

*Seedlings Foundation & Shadow Creek Films
Present*



The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia



United States / 2012 / Documentary / English / 51 minutes

HBO Network Broadcast October 29, 2012

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LOGLINE

A dyslexic high school student pursues admission to a leading college – a challenge for a boy who didn’t learn to read until 4th grade. Additional accounts of the dyslexic experience from children, experts, and iconic leaders at the top of their fields, help us to understand that dyslexia, a persistent problem with learning to read, can be as great a gift as it sometimes is an obstacle.

SYNOPSIS

DYLAN, a dyslexic high school senior, hopes to attend a highly competitive university. In spite of his accomplishments in the arts, sports and academics, Dylan is a poor speller and slow reader. Will these limitations prevent him from getting into a top school?

ALLISON, a dyslexic graduate student at Columbia University, reveals her lifelong desire to surpass the low expectations of others, borne from their misassumptions about learning disabilities.

SKYE, a bright dyslexic seventh-grader from Manhattan, confesses that dance competition is her “release valve” from the pressure to keep pace academically with her classmates.

SEBASTIAN, a ski-racing fifth-grader from Connecticut, helps us understand why providing dyslexics extra time on tests is not an unfair advantage: dyslexia takes time away from the student; special accommodation in test situations simply gives him or her the time back.

Mothers of these young adults and children share intimate recollections and observations that suggest a sometimes painful irony: in spite of their clearly high levels of intelligence and creativity, these dyslexics struggle with activities that the rest of the population performs automatically. How can this be?

DRS. SALLY and BENNETT SHAYWITZ, co-directors of the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, discuss how scientific advances illuminate the diagnosis and treatment of dyslexia. Dr. Bennett Shaywitz explains how advances in functional magnetic resonance imaging has made visible what previously was a hidden disability. Dr. Sally Shaywitz explains the “Sea of Strengths” model of dyslexia which emphasizes a sea of strengths of higher critical thinking and creativity surrounding the encapsulated weakness found in children and adults who are dyslexic.

Super-achieving dyslexics revered in their fields – from SIR RICHARD BRANSON and financier CHARLES SCHWAB to politician GAVIN NEWSOM and attorney DAVID BOIES – confirm what the children, experts and families suggest: dyslexia carries with it as many rewards as frustrations.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

By conservative estimates, one in five people are dyslexic. Although very bright and often highly creative, they have a difficult time making sense of written language. I know a little about this paradox. My son, Dylan, is dyslexic.

Like many dyslexics, Dylan is intelligent, thoughtful and intellectually curious – a “big picture” thinker. But at the age of ten, he was barely able to read and write. To say that school was difficult for him is beyond understatement. Now that he is grown and thriving, there are many things that I wish I had known about dyslexia at that time - things that would have helped me understand that his struggle in lower and middle school was not the final verdict on his academic or intellectual ability or ambition. When I was given the extraordinary opportunity to make a film about understanding dyslexia, the mission was simple: make the movie I wish my family could have seen when Dylan was functionally illiterate in 4th grade.

This film reveals that dyslexia is a neurological issue, not a character flaw. It explains that the struggle with the written word is not a measure of one's ability to think, to create, or to solve problems – all valuable skills in the world outside the classroom. This film also reveals that some of our greatest leaders in Business, Law, Politics and Medicine are dyslexics who succeeded in spite of their learning challenges.

The film also shares some practical and occasionally humorous tips on how to deal with dyslexia on a daily basis. Hopefully, this film will help dyslexics and their families realize that the challenges of early education will be behind them one day and that the future can and should be brighter for dyslexics.

It was not easy to cast my wife and son in this movie. We are typically private people, and those who know us will be greatly surprised to see this film. However, the opportunity to help other families in turmoil was important to all of us, particularly my wife, Kyle, who is a life-long educator and now an expert regarding dyslexics and education.

And we were not alone in this; three other families took a risk to share their experiences in order to help others, as did some of the world's better-known leaders in the fields of Law, Politics, and Business. By combining our experiences with the wisdom, creativity and expertise of Drs. Sally and Bennett Shaywitz, top experts in the study and treatment of dyslexia, we hope that a broader and better understanding of dyslexia will help make the world a better place for one in five people worldwide.

