students to practice storytelling as a way to communicate ideas and build empathy for characters both real and fictional.

QUESTIONS

- How did you feel after watching the film CHUSKIT?
- What was the main idea of the film?
- Who was the protagonist?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the character of Chuskit?
- What does tenacity mean? How did Chuskit show tenacity?
- How did Chuskit become disabled? How do you know?
- What is the conflict in the story that Chuskit must overcome?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to include the scenes with the monks creating the mandala? How did it add to the story?
- Can you think of any other movies that have a protagonist with a disability?
- Do you think more movies should have protagonists with disabilities? Why or why not?

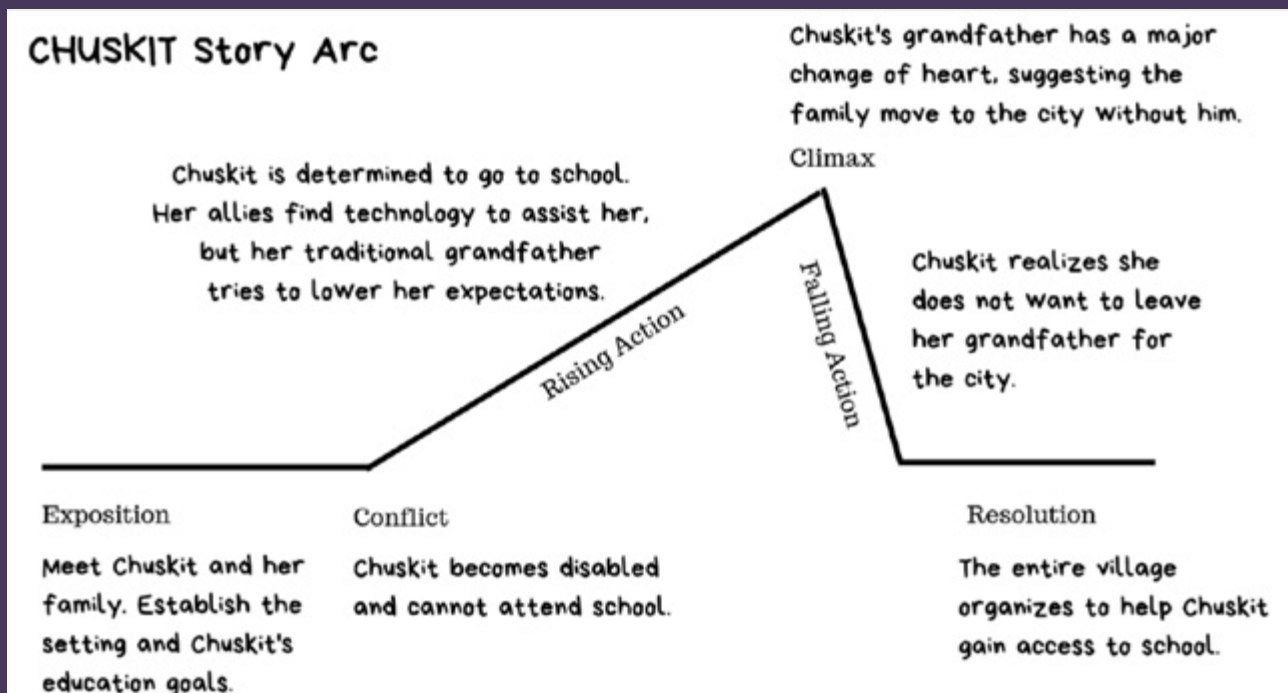
ACTIVITY | LARGE GROUP TIME: 15 MINUTES

PLOT THE STORY ARC FROM CHUSKIT

Distribute a copy of the Story Arc Handout included at the end of this guide for students to review.

Draw a story arc line for the class to see and work together to plot the story of CHUSKIT as a class.

