

LIFE, ANIMATED



GRADES 5-12 CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILM:

Life, Animated is a coming-of-age documentary about Owen Suskind, who lives with autism and used animated Disney movies as a prism through which to connect with the world. A class screening of the film may complement an Art, Health or Social Science curriculum, and will encourage students to consider the experience of growing up with autism or developmental difference. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will challenge students to think critically about disability, creativity, empathy and the definition of a meaningful life. Discussion questions and supplemental materials facilitate further research into related topics such as the relationship between fiction and reality, and role of storytelling in defining a personal narrative.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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SAN FRANCISCO
FILM SOCIETY



USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **Life, Animated**.

Support materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

ABOUT THE FILM

Imagine being trapped inside a Disney movie and having to learn about life mostly from animated characters dancing across a screen of color. A fantasy? A nightmare? *Life Animated* is the real-life story of Owen Suskind, the son of the Pulitzer Prizewinning journalist Ron Suskind and his wife, Cornelia. An autistic boy who couldn't speak for years, Owen memorized dozens of Disney movies, turned them into a language to express love and loss, kinship, brotherhood. The family was forced to become animated characters, communicating with him in Disney dialogue and song. Until they all emerge, together, revealing how, in darkness, we all literally need stories to survive. Now a young man, Owen is getting ready to live on his own, and the film shows his successes and struggles as he embarks on this huge step.

Roger Ross Williams (USA, 2016)
91 minutes, Color, In English
Grades 5-12

Recommended Subject Areas:

Arts/Media
Elementary School
Health
Journalism
Middle School
Peer/Youth Issues
Science
Social Science

Key concepts / buzzwords:

Adulthood
Animation
Autism
Brothers
Bullying
Childhood
Disability
Disney
Family
Independence
Relationships



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Life, Animated tells an intimate story about the Suskind family as they struggle to understand autism, and to support Owen in his journey to connect with the world and become independent.

If students are not familiar with autism, you may want to share the following definition of autism from Merriam-Webster Student Dictionary:

autism

Function: noun

: a disorder that is characterized especially by problems in interacting and communicating with other people and by doing some activities over and over again

Before watching, ask students about their own experiences with autism, and their prior understanding of the disease.

- Do you know anyone who is autistic? What contact have you had with autism?
- What does it mean to be autistic?
- What extra challenges do autistic kids and their families face, beyond the regular challenges that we all face while growing up?

You may choose to conduct this exercise in a group discussion or as an individual journaling assignment. Ask students to keep the discussion in mind as they watch **Life, Animated**.

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

1) Describe Owen.

- What kind of a guy is Owen?
- What's important to him?
- What are Owen's goals?
- What challenges did Owen face in his early life, and over the course of the film?

How did he react to these challenges?

- How does Owen change and grow during the course of the film?

2) Describe Owen's family.

- How is Owen's family like or unlike your family and other families that you know?
- What do you think it was like for Owen's parents when they first learned that Owen

had autism?

- How did autism change the Suskinds' vision of what their lives would be like? What adjustments did they make to adapt to Owen's condition?
- Describe how Owen's parents learned that they could reach him through the Disney films. Why was this so important? How did the discovery change their relationship with their son?

3) Describe Owen's relationship with his brother.

- What do you think it was like for Walter to discover that his younger brother was different?

DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OWEN AND HIS BROTHER



- How has the experience of growing up alongside an autistic sibling changed Walter's own childhood?
 - Describe Walter and Owen's relationship now that they are both young men.
 - What added responsibilities does Walter have, compared with other young men his age?
- 4) Why do you think Owen identifies with the sidekicks in the Disney films, rather than with the heroes?
- Do you have any favorite characters in Disney films? Which characters do you like best?
 - What are some of the common character traits of Disney heroes? What are the traits of Disney sidekicks?
 - What do you think determines whether a kid identifies with the heroes or with the sidekicks?
 - What could we do as a society to make more room for difference in the category of heroes? Can you think of any heroes who defy the stereotypes?
 - Do you think Owen has any qualities that are heroic? What are they?
- 5) As Owen prepares to graduate and move into his own apartment, his mom wonders about the larger arc of Owen's life. How can Owen contribute to his community, and find meaning for his life?
- Where in the film did you see Owen contributing to his community?
 - What role do you think Owen can play as a spokesperson and an advocate for people with autism?
 - What defines a meaningful life for people without autism?
 - At what moments do we consider whether our lives have meaning?
 - Have you thought about what gives your life meaning? What role would you like to play in your community?

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Context

1) What is autism?