- James Redford

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER'S STATEMENT



Dyslexia runs in my family. My father once described himself as a slow reader, but despite this trait he was able to run a conglomerate of 70 individual companies. He loved engineering school where his skills as a problem solver developed. He rarely read novels or anything else for pleasure, except for poetry. He loved reading poetry, which he read to us in the evenings, partly, he said because it was shorter, but also because a good poem had the ability to convey complicated feelings and emotions with economy and grace.

In our film, you will meet some of the most successful dyslexics, such as Richard Branson, Charles Schwab and David Boies. You will also meet young people, like my daughter Allison. When she was younger we had been told she had auditory processing problems, phonemic awareness challenges and a host of other concerns. No one ever used the word dyslexia. Since we didn't understand what she had, it was harder to help her. Her own grit and determination allowed her to achieve her goals, but the lack of knowledge about why she could do some things so well and struggled so much at things that were so easy for others was puzzling and hurtful. Getting her diagnosis and getting extra time for tests made a huge difference for her. I wanted other families to learn more about dyslexia and all of its implications.

I asked Jamie Redford to direct the movie because we share the experience of having raised dyslexic children. Almost two decades ago my husband and I were told our daughter was an enigma to her kindergarten teachers and offered various explanations that proved to have no basis. However, I almost got on the same merry-go round of misinformation when my son, who is twelve years younger than his sister, began displaying the same symptoms. I wanted other families, teachers and administrators to learn what I have had the privilege to learn. This film was borne out of that wish of mine.

Naming these symptoms of dyslexia, recognizing them, and intervening seem to be the strategies that work for the families in our documentary. In the film we see the Redfords and the Lukases choose to take their children out of mainstream schools and put them in special programs. As our son progresses through school we are not harassing him about the things we understand he struggles with, as long as he is putting in genuine effort. We save our nagging for the things he can improve upon by his own efforts. In Dr. Shaywitz's words, we know he has a sea of strengths to rely on and we urge him to do so.

Our hope is that educators and parents will help all dyslexic students get the kinds of interventions they need early on, so they will learn to read and to develop the self-discipline to work hard. With this awareness they can gain the confidence to accomplish their goals, and the self-knowledge to soar with their strengths.

- Karen Pritzker

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER



James Redford writes, produces and directs for film and television. His latest directorial project, *Toxic Hot Seat*, is a documentary film that examines the possible health dangers of chemical flame retardants currently used in upholstered furniture made in the USA. He is also working again with Karen Pritzker on a new documentary that explores the emerging link between childhood trauma and life-long health problems - and what can be done about it. He produced the film *Watershed* about the Colorado River and the acclaimed HBO documentary *Mann V. Ford*. Additionally, James wrote and directed *Quality Time*, an award-winning short comedy starring Jason Patric. He recently combined his passion for music and directing in Andain's new music video, *Much Too Much*.

Other credits include producing *The Kindness of Strangers* which premiered at Sundance in 1999 and was picked up by HBO as well as adapting and directing Showtime's *Spin* starring Stanley Tucci, Dana Delany, and Ruben Blades. Redford also wrote the original screenplays for *Cowboy Up* starring Kiefer Sutherland and Darryl Hannah as well as adapting Tony Hillerman's *Skinwalkers*, a PBS/Mystery! Series that was the highest-rated PBS-scripted program of 2002. *The Acting Thing*, a comedic short written by James, was named best comedic short at the 1996 Houston Film Festival and aired on the Sundance Channel that same year.

After surviving two liver transplants, James founded JRI, a non-profit dedicated to promoting a deeper understanding of the miraculous gift of organ donation. His live musical event, "Share the Beat", has been performed across the country with the help of notable talents such as: Tim McGraw, Phil Vassar, Deana Carter, Ruben Blades, Dana Delaney, James Denton, Ryan Merriman, and Eric Stromer among others.

