



THE SOUND OF SILENCE IN FOOTBALL: DERRICK COLEMAN

Derrick Coleman, a football player with the Seattle Seahawks, is the only legally deaf athlete in professional football history to play offense. In early January 2014, he made a commercial* where he talks about the impact his hearing impairment has had on his life. The video went viral and in less than a week, had 5.5 million views. Coleman's story provides an excellent teaching opportunity to discuss disabilities and the importance of safeguarding the rights and dignity of people with disabilities in our communities and around the world. As the U.S. Senate debates whether to ratify an international treaty on disability rights ([see ADL's Advocacy Alert](#)), Derrick's story provides an opportunity to put a human face on the impact that fair policy can have on people's lives.

In this lesson, students will discuss this inspiring football player, learn more about Derrick Coleman's life and reflect on a story written by a deaf teenager.

[**NOTE:** In advance of the lesson, think about whether you have any students in your class who have a disability or a hearing impairment. Sometimes students feel relieved to discuss a topic so relevant to their lives while others might feel awkward or embarrassed. This does not mean you should not discuss the topic, however, be careful not to highlight their situations, put them on the spot or use them as an example of a person with a disability. Be aware that strong feelings could arise and plan in advance for how to handle it. Also, consider talking with the students or their parents in advance.]

See these additional ADL resources: *Curriculum Connections* "[Equal Treatment, Equal Access: Raising Awareness About People With Disabilities and Their Struggle for Equal Rights](#)" which includes [Evaluating Children's Books that Address Disability](#) and [Communication Guidelines on Disability](#).

Grade Level: grades 6–8

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn what it means to be disabled, deaf and hearing impaired
- Students will reflect on why students who have disabilities sometimes get teased or bullied in school
- Students will gain some background about Derrick Coleman's life
- Students will learn more about the perspective of a young person who is deaf

Material: [Duracell: Trust Your Power – NFL's Derrick Coleman](#) video (1 min., YouTube); [Deaf NFL Player Inspires and Excels on Field](#) video (4 minutes, CBS); "[Deaf but Not Dumb](#)" (YouthComm.org), one copy for each student; (optional) [Communication Guidelines Relating to Ability](#) and [Suggested Language for People with Disabilities](#)

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. Review the words prior to the lesson and reinforce the definitions as they come up during the course of the lesson. (See also ADL's [Glossary of Education Terms](#).)

- Ableism
- American Sign Language
- Bullying
- Deaf
- Dependent
- Disability
- Discrimination
- Hearing-Impaired
- Interpreter
- Invalid
- Mainstream

WARM-UP: TRUE OR FALSE?

1. Read the statements below. Have students either raise their hands for "true" and "false" or have them walk to one part of the room for "true" and another part of the room for "false."
 - All people who are deaf would rather not be deaf. (False)
 - Most people who are deaf have parents who are deaf. (False)
 - On average, people who read lips catch about 25-30% of what is said. (True)
 - People who are deaf are not allowed to drive. (False)
 - Most people with hearing loss do not use sign language. (True)
2. After going through all the statements, share with students which are true and false.
3. Ask students: *Did anything surprise you about the answers and if so, what? What do you want to learn more about being deaf or hearing impaired?*
4. (Optional) Have students pick one of the above statements that they want to learn more about. Have them conduct research and write a paper which summarizes their findings.

DISABILITY AND ABLEISM

1. Ask students: *What is a disability?*
2. Explain that a disability is a mental or physical condition that affects a person's movements, senses or activities. Ask students for examples. Examples can include: hearing impairments/deaf, visual impairments/blind, learning disabilities such as dyslexia, spinal cord injuries and having to be in a wheelchair, loss of limbs (arms and legs) or the ability to use them, etc.
3. Ask: *What is a hearing disability?*
4. Explain that a hearing disability is a hearing impairment, hearing loss or deafness which is a partial or total inability to hear.
5. Explain that there are several reasons a child can be born deaf or become deaf early in life. Deafness can be genetic and can also be caused by pregnancy complications, certain medicines taken during pregnancy or problems during birth. In early childhood, certain illnesses and infections can cause deafness and occasionally deafness can be caused by a head injury or exposure to loud noise.

6. Have a group discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Do you think people with hearing impairments can do everything that hearing people can do? Why or why not?
 - How would you communicate if you had a hearing impairment?
7. Ask: *What is ableism?* Have students use their knowledge of other “isms” to define the word.
8. Explain that ableism is prejudice and/or discrimination against people with mental or physical disabilities. Ask for examples and share one if the students do not have an example, explaining that they will learn more about ableism throughout the lesson.

