

"Someone Sang for Me"

A Portrait Of Educator Jane Sapp

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What did I like about the film:

This film *Someone Sang For Me* I believe unfolds two powerful messages for the educator. Firstly, that we must **approach our children with a pro-active attitude**, a spirit of vision, and allow them to see a healthier tomorrow through our eyes; and secondly, that we must **develop the ability to hear them through the mediums best suited to them**, and then to **support or create learning venues, (based on their familiar and comfortable style of communication) as valid and needed conduits of education and social uplifts.**

People of African decent have always used songs and music to support celebrations and to communicate information to one another. In most black churches today the minister will deliver his sermon in a rhythmic fashion that both stirs the soul and captures the attention of the hearer. This film demonstrates one of the most basic practices among black folk throughout the ages, that of educating through rhythmic story telling and/or singing. In this film Jane Sapp epitomizes the ideal teacher, whose love and compassion is equaled only by her insightful awareness of the power, intelligence, resilience and untapped energy of the children around her. The film focuses on someone who approaches liberation and education of our children from the perspective of children being resource-abundant, rather than resource-deficient, thereby supporting them in making internal mental shifts that heighten their self-image and develop their awareness of the possibilities and opportunities around them. Jane Sapp, who is a longtime civil rights activist and who has worked with a number of renowned civil rights leaders, has skillfully incorporated a form of "popular education," as opposed to "banking education," into her program. Banking education assumes that the subjects (children) come to the classroom with little to no information, and that the educator has all the knowledge to be deposited or "banked" into the minds of these children. Popular education acknowledges the skill and information level of the teacher, while placing the greater emphasis on the experiences and information the children already possess, and it draws upon that information as a guide toward new information and different experiences. Popular education depends greatly on peer education and circular leadership to facilitate a listening, reflection, and action process. This process supports the moving of individuals and groups from a state of helplessness to a place of powerfulness. Jane shared this powerful experience with our children through the codification of songwriting and singing.

I especially appreciated the manner in which the film captured and recorded these early stages of the attitude transformation, paradigm shifting, if you will, that these children experienced as they interacted with Jane and each other. The film allowed the children to describe in their own words the hopeless, debilitating, and seemingly inescapable worlds they live in, then gave a snapshot of the embryonic evolution of these same children emerging into "dare to think differently" and "I believe I'm better than that" kind of thinkers, who for the first time began to assume the authority to redefine their worlds.

This film was done in a community not unlike other urban communities across the country, Springfield, MA, with its struggles with gangs, drugs, high unemployment, teen pregnancy,

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homicide, and suicide. It is a city where HIV/AIDS is on the rise (especially among African Americans), and the rate of high school dropouts among minority youths continues to climb. Meanwhile, parental involvement and control are on a decline, and more of our youth are being incarcerated at alarmingly younger ages. The film suggests that the ingredients of uncompromising love and unwavering faith, coupled with consistent and dedicated work, can and do make a difference – even in the lives of those who are considered the worst of the untouchables. Having a passion for liberation and acknowledging that “our liberty is in truth bound to that of the most downtrodden and voiceless of our community” are the first steps toward becoming an effective educator.

This film is an excellent tool for anyone engaged in the liberation of young minds imprisoned by social oppressions, disguised systematically in the many challenges of urban living.

What could other church groups gain from seeing this film?

This film will support the pastors, church leaders, Sunday school teachers, and choir directors in developing a deeper understanding for the need of helping our children find their voices. Someone Sang for Me reminds us that there is as great a need for us to be able to hear and learn from our children as there is for our children to be able to hear and learn from us.

Singing is an empowering, uplifting, and liberating experience, utilized by many communities of faith. This is true especially among the black faith community. Almost every area of service is accented by some kind of song or rhythmic representation to support ushering in the next phase of the service. These songs and musical interludes are a kind of voice for the church leaders, choirs and lay parishioners to speak to and with an unseen force that helps and guides their services and lives. Many of our children live in a voiceless world, and, surprisingly, a number of them are in the church. The need to have a venue through which to express oneself and communicate one’s needs is critical. Many of our children who live in our nation’s urban blight, surrounded and victimized by drug addiction, physical and psychological abuses, abandonment and poverty have no way of communicating their frustrations, nor the opportunities to showcase their intelligence. This film demonstrates an intentional use of songs and rhymes (such as many of the songs used in our church services today) to reach the unreachable and to take them on a journey towards finding their individual and collective voices.