- What does it mean to be on the autistic spectrum? What are some of the characteristics of people who are autistic?
- What is the world like through the eyes of an autistic person? How does autism change peoples' perception and experience?
- What challenges do autistic people face in today's world? What challenges do autistic people have in engaging with other people?
- Why is it important for people who don't have autism to learn about the autism spectrum?
- Did you learn anything about autism through watching this film? What did you learn?

2) Why do you think Disney films made life easier for Owen?

- What is it about Disney characters and stories that was so helpful and comforting for Owen? How is the world of Disney like the real world, and how is it different?
- How did the world of Disney help Owen to build a bridge to the real world? What connections did Owen draw between the films and his own real life challenges?
- Have you ever identified with a character in a film or a book, and drawn connections between your own life and the story?
- Have you ever written a story, like Owen's "Protector of Sidekicks," that was fictional but grounded in real experience?
- In what ways can fiction help all of us as we struggle to make sense of a complex and confounding world?

3) What kind of bullying did Owen face in school?

- Do you think bullying is a common experience for kids on the autistic spectrum?



- Have you ever seen someone being bullied because he or she was different?
- What can you do in your own school to promote understanding and acceptance, and to prevent bullying?

4) Owen's family is lucky that they are financially comfortable, and they can pay for high quality care to support Owen's growth and development.

- What kinds of support systems and special programs have helped Owen to overcome challenges and to engage with the world?
- What additional challenges might families who are not so well off have in caring for an autistic child?
- What role can increasing awareness and advocacy play in making programs and support systems more accessible across income levels?

5) What was your reaction to Owen's speech at the French convention on autism?

- What was Owen's message?
- How did the audience react to his message?
- Why is it important to listen to the experiences of people who have autism?
- How does listening directly to Owen and people like him help us to develop a better understanding of what autism is and how we can support people who struggle with it?

Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

1) How did you feel after the film ended?

- What were your initial thoughts and reactions?
- Did you empathize with Owen and his family?
- How do you think other students would react to this story?
- Why is film a good tool to promote empathy and to build understanding among people who have different experiences?

2) What techniques did the filmmaker use to recreate scenes from Owen's childhood, and to describe Owen's internal world?

- What parts of the story were told using home movies?
- What did you learn from the home movies that you couldn't have learned through interviews or contemporary footage?
- What did you think of the drawings and original animations in the film?
- What parts of the story were told through drawings?
- How did the drawings give us access to the complex and difficult to articulate world inside of Owen's mind?
- Do you think this strategy was effective?

3) In what moments do the stories in the Disney movies parallel the events in Owen's own life?

- Where do you see connections between real life and the Disney movies that are included onscreen?
- How do the filmmakers use juxtaposition to strengthen the connection between the world of Disney and Owen's reality, and to help us understand the connections that Owen draws?
- Which movies help Owen to deal with specific challenges, like being bullied, leaving home, and breaking up with Emily?
- Do you think these metaphors are effective?



California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- **Grade 7:** Standard 1.8 Analyze the effect on the viewer of images, text, and sound in electronic journalism; identify the techniques used to achieve the effects in each instance studied.
- **Grade 8:** Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare's *Henry V* with Kenneth Branagh's 1990 film version).
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.
- **Grades 11 & 12:** Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Common Core Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts standards for Reading Informational Texts grades 7-12. Additional specific standard applications are listed below:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.



MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) **Medium:** the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) **Author:** the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) **Content:** the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) **Audience:** the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) **Purpose:** the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed.</p> <p>How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone.</p> <p>Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>All Media Is A Language.</p> <p>What is the subject of the media message? What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content? What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response? To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience.</p> <p>Who receives the message? For whom is the message intended? What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message? What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message? How might others perceive this message differently? Why?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.</p> <p>Why was the message constructed? Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How? To what extent does the message achieve its purpose? What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?</p>



THE NON-FICTION FILM WHAT IS A DOCUMENTARY?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. Leni Reifenstahl's propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth. The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

1895 The Lumiere brothers developed the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called "actualities" (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)

1900-1920 Travelogue or "Scenic" films became popular, showcasing exoticized images from around the globe.

1926 John Grierson coined the term "documentary" to describe Robert Flaherty's romantic nonfiction film, *Moana*.

1929 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino-Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With a Movie Camera*.

1935 Leni Reifenstahl released *Triumph of the Will*, the infamous propaganda film that chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.

1939 John Grierson collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in support of the war.

1960s The cinema vérité movement began in Europe, shortly followed by "direct cinema" in the U.S. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* opened the door to the activist cinema of the 1970s, which used film as a tool to counter capitalist and neo-colonial politics in Latin America.

1988 The US Congress mandated that the US government support the creation of independent non-commercial media, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium vastly more affordable to independent and amateur filmmakers. Video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo allowed amateur filmmakers to broadcast their work.