Here is a reference of what your completed story arc might look like:



ACTIVITY | LARGE GROUP TIME: 15 MINUTES

PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING WITH DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST MIA IVES RUBLEE

Explain to students that you are going to do an “active listening” exercise. Here’s how it will work:

- As a class, students will watch the short video (linked below), featuring an interview with disability rights activist Mia Ives Rublee.
- As students watch and listen to the video, they should pay close attention to what Mia says in the video.
- After watching, the students will try to repeat back phrases that Mia said in the video. They should try to repeat each phrase word-for-word—or as close as they can remember—to what she said.
- Explain that the purpose of this exercise is to practice active listening skills so students can help ensure that people with different abilities are heard when they speak.
- Ask students to try the exercise without writing anything down, explaining that in real life, they probably wouldn’t take notes when talking with someone.
- Students with hearing impairments can elect to watch the video individually on their personal devices, if necessary.

After explaining and answering any questions, have the students watch [this video](#) created by Siena Heights University (Runtime: 3:27).

- Have the students take turns repeating back phrases and thoughts that Mia said in the video, and then have a reflection on how this exercise felt. Some discussion questions include:
 - Was it easy to remember exactly what Mia said?
 - What do you think “active listening” means?
 - How does it feel when people listen to you?
 - How do you think Mia feels when people listen to what she has to say?
 - What can people learn from Mia?



ACTIVITY | SMALL GROUPS TIME: 50 MINUTES

READ THE STORY “A PAINTER NAMED KENNEDY” AND SKETCH A STORYBOARD

- Distribute copies of the story “[A Painter Named Kennedy](#)” by Jerry McGilll
- Have students form small groups of four and practice reading comprehension by taking turns reading a paragraph from the story aloud to their small groups.
- Then, have them work in small groups to create a storyboard based on the story of Kennedy. Explain that a storyboard is a sketch of how the story will look if you made a movie out of it—they resemble a comic strip when they are finished.
- They should draw several squares on a piece of paper and sketch out scenes from Kennedy’s life. Stick figures are perfectly fine! The goal is to have them think about how they would visually represent the story.
- As an extension, groups can present their storyboards to the class to see how they compare.
- For more teacher tips on storyboarding, see [this lesson plan from Scholastic](#).

ACTIVITY | INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT TIME: 2 WEEKS

READ A BOOK FEATURING A YOUNG PERSON WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY

- Ask your school librarian to help pick a collection of young adult literature featuring protagonists with disabilities. For reference, [here is a list of books recommended by Common Sense Media](#).
- Have students select a book to read from the collection and establish a deadline for when they should complete it.
- If time allows during presentations, invite the class to discuss their reactions to the works shown.
- Once complete, have them write a one-page book report to demonstrate their comprehension of the story. Some prompts for the book report include:
 - Summarize the book in one paragraph, using your own words.
 - Who is the protagonist? How would you describe the protagonist?
 - What does the protagonist like to do? What are their interests or hobbies?
 - How are you similar to the protagonist? How are you different?
 - What is the protagonist trying to achieve?
 - How does the protagonist’s disability affect their life?
 - How does the protagonist feel about their abilities?
 - What is the main message of the story? What did you take away from it?

LESSON 2: ABILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY

This STEM lesson introduces students to various types of disabilities and forms of assistive technology that they may see in their school and community. Discussion questions encourage students to think about the effect technology has on Chuskit's life. Hands-on activities aim to get students involved in making their own community more accessible.

QUESTIONS

What is Chuskit's disability?

- How does Chuskit feel about her disability?
- What obstacles prevent Chuskit from going to school?
- How do you think Chuskit's life would be different if they lived in the city?
- How do you think Chuskit's life would be different if her family were wealthy?
- What does Chuskit's brother represent in the film?
- What does Chuskit's grandfather represent in the film?
- What types of assistive technology did Chuskit use to help her get around?
- How does Chuskit feel after she gets assistive technology?
- What does independence mean? How does it feel to be independent?



