

Intercultural Communication Class 12
Film Review 1 & 2 by Dee Adams

Cool Runnings

Cool Runnings is based on the true story of the of the Jamaican bobsled team created on the Caribbean island and their struggle to build a group of athletes who could compete in the 1980's Winter Olympics in Calgary, Canada (IMBD, Jamaica bobsled federation).

The film opens on the island and illustrates the team leader's repeated attempts to recruit an American coach to teach them the sport of bobsledding. That initial challenge is played for laughs through the intercultural communication between the Jamaicans and the American coach John Candy. **Kinesics and illustrators (Hall, p. 162, 170)**, such as the use of a billiard cue stick by Candy to emphasize forcefully a complete lack of interest in coaching a bobsled team on an island without snow.

Once initial team members are recruited, several other concepts are depicted. For example, team member Junior Bevil, the son of a wealthy Jamaican business owner has a conflict with his father over his **identity and role expectations (Hall, p. 102)**. The senior Bevil believes that his son is wasting life as a member of the team "sliding around on his backside," but should instead make use of his elite education and pursue a job in a distinguished accounting firm. Junior Bevil is not interested in the life his father believes he should pursue. He wants to be an Olympian. Junior Bevil must not only confront the **relational aspect** of the identity issue and **role expectations**, he must come to terms with his **personal identity (Hall, p. 102)** and his wish to assert independence.

The team raises the money to get to Canada and the Winter Olympics, but they barely have enough money for equipment. The bobsledders begin to compare the differences between their team and members from other countries. They find themselves competing against elite, affluent countries, such as Switzerland. **Communal identity and differences surface (Hall, p.108, 106)**. As a result, the Jamaicans gradually begin to copy aspects of the Swiss culture in the belief that the change will ensure their success. The results are humorous and disastrous. So the bobsledders examine who they are on macro and micro levels. The Jamaicans discover that in order to compete successfully in the intercultural program, the Olympics, they must first understand, and embrace their unique differences.

Teacher Comment:

Good review, but short what did you learn about the culture by watching the film?

References

IMBD. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0106611/>

Jamaicabobsled team. Retrieved from

http://www.jamaicabobsleighteam.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53:crashing-start&catid=34:mens-history&Itemid=64

Mississippi Masala

Mississippi Masala takes place in the early 1970s in Uganda and in Greenwood Mississippi in 1990 (IMBD). Political unrest forces an African born attorney of Asian descent, his wife, and small daughter to flee the country leaving behind their property, which the government confiscates under the theory that Africa should be for black Africans (Ethnocentrism, Hall, p. 198).

Several conflicts unfold during the film. The initial conflict, which is seemingly intercultural, transpires in Uganda between the attorney and a black African teacher, a friend since childhood (Historically Shared Culture, Hall, p. 6.) After granting an interview to the BBC, the attorney is jailed for speaking out against the politics of the Ugandan dictator who orders tAsian Africans expelled from the country.

When the teacher gains his friend's release from jail, they argue over which race actually belongs in Uganda (Communal Identity, Hall p. 109).

Friends since childhood, the politics of race terminates the friendship and the attorney and his family eventually move to a town in Mississippi where they join other Asians who own motels.

By the early 1990s, the attorney continues to fight a legal battle for his property with the Ugandan government. His daughter, Mena, living with them is 24 years old, single, and cleans motel rooms. A conflict develops between them, initially because the father believes that his daughter belongs in college and should not be cleaning bathrooms (Relational identity, Hall, p. 109). However, Mena is comfortable with the work (Personal Identity, Hall, p.109).

The relational conflict between father and daughter worsens after Mena meets an African-American carpet cleaner. When members of the Indian community discover that Mena is having an affair, there is a public brawl, and she and her beau are arrested. Her father is summoned to bail her out and discovers her secret affair. He and his wife feel publicly humiliated (Communal Identity, Hall p. 109).

After the Asian business community discovers Mena's affair, they boycott the carpet cleaner's services. The attorney decides to move his family back to Africa, but Mena runs away with her beau.

Meanwhile, the attorney returns to Uganda to attend court, and make peace with his friend, but discovers that his friend was murdered in the early 1970s. He decides to drop his lawsuit and returns to Mississippi where he realizes that his heart is with his wife (Personal & Relational Identity, Hall, p. 109).

The film highlights the relationship between culture and identity and how politics play a role in shaping destiny. For instance, the attorney was an East Indian, but had never been to India. He considered Africa his home. He was born in Uganda because the British government brought his grandfather to the country to help build a railroad, and his ancestor decided to stay in Africa and raise a family.

Within the exiled Asian community in Mississippi, prejudicial views were rampant. For instance, Mena had a light brown complexion, but she was considered too dark; fairer skin was considered more acceptable (Prejudice, Hall p. 202).

Reference

IMBD. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0102456/>

Teacher Comments: Excellent review and application of class terms.