WHO IS DERRICK COLEMAN?

1. Ask students if anyone knows who Derrick Coleman is? Have students share what they already know.
2. Explain to students that Derrick Coleman is a football player with the Seattle Seahawks who is hearing impaired. Coleman made a very inspiring commercial video, [Duracell: Trust Your Power – NFL’s Derrick Coleman](#), discussing his disability and the impact it has had on his life, and has been widely featured in a number of articles. As of this writing over 9 million people have seen the video.
3. Ask if anyone has seen the video. Tell students that the video went viral and in less a week, had 5.5 million views and as of this writing, is up to 9 million views. For those students who have seen the video ask the following discussion questions:
 - How did you feel while watching the video?
 - How was Derrick Coleman’s childhood?
 - How was he treated because of his hearing impairment?
 - Why do you think Derrick Coleman made the commercial and has given so many interviews?
 - What more do you want to know?

WRITING ACTIVITY: LEARN MORE ABOUT DERRICK COLEMAN

1. Have students learn more about Derrick Coleman by viewing the video [Deaf NFL Player Inspires and Excels on the Field](#). After watching the video or reading articles, write or project the following questions on the board and have students respond in writing.
 - How did you feel while watching the video or reading the articles?
 - How does Derrick Coleman communicate with his teammates?
 - How did his parents feel about his hearing loss?
 - Why was he teased and bullied?
 - Do you think he experienced discrimination? If so, how?
 - How has he directed his disability to help others?
 - What are your overall impressions of Derrick Coleman and what makes you say this?
2. Instruct students to choose at least 3 questions to answer. When they are finished, have some students share their responses out loud or with a partner.

READING ACTIVITY: “DEAF BUT NOT DUMB”

Distribute copies of the article, “[Deaf but Not Dumb](#),” written by a New York City teenager for [Youth Communication](#). In the story, Oni Nicolarakis shares her real-life experience transitioning from a deaf school to a mainstream school. Have students read the article (or distribute the night before for them to read for homework) and discuss by asking the following questions:

- What was the main message Oni conveyed in her essay?
- Why was Oni fearful about going to a mainstream school?
- What did she like about the Lexington School for the Deaf?
- What happened when she went to Middle College HS?
- How did the other students respond to Oni?
- What challenges did she face at her new school?
- What kind of changes happened for Oni as a result of attending the mainstream school?
- What did you learn from reading Oni’s story?

CLOSING

Have each student share one change in their thinking (as a result of this lesson) about hearing impairments or disabilities by completing this sentence: “I used to think _____ about hearing impairments, but now I think _____.”

ADDITIONAL READING

- [National Association of the Deaf](#)
- [Being the Only Student With a Hearing Loss](#) (Listening and Spoken Language Knowledge Center)
- [Through Deaf Eyes Discussion Guide](#) (PBS)
- [Different But Equal: Teens Write About Living With Disabilities](#) (New York: Youth Communication, 2010)
- [Books About Deaf and Hard of Hearing People for Young Readers](#) (Gallaudet University)
- [NCLB, IDEA, and Deaf Children](#) (Gallaudet University)
- [Hearing Impairment: Kristin's Story](#) (TeensHealth)
- [Gallaudet National Essay, Art and ASL Contest](#)

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COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Standard 3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
Writing
Standard 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES RELATING TO ABILITY

Distinguish Between Disabilities and Handicaps

The term “handicapped” is still used by the media today to refer to people with disabilities, but the word has a negative connotation for many people. Most social service agencies and disability publications have replaced this term with “person with a disability.” The term *handicap* describes a condition or barrier caused by society or the environment.

A <i>disability</i> applies to a person’s functional limitation.	A <i>handicap</i> is a barrier in the environment.
A person uses a hearing aid because he or she is deaf or hard of hearing.	A handicap is when there is no telephone system available that enables people with hearing disabilities to make calls.
A person uses a wheelchair because of a physical disability.	A handicap is when there is a stairway but no adjoining elevator so that a person with a physical disability cannot go up or down a floor.
A person requires extended time on an exam because of a cognitive disability.	A handicap is when inadequate time is allowed to complete a task for a person to demonstrate understanding of material.

Person First: People with Disabilities

The person precedes the disability, both figuratively and literally. It’s “persons with disabilities,” not “disabled persons,” and “person with cerebral palsy,” not “cerebral palsy victim.”

Adjectives Aren’t Nouns

Use an adjective as description, not as a category or group, i.e. “people who are disabled,” not “the disabled,” and “people who are blind, not “the visually impaired.”