ACTIVITY | SMALL GROUPS TIME: 30 MINUTES

PRACTICE INTERNET RESEARCH USING DISABILITY VOCABULARY

- Before this activity, print and cut up the Disability Vocabulary Cards included at the end of this guide.
- Break students into nine small groups and distribute one card to each group.
- Explain to students that they will be doing Internet research in their small groups to write a definition of their disability.
- They must use three reliable sources to write their definition. Have a brief discussion about what to look for using these questions:
 - What makes a source reliable?
 - How do you find the name of a source?
 - How do you find the date the information was published?
 - How do you find the author of the source?
 - How do you determine the author's purpose?
- You can also distribute Teaching Tolerance's "[Choosing Reliable Sources worksheet \(page 1\)](#)" diagram for students to record their research and sources.
- Allow at least 15 minutes for students to conduct Internet research on their word.
- Then have each group tape their word to a classroom wall and present their definition and the names of their sources to the class. After all groups have had a turn, you should have a "word wall" made up of the disability vocabulary.
- As an extension, you could also have each group fill out [this worksheet from Teaching Tolerance](#).
- For more on Understanding Disabilities, see [the full lesson plan available from Teaching Tolerance](#).



HANDS-ON ACTIVITY | TIME: 40-60 MINUTES

EXPLORE DIFFERENT TYPES OF STEM ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Talk to your science department and your school administrators to see what forms of STEM assistive technology you have available for students with disabilities. [Here are some examples.](#)
- Work with your school staff to do a demonstration of various forms of assistive technology available for students to use at school.
- Then allow students to try out the technology to see close up how it functions. Depending on what technology is available, set up a few stations so that students can practically apply their piece of technology.

ACTIVITY | INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT TIME: 30 MINUTES

STEPHEN HAWKING BIOGRAPHY ORGANIZERS

- [Select an age-appropriate biography graphic organizer](#) and distribute a copy to each student.
- Ask students to fill out the biography graphic organizer based on Stephen Hawking. You can ask students a few set-up questions, such as:
 - Raise your hand if you have heard of Stephen Hawking.
 - What do you know about him? Why was Stephen Hawking famous?
- Explain to students that you will show them a video about Hawking's life to get them started. They are welcome to take notes on their organizers as they listen to [this video created by TIME](#) (Runtime: 3:52).
- The video may not answer all of the questions, so allow time for them to do additional Internet research to complete their biography graphic organizers.

ACTIVITY | SERVICE LEARNING TIME: 50 MINUTES

ADD A LOCATION TO WHEELMAP.ORG

- Have students form pairs to look at [Wheelmap.org](#), which maps wheelchair accessibility worldwide, on their personal devices. You can also download the app for free on Apple and Android devices.
- Allow about 15 minutes for students to familiarize themselves with the website by looking through the information input for their area. They should also review [the FAQ section](#) to understand more about how the map is coded.
- Have students select a location at their school or nearby to add to the map. They will need a measuring tape, a camera, and a device with Internet access to answer the questions about accessibility.

LESSON 3: EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT

This lesson builds on the understanding that education is a human right and Chuskit is entitled to it. Yet many students like Chuskit cannot access schools. Discussion questions encourage students to appreciate their own access to education, and think about ways they can make their school more inclusive to students with different abilities. Activities also encourage students to learn about disability rights history and the rights that advocates have won in America.

QUESTIONS

- Why does Chuskit want to go to school so badly?
- How did it feel to see Chuskit be denied an education because of her disability?
- What do you think Chuskit's life would be like if she didn't get an education?
- What is an advocate? Who advocated for Chuskit?
- How did Chuskit's friends and family advocate for her?
- How did it feel when the community came together to help Chuskit go to school?
- Do you think our school is accessible to students with disabilities? Why or why not?
- What would make our school more inclusive for students with disabilities?
- Do you think every person should have the right to go to school?
- How would you respond if someone told you that you couldn't go to school?



ACTIVITY | PAIR SHARE TIME: 20 MINUTES

WATCH & DISCUSS A VIDEO FROM UNICEF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- As a class, watch [the video from UNICEF Children with Disabilities](#) (Runtime: 2:24)
- Then, have students form pairs and discuss the following media literacy questions for 5-10 minutes:
 - What is the main idea of this video?
 - What organization made this video? What do you know about this organization?
 - How was this video made accessible for viewers with disabilities?
 - How is "inclusive education" defined in this video?
 - What did the people in the video say about their education experience?
- After pair sharing, have students discuss their reflections as a large group.