PRESENT DAY The term "documentary" has come to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of truth in film and to explore new avenues and applications for the medium.



THE MAKING OF A DOCUMENTARY

Idea, Issue, Story.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

The Production Process.

To capture candid moments on film, modern documentary makers often leave the camera running, collecting far more footage than the final film requires. They may do this during interviews or in observational-style encounters with their subjects. To get increased access and an observational aesthetic, documentary makers often use handheld cameras and natural light, rather than staging a more formal filming environment.

Post-Production and the Documentary.

Because a documentary film relies upon candid footage, a large part of the film's construction occurs in the editing room, where you work with what you've captured. A documentary editor will sift through long interviews just to find a few phrases that will summarize the film's message. To emphasize important points and build the story, some documentaries use a voiceover,

an interview or a scripted narrative that brings candid footage together into a coherent statement. An original score can work alongside the voiceover to unify the footage and shape the mood of the film. Audiences often underestimate the power of sound to generate an emotional response. Many documentaries also use charts, graphs and historical footage to add context and emphasize key points.

Distribution.

Once a film is completed, the filmmaker needs to help it find its audience. Many documentaries are made independently on small budgets, but what's the point of all your work if no one hears your message? Some documentaries will be released in theaters around the country or get programmed on public or cable TV channels, but most documentary filmmakers will start by submitting their work to film festivals, in hopes of attracting distributors for the theater and television markets. Filmmakers may also make their films available online and use social media to reach their target audience.



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

The Film's Official Website:

<http://www.lifeanimateddoc.com/>

The Autism Affinities Project:

<http://lifeanimated.net/>

Teacher Resources for Discussing Autism:

Autism Speaks: Educational Toolkit: <http://media.autismspeaks.org/liub/LIUB+Educational+Toolkit.pdf>

Educating About Autism in an Inclusive Classroom: http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/ed_autisminc.pdf

The Guardian: How to Teach Autism Awareness: <http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/mar/31/autism-awareness-teaching-tips-lesson-resources>

Autism Awareness Month Lessons and Activities: <http://www.autismclassroom.com/index.php/78-updated-news/214-autism-awareness-month-lessons>



REVIEWS

Variety

Justin Chang
 Chief Film Critic
 @JustinCChang

Roger Ross Williams' captivating documentary explores a young autistic man's growth and progress through his obsession with Disney animated movies.

The busy subgenre of documentaries featuring autistic subjects gets a strong new entry in "Life, Animated," a captivating portrait of a young man for whom Disney animated movies have provided a powerful lifeline to progress, language and understanding. Interweaving clips from "The Little Mermaid," "Aladdin," "Peter Pan" and any number of toon classics whose words and images the 23-year-old Owen Suskind has long committed to memory, this latest film from Roger Ross Williams ("God Loves Uganda") teems with insights into how children's fantasy can and can't bridge a developmental gap, but works on an even more basic, emotional level as a warm testament to a family's love and resilience. Acquired for North American distribution by the Orchard, this winner of a Sundance directing prize could benefit from its accessible hook and generous sampling of Disney clips to reach a wider-than-usual audience for nonfiction titles of its type.

Cape Cod, Mass.-based writer Ron Suskind, whose bestselling 2014 book about his son's experiences inspired the film, and his wife, Cornelia, recall their devastation when their son Owen suddenly seemed to vanish emotionally and cognitively at the age of 3: His sleeping became irregular, he had difficulty walking and

his speech became garbled and nonsensical. Their fears were concerned by an early diagnosis of pervasive developmental disorder, suggesting that even if Owen recovered the ability to speak, he would effectively be dependent on others for the rest of his life.

But a glimmer of hope emerged during, of all things, a family viewing of Disney's "The Little Mermaid," when Owen's insistence on replaying a particular scene — and his repeated mutterings of what seemed at first like gibberish — led his parents and older brother, Walter (aptly named), to realize that he had memorized some of the movie's dialogue. In time it would become clear that Owen had, in fact, memorized all the movie's dialogue, and indeed that of every Disney animated film in existence, having watched and rewatched them endlessly on video. In a second "Eureka!" moment, Ron and Cornelia recall their shock when Owen, after a spell of speechlessness, suddenly articulated a complex insight by drawing a metaphor to "The Jungle Book" and "Peter Pan" — and led them to realize that these beloved cartoon classics might well help enable Owen to learn to speak, read and write.