Germaneness

People with disabilities should be treated just like everyone else. You wouldn’t mention the physical condition of an able-bodied person unless it was germane to what you were saying. Unless a person’s disability is relevant, don’t mention it.

Communicating with People with Disabilities

When introduced to a person with a disability, it is polite to shake hands. Most people with limited use of their hands, or artificial limbs, can shake hands. If you’re unsure, let the other person make the first move. Always treat people with disabilities with the same respect you treat others. Speak to and look directly at the person instead of communicating through a companion who may be along. The presence of a physical disability does not mean the person has a cognitive disability as well.

Common expressions, such as “see you later” or “I’ve got to run along,” are usually not insulting to those who can’t see or run, so don’t feel embarrassed if they happen to creep into your conversation. Don’t be embarrassed to offer help to someone with a disability, but wait until the offer is accepted and instructions are given before proceeding.

Speech Disabilities

Ask questions that can be answered in few words or with a nod of the head. Don't pretend to understand when you don't. Repeat what you think the person said, and if all else fails, use written notes.

Deafness

To get the attention of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, you may need to touch the person lightly, wave your hand or use some other physical sign. If the person is using an interpreter, speak directly to the person rather than the interpreter. If the person is lip-reading, look directly at him or her and speak slowly and clearly. Even the best lip-reader can pick up less than half of the words you speak. It is not necessary to exaggerate your lip movements or shout. Speak expressively, because the person will use facial expression, gestures and body language to help understand. Don't stand with a bright light behind you, and keep your hands away from your mouth when speaking. If you are having trouble communicating, consider using written notes.

Blindness

When communicating with someone who is blind, identify yourself and introduce anyone else who is present. Before trying to shake hands, say something like, "Shall we shake hands?" or reach for the other person's extended hand. When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat. If walking from one location to another, offer your arm as a guide, and alert the person to any obstacles such as steps, curbs or low arches. If dining, don't feel embarrassed to orient the person as to where the silverware and other items are. Let the person know when you are leaving.

Avoid Condescending Language

Terms like physically challenged, special and differently-abled are patronizing. If appropriate and relevant, note that a person has a physical, sensory or mental disability and leave it at that. Also, people who do not have without disabilities should not be referred to as "normal" because of the inference that people with disabilities are abnormal.

Avoid Pity

People with disabilities aren't "victims." As one woman noted, "I'm not a wheelchair 'victim.' Wheelchair victims are the people I bump into with my footrest at the supermarket." People with disabilities should not be labeled as impaired, nor should they be described as "inspirational" or "courageous" just because they have a disability.

People in Wheelchairs or on Crutches

Consider a person's wheelchair part of the person. It's not polite to touch or lean on the chair unless the person gives permission. Never pat a person in a wheelchair on the head. When talking to someone in a wheelchair or on crutches for more than a few minutes, sit or place yourself at the other person's eye level.

Adapted from *Handicapping Language: A Guide for Journalists and the Public*, Illinois Department of Human Service's Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), Springfield, IL, 800-843-6154 (V) or 800-447-6404 (TTY). Reprinted with permission from Leslie Ann Ramyk, NAEYC and DORS.

SUGGESTED LANGUAGE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Inappropriate/Common Wording	Suggested Wording
[Ability]-challenged	Has a disability
Afflicted	Has a cognitive disability or difference
Birth defect	Born with...
Cerebral-palsied	Has cerebral palsy
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	Uses a wheelchair
Cripple	Person with a physical disability
Deaf and dumb, deaf-mute	Person who is deaf, hard of hearing or has a speech disability
Deformed	Has a physical disability or difference
Emotionally disturbed	Has a mental health disability
Epileptic	Has epilepsy
Handicapped	Person with a disability
Handicapped accessible	Accessible to people with disabilities, fully accessible
Handicapped parking	Accessible parking
Hunchbacked	Has a spinal curvature
Insane, crazy, deranged, deviant	Has a mental health disability
Invalid	Chronically ill
Lame	Walks with a limp, uses crutches
Midget, dwarf	Short-statured, little person
Mongoloid	Person with Down's syndrome
Paraplegic, quadriplegic	Has paraplegia; has quadriplegia
Retarded	Person with intellectual disability
Spastic	Has seizures, muscular dystrophy

NOTE: Use of the term “normal,” “able-bodied” and “healthy” to describe people who do not have disabilities is inappropriate, as it communicates an assumption that people with disabilities are “abnormal.” Use “person without a disability” or “typical” instead.