ACTIVITY | INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT TIME: 1 WEEK

WRITE A RESEARCH PAPER ON AN EVENT FROM THE AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT TIMELINE

- Have each student select an event listed on [the timeline compiled by the National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth](#).
- Ask them to research the event and write a 2-3 page historical research paper.
- Research sources should be reliable (see the small group activity listed in Lesson 2 for more on this) and properly cited.
- You can also require that students include one quote from someone involved in the historical event.

ACTIVITY | SMALL GROUPS TIME: 3 DAYS

CREATE POSTERS TO RECOGNIZE DISABILITY HISTORY WEEK (SECOND WEEK IN OCTOBER IN CALIFORNIA)

- Double check your state's education website to confirm the designated Disability History Week and any relevant themes. If your state's week does not align with your schedule, you can also select your own week or month.
- Have students work in small groups to create a poster on a subject of their choosing related to disability. They should brainstorm ideas as a small group and decide on one to pitch to you. Help them develop their ideas by asking clarifying questions and providing feedback.
- Each poster should include both images and text. As an example, you could show them [this poster of Lydia X. Z. Brown](#) from Amplifier Art (this poster is available for free to download and print for your school).
- Allow time for at least one round of revisions, and grade students on clarity and creativity.
- If you have access to the proper printing technology, students can use the following design tools to create their posters:
 - [Canva](#)
 - [Pictochart](#)
 - [Comic Life](#)
 - [Adobe Spark](#)
 - [Adobe Illustrator](#)

ACTIVITY | LARGE GROUP TIME: 2 WEEKS

CREATE AN ACCESSIBLE ANTI-BULLYING PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT (PSA)

- Share with your class that researchers have found that “children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers” (PACER, 2019) and ask them to work together to create a PSA to discourage bullying of students with disabilities in your school.
- Explain that PSAs are videos created to raise awareness and change public attitudes and behavior toward a social issue. A few examples include:
 - [TRUTH anti-smoking PSA](#)
 - [“Because of You” anti-bullying PSA](#)
 - [Sandy Hook Promise anti-gun violence PSA](#) (warning: this video contains images of a school shooter; please review in advance).
- Some discussion questions about these PSAs include:
 - How are they similar? How are they different?
 - Who is the audience for each video?
 - How would you describe the tone of each video?
 - What problem are they trying to solve?
- Split the class into three groups and assign one of these three PSA audiences to each group: 1) bullies 2) bystanders 3) students who have been bullied.
- Require that students include one fact from [PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center fact sheet](#) in their video.
- Require that students make their videos accessible to people with disabilities by including these minimum requirements:
 - Captions in a legible font
 - An audio description of visuals on screen
 - High contrast colors
 - Transcript published with the video
- To show students an example of an accessible video, see the Pair Share exercise in this lesson. More video accessibility guidelines [can be found here](#).
- For more on teaching PSAs, see [this resource from TeachWriting.org](#).
- For more on video production, your students can tour [this collection from PBS Learning Media](#).
- Here are recommendations on free and inexpensive video editing software:
 - [Apple iMovie](#) (video)
 - [Adobe Premiere Rush](#) (video)
 - [Adobe Spark](#) (graphics and video)

STANDARDS

Common Core Standards English Language Arts Literacy

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8 - Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5 - Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4 - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

For more, see [Common Core State Standards Initiative](#)

Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards

Identity - Students will develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society.

Identity - Students will recognize traits of the dominant culture, their home culture, and other cultures and understand how they negotiate their own identity in multiple spaces.

Diversity - Students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including themselves) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups.

Diversity - Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political, and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified.

Justice - Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).

Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.

For more, see [Teaching Tolerance](#)

RESOURCES

FILM

- [CHUSKIT](#)
- [AUTISM IN LOVE](#)
- [BULLY](#)
- [LIVES WORTH LIVING](#)
- [MR. CONNOLLY HAS ALS](#)
- [WHEN I WALK](#)