That the boy did in fact develop these abilities and more is made clear by the many scenes we see of him as an engaging, talkative, high-functioning adult in his early 20s. Williams and his d.p., Tom Bergmann, show Owen confronting many of life's challenges and milestones head-on: attending group sessions with peers also on the spectrum, moving into his own apartment; starting a relationship with his first girlfriend (a development that lends the film some emotional urgency in its later stages); and traveling with his parents to France to speak about his experiences at a conference. What seems to remain constant is his love for those old movies, a library of which he lovingly maintains (many of them



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still on VHS) and watches frequently — a passion that he’s shared with many of his classmates, whether he’s holding a group viewing of “The Lion King” or, in a surprise treat, hosting a visit from “Aladdin” voice actors Jonathan Freeman (Jafar) and Gilbert Gottfried (Iago).

But the documentary’s most resonant moments are those in which Owen and his family and friends grapple with the mystery of how these beloved cartoon classics were able to reach some distant, buried side of Owen after all other methods seemed to have failed. As one observer notes, the Disney movies are in many ways ideally suited to viewers with autism: With their emphatic, exaggerated emotions, they may have enabled Owen to process and express his feelings, while their eternal replayability provided the comfort of a fixed script that he could commit to memory. But they also speak to the essential appeal of fairy tales and fantasies, and the way they provide — for people on and off the spectrum — a simple yet essential framework for making sense of the world. (That framework has its limits, too; Walter lends “Life, Animated” one of its more amusing moments when he notes that Disney films don’t exactly allow for an adult understanding of sexuality.)

With editor David Teague adroitly interweaving clips from the movies throughout (Disney approved use of the footage but exercised no editorial control, per press notes), Williams’ film suggests any number of parallels between Owen’s life and the Disney narratives, with their quests for individual freedom and self-fulfillment; the movie touches fleetingly on the respective boy heroes of “Peter Pan” and “Pinocchio,” but mercifully doesn’t belabor the connection. In the one art-imitating-life element that feels perhaps a bit tidily orchestrated, Owen watches “Bambi” shortly after his mom leaves him alone in his new apartment.

Perhaps the most telling insight comes from Owen himself, who from an early age delighted in drawing not Disney heroes and heroines, but those second-banana figures like Iago, Sebastian, Timon, Pumbaa and Jiminy Cricket — all of whom he’s enshrined in his own story, called “The Land of the Lost Sidekicks.” That hand-drawn personal fiction, brought to life by a team of French animators in a nicely rough-hewn complement to the Disney footage, provides an illuminating window into how Owen sees himself and his place in the world. In the end, with its extended interviews with the Suskinds, “Life, Animated” conveys the deeply moving sense that Owen, however fortunate in his choice of obsession, was even more blessed to be born into a family this tirelessly supportive — one that saw the wisdom of never encouraging him to put childish things away.

The Guardian

by Lanre Bakare

Autism is a widely misunderstood condition; something Oscar-winning documentary film-maker Roger Ross Williams’s latest project attempts to tackle. Focusing on the life of Owen Suskind, who was diagnosed as autistic aged three, it’s a beguiling mix of animated storytelling and narration that doesn’t flinch from exploring the emotional highs and lows that accompany a life with autism.

One of Williams’s many accomplishments with *Life, Animated* is using the animated segments to communicate what the world is like for autistic people. Conversations become garbled, with words almost impossible to pick out, and the everyday noises and situations which for most of us are the background ambience of life become a cacophony of imposing



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sound. Owen's parents talk in heartbreakingly honest moments about how they feared they had lost their son for ever.

That's where the other star of the show comes in. Disney's animated films provide the connecting link from Owen's world to that of his parents. Using dialogue from films such as *Dumbo*, *Bambi* and *Aladdin*, Owen is able to communicate (he taught himself to read by studying the film's credits). Not only does the film open its audience's eyes to the world of autism it also sheds new light on the almost Shakespearean qualities of films like *The Lion King*. Owen is able to traverse the world using lessons learned from the movies. They help him form friendships and talk to his parents; he even creates a Disney club for likeminded fans, of which there are many.

The film also charts Owen's move towards living independently, and as a 23-year-old, the limits of Disney's world are tested. His brother Walter talks about the difficulty in using Disney films to talk about sex – concluding Disney porn might be the only way to really get across the finer points. One of the most poignant parts of the entire film comes when Walter discusses his fears as he gets older: what will happen when his parents are too old to care for Owen, will he be able to cope, what will become of his brother?

It's that combination of despair and joy, victories and defeats that make *Life, Animated* such a compelling rendering of life with autism. Owen has to cope with the same life challenges as anyone else: moving out of home, breaking up with a girlfriend, having a job interview. And Williams doesn't patronise or sentimentalise his world. Things are difficult, seemingly insurmountable at times, but with family, patience and yes, Disney films Owen and the Suskinds are able to overcome them. It's an educational achievement masquerading as a feel-good documentary, and a must-watch.