James also plays guitar for Olive and the Dirty Martinis, a popular Bay Area rock and roll cover band. He is an avid surfer, cyclist, and skier and currently lives in Marin County, CA. To learn more, please visit www.jamesredford.com.

ABOUT THE PRODUCER



Windy Borman brings over a decade of professional experience in film, video, event planning, theatre, and the non-profit sector to The Big Picture.

She is an award-winning Director and Producer, as well as an experienced Researcher, Screenwriter and Social Media Marketing Strategist, with field and studio experience on large- and small-scale productions in the United States, England, Ghana, Thailand and Laos.

As an independent filmmaker, Windy has produced and directed films, videos, PSAs, and documentaries, including the 8-time award-winning “The Eyes of Thailand” www.eyesofthailand.com (2012). Other credits include developing the grassroots screening campaign for Little Town

of Bethlehem (2010), the social media strategy for The River Why (2010), and writing for IndieWire: Women and Hollywood.

From 2003-2005, Windy dedicated two years of her life to teaching middle school Drama and Dance in the South Bronx with Teach For America. In 2006, she founded D.V.A. Productions (www.dvaproductions.com) to produce dramatic, engaging, life-changing documentaries, films and media in the San Francisco Bay Area and around the world. She currently serves on the Advisory Board for Bay Area Women in Film and Media.

THE CHARACTERS

David Boies

David Boies is an attorney repeatedly chosen to try many of the nation's landmark high-profile cases, representing such varied clients as Vice President Al Gore in litigation surrounding the controversial 2000 election, the U.S. Department of Justice in its successful antitrust suit against Microsoft, and gay and lesbian couples in overturning California's ban on gay marriage.

Although unable to read until the third grade, and a slow reader to this day, Boies learned to compensate for his dyslexia by developing outstanding powers of concentration and a keen memory. According to *Time Magazine*, he has an "uncanny ability to recall a key fact, legal citation or piece of contradictory testimony at moments of the most intense pressure." Boies is Chairman of the law firm Boies, Schiller & Flexner.

Sir Richard Branson

Arguably the most successful high school dropout in the history of business, Sir Richard Branson struggled in school due to dyslexia. At age 16 he informed the school's Headmaster he was leaving. The Headmaster replied, "You will either end up in prison or a millionaire."

The words proved prophetic. Branson's entrepreneurial drive was unmatched, and he went on to launch Virgin Records, Virgin Atlantic, Virgin America airlines and hundreds of other ventures. Sir Richard is also an avid explorer and adventurer, who holds various land and air speed records. He is part of a peacemaking group of legendary leaders that includes Nelson Mandela and President Jimmy Carter. He was knighted by the Queen of England.

Sheree Carter-Galvan

Sheree is Sebastian's mom and over the years she has learned the value of engaging Sebastian's teachers along the way, with informative articles to help them understand his core issues. Sheree is general counsel at Yale University.

Delos ("Toby") Cosgrove, MD

Dr. Toby Cosgrove, one of the country most innovative and distinguished cardiac and thoracic surgeons, didn't know he was dyslexic until age 32. Rejected by 12 out of the 13 medical schools to which he applied because of poor test scores, his innate skills as a clinician and his inventive mind have pushed him to the top of his field.

Dr. Cosgrove completed more than 22,000 operations, performed the first minimally invasive mitral valve surgery, and patented 18 medical and clinical products used in surgical environments. He points out that in surgery, dyslexia is an advantage because it favors spatial relationships. Hungry for a different challenge, at the age of 64, Dr. Cosgrove became the president and CEO of Cleveland Clinic. Under his tutelage, the Clinic has flourished to a \$4.6 billion healthcare system stretching from Cleveland to Florida, Toronto, and soon Abu Dhabi. *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked the Cleveland Clinic one of the top three hospitals in the U.S.

Sebastian Galvan

Sebastian is a highly creative student in 5th grade. He credits working extra hard and using things like flashcards for his success in school, and encourages all kids with dyslexia to share the facts with their friends. He is an avid ski racer and has competed on the national level in his age group.