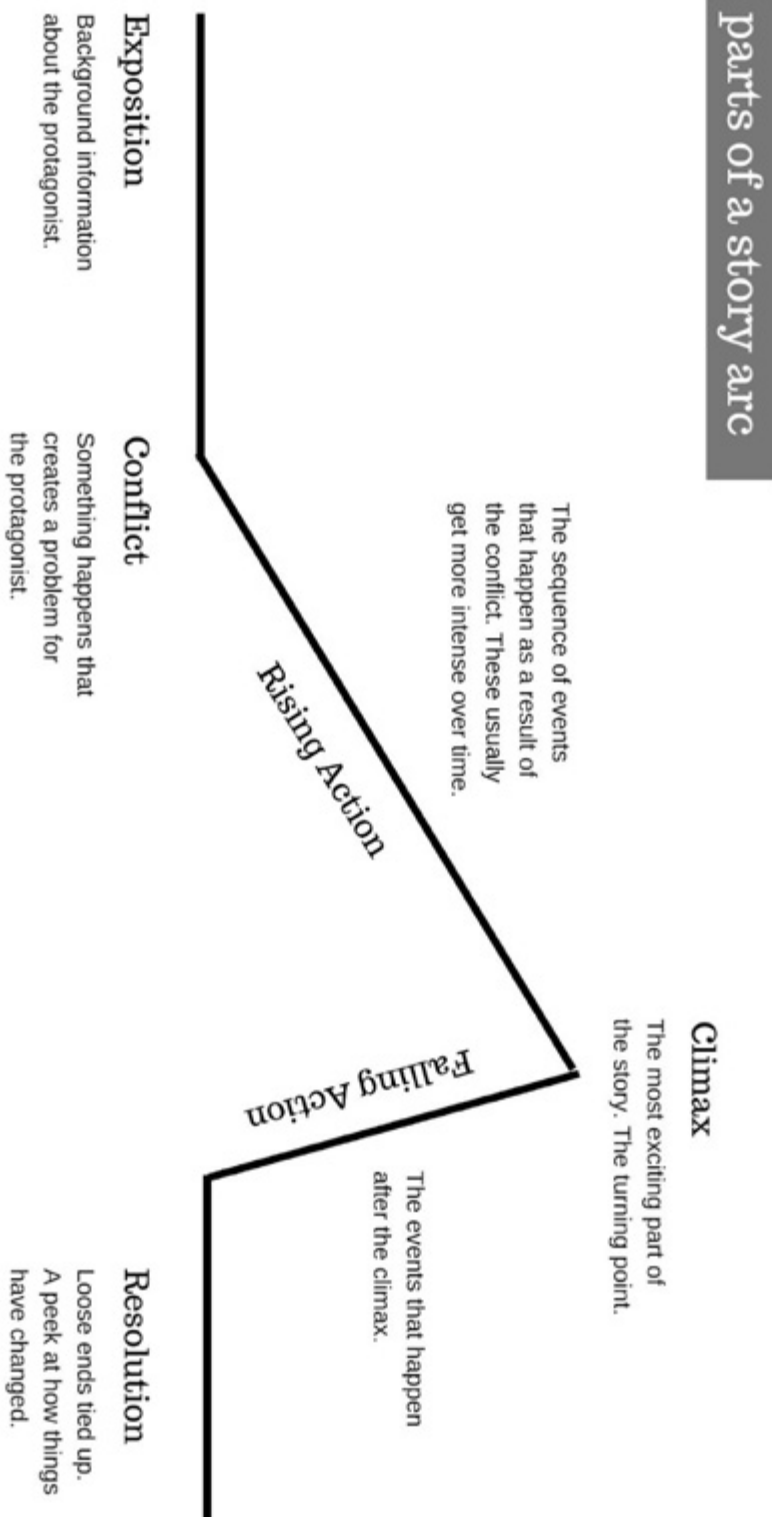
ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- [ACLU](#)
- [Disability Rights California](#)
- [National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth](#)
- [Youth Organizing! Disabled and Proud](#)
- [United Nations](#)

MEDIA LITERACY ORGANIZATIONS

- [National Association for Media Literacy Education](#)
- [Common Sense Media](#)

HANDOUT: STORY ARC



HANDOUT: DISABILITY VOCABULARY CARDS

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER	AUTISM
BLINDNESS	CEREBRAL PALSY
DEAFNESS	DOWN SYNDROME
DYSLEXIA	INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY
MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY	PARAPLEGIA