Church leaders will see that Jane Sapp very skillfully listens to these children describe their world and engages them in a series of groups where they do songwriting and singing. She shows us how to teach children to push themselves and thereby push the negative thoughts out. This listening, reflection, and action process supports these children in redefining their world, while developing feelings of control and empowerment, because things start to make sense and become clearer to them. Through this process, she allows these youths to discover the power to change things from the inside out. Songs like “Welcome to My World,” “There’s a River Flowing in My Soul,” “I Want To Be Strong,” and “This Little Light of Mine” promote self-actualization through a repetitive kind of positive self-talk. And songs such as “We’ve All Got Stories,” “Let Me Be Your Friend,” and “We Are an African People” suggest to our youth that there is a connection between people that transcends our race and skin color. These are all themes taught and preached in the church every week and are obviously parallel themes between the school and the church, between the teacher and the preacher.

What are some questions that can be asked before and after the viewing of this film?

Some possible themes from which questions can be drawn are:

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1. Taking a proactive "resource-abundance" approach towards educating our children.
2. Recognizing and acknowledging the experiences of our youth as needed and necessary building blocks of education and social development.
3. Developing the skill to listen to our children as they describe their world, as they perceive it.
4. Exploring and using traditional and non-traditional activities to support educational, social, emotional, and spiritual growth of our children.
5. Developing stronger self-esteem through writing songs and singing.

From the above themes, I believe the following questions can be asked before/after the viewing of this film:

(These questions might be used as icebreakers and/or intros to the film)

- Tell me three things you want to achieve in your life.
- Can you share with us your feelings about your community/school/church/home life?
- What does a happy home/church/school/community look like?
- How important is it to you to be understood and do you think that you are understood?
- Whom do you expect to be able to talk to about your issues? Can you?
- What do you think happens when people have something to say but can't because they stop themselves or others stop them?
- How do others stop us from expressing ourselves?
- What kind of things do we sometimes do that prevents us from being able to express ourselves?
- What do you enjoy doing that allows you to feel free?

These are some questions that might be asked after the viewing of the film:

- What do you think is the meaning of this film's title, *Someone Sang for Me*?
- What kind of songs do you like to sing/listen to? Why?
- How do you think the children of this film saw themselves before they started singing?
- Can anyone identify with any of these children? How?
- How did these children see themselves in relationship to their communities?
- How do you feel about your community?
- What kind of conditions did the film show as things that supported or blocked opportunities for success among the children in the film?
- Describes some of the things in our community that either support or block opportunities for you?
- How did you feel about the way the children learn to talk about their issues?
- What kind of activities would help you express the way you feel about your environment (home, school, church, and neighborhoods)?

Books and other material that might be referenced to support teaching our youth:

Some of the following materials are suggested for those who work specifically with and for the uplift of the African American child.

- *Yearning (Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics)*, by Bell Hooks
- *Chains And Images of Psychological Slavery*, by Na'Im Akbar, Ph.D.
- *Black Power (The Politics of Liberation in America)*, by Stokely Carmichael
- *Race Matters*, by Cornel West

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- *The 7 Habits Of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey
- *Principle Centered Leadership*, by Stephen R. Covey
- *Beyond Roots: In Search of Blacks in the Bible*, by William Dwight McKissic, Sr.
- *The Negro In New York*, by James Egert Allen, Ed, D., LL.D.
- *The Community Of Self*, by Dr. Na'Im Akbar
- *Our Story 1950-2000: A History Of African America in the Final Years of the Second Millennium*, by Richard Sagor
- *Blue Eyed* (film: Racial Discrimination), by Jane Elliott***

The recommended film, *Blue Eyed*, is critical for white Americans engaged in the education of Black Americans. Not understanding the subtle but crippling effect of racial prejudices and stereotypes that are often brought into the classroom by good-hearted and well-meaning white administrators and teachers has historically proven disastrous to generations of black children.