Geralyn Lucas

Geralyn shares a home with two dyslexics: with daughter Skye and husband Tyler (who realized he was dyslexic after his daughter received her diagnosis). Geralyn encourages all parents to never give up on their child's education. A writer and journalist, she is the author of *Why I Wore Lipstick to My Mastectomy*.

Skye Lucas

Skye Lucas is a 7th grade student in Manhattan with dyslexia who remembers initially hating school and often pretending to be sick to avoid going to class. After attending The Windward School for Dyslexics, Skye attends a mainstream school and enjoys it, now that she has had the help she needed to understand her dyslexia.

Tyler Lucas, MD

Tyler Lucas is a highly successful orthopedic surgeon who remembers struggling with reading but was not aware of his disorder until he began to research dyslexia after his daughter, Skye, was diagnosed as dyslexic. Tyler emphasizes that dyslexia should not be referred to as a learning disability but rather a learning ability in that it encourages deeper thinking.

Gavin Newsom

Gavin Newsom is the current Lieutenant Governor of California and previously Mayor of San Francisco from 2003-2011. Diagnosed at age five, but unaware of his condition until 5th grade because his mother didn't want him to use his disability as a crutch, Newsom labored to read, spell and work with numbers.

When asked to speak to students about his experiences, Newsom is gratified when parents tell him how inspiring it is to their dyslexic children to know he shares their disability and has achieved success, so they can too. The key, he tells students, is to "develop discipline, for when you can apply discipline to a problem in life, you can solve any problem. When you start to learn that, your self-esteem begins to change, and then your sense of self and possibility, every aspect of your life, small and large."

Bonnie Patten

Bonnie Patten is the Executive Director of Truth In Advertising, a non-profit watch dog group. As a litigation attorney, Patten successfully defended physicians in complex and unique medical claims. "A lawyer needs to read vast amounts of material, to understand and remember what the material says, and to pay attention to details. To catch nuances that others may have missed and then distill it all down to its essence so a jury can understand it." And what makes Patten especially good at her job? Being dyslexic.

"Ironically, my dyslexia sometimes helps me pick up on details that turn out to be pivotal," Patten says. "I can't glance through case law and documents related to a specific lawsuit and immediately get the gist of what's going on. I have to review everything, sometimes more than once. Reading in this methodical way takes more time – I am forced to pay attention to every single word – but it's not such a bad thing. In a profession in which an "and" or an "or" can make all the difference, my reading style is a positive, not a negative. You would say it gives me a little bit of an edge."

Karen Pritzker

Karen Pritzker is the Executive Producer of *The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia*. She is the mother of Allison Schwartz. She is the co-founder of The My Hero Project, President of Seedling Foundation and a former magazine editor. Her freelance work has appeared in numerous publications including *Success*, *Seventeen*, *Kirkus Reviews* and *Newsday*. She is the mother of four children and lives with her husband and four dogs in Stony Creek, CT.

Dylan Redford

Dylan Redford, a high school senior, is the son of Kyle and James Redford. Dylan struggled to such a degree growing up with dyslexia that even his mother, a teacher, worried that her obviously intelligent son might not be accepted into a competitive college. She reports that Dylan never gave up on himself.

Kyle Redford

Kyle Redford is the mother of Dylan and a 5th grade teacher at Marin Country Day School in Corte Madera, CA. She writes articles about dyslexia and education and is currently writing an educational survival guide for dyslexics and their families.

Charles Schwab

Charles “Chuck” Schwab founded the first discount brokerage firm in America, helped solidify online investing as an everyday tool, and is a pioneer in helping millions of ordinary Americans take control of their savings and investments through the Charles Schwab Corporation.

He also had no idea he was dyslexic until age 40, after learning of his son’s diagnosis. Although he failed both French and English as a freshman at Stanford University, his strong conceptual capabilities helped him solve complicated business problems. After completing an Economics degree, he continued at Stanford to earn an MBA. “Even though I couldn’t read quickly, I could imagine things much faster than people who were stuck thinking sequentially. I could visualize how things would look at the end of the tunnel.” Schwab formed the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation to assist children with dyslexia.

Allison Schwartz

Allison Schwartz is the daughter of Karen Pritzker and was not diagnosed with dyslexia until age 23. Allison remembers overhearing a conversation when she was in 4th grade about how she would never be able to master geography or language (she went on to learn Farsi *and* Arabic and had a Bat Mitzvah in Hebrew.) Armed with determination and countless boxes of flash cards she made to memorize study materials, Allison excelled. She is a graduate of the University of Chicago and received her master’s degree in American Studies from Columbia University in 2008. Allison has worked at the New Haven Advocate, The Cook County Prosecutor’s office and as a fellow for the Correctional Association of New York.

Bennett Shaywitz, MD

Dr. Bennett Shaywitz, a pediatric neurologist, is the Charles and Helen Schwab Professor in Dyslexia and Learning Development, Chief of Pediatric Neurology and Co-Director of the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity at the Yale University School of Medicine.

A member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science, Dr. Shaywitz, the author of more than 300 scientific publications, uses functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to identify a neural signature for dyslexia, making a previously hidden disability visible, and demonstrating the brain basis for the accommodation of extra time needed by dyslexic readers on high-stakes standardized tests.

Sally Shaywitz, MD

Dr. Sally Shaywitz, a developmental pediatrician, serves on the faculty of Yale University School of Medicine as the Audrey G. Ratner Professor in Learning Development and is the Co-Director of the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity (YCDC) as well as the Executive Director of its website. Dr. Shaywitz is a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science, and is the author of over 200 scientific publications, including the top-selling book on the subject, *Overcoming Dyslexia* (Knopf, 2003; Vintage, 2005).

Dr. Shaywitz conceptualized the “Sea of Strengths” model of dyslexia which emphasizes a sea of strengths of higher critical thinking and creativity surrounding the encapsulated weakness in spoken language found in children and adults who are dyslexic. She is currently writing a new book to help dyslexic children, their parents and teachers.

MYTHS AND TRUTHS ABOUT DYSLEXIA

©Overcoming Dyslexia, Dr. Sally Shaywitz, MD

MYTH

Dyslexia is a visual problem; Dyslexic children and adults see and write letters and words backwards. If a child does not reverse b's and d's or p's and q's, he or she cannot be dyslexic.

TRUTH

Dyslexia is fundamentally a problem in spoken language; it is not a visual problem. Many children reverse their letters when learning to write, regardless of whether or not they have dyslexia.

MYTH

Dyslexia primarily affects boys.

TRUTH

Both males and females can be dyslexic. In a study published in 1990 in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the Shaywitzes demonstrated that dyslexia affects comparable numbers of boys and girls. Although more boys are referred by their teachers for evaluation, these referrals appear to reflect the more rambunctious behavior of boys in the classroom.

MYTH

Smart people can't be dyslexic; if you are dyslexic, you can't be very smart.

TRUTH

Some of the very brightest boys and girls struggle to read. Dyslexia occurs in people of all levels of intelligence. Many gifted people at the top of their fields are dyslexic.

MYTH

People who are dyslexic are unable to read.

TRUTH

Most commonly, dyslexic children and adults do learn to read; the problem is the effort they must exert in order to read. Other people, no smarter or more capable, become “fluent” readers early on, so that reading is automatic, fast, and pleasurable. In contrast, dyslexic children remain “manual” readers who read slowly and with great effort.

MYTH

There are no clues to dyslexia before a child enters school.

TRUTH

Since reading is based on spoken language, hints of potential dyslexia can be detected in a child before he or she ever enters school. Children with dyslexia often have slightly delayed speech and don’t recognize rhyming words. There is often a family history of reading difficulties. Testing can be performed early on and helpful intervention may prevent many unnecessary difficulties.

MYTH

If you perform well in school, you can’t be dyslexic.

TRUTH

Some dyslexics perform very well in school; these students are highly motivated and work incredibly hard; many have received the necessary accommodations – such as receiving extra time to complete standardized tests – that allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge. Dyslexic students have completed rigorous programs at highly selective colleges, graduate and professional schools.

For more information, please visit the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity at
<http://dyslexia.yale.edu/Myths.html>

PRODUCTION CREDITS

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