

Spinnolio

NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

16th FLOOR

1251 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10020

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Spinnolio

Table of Contents

	Page
I. Synopsis	1
II. Interpretation	3
III. How to Use the Film	5
IV. Learning Objectives	8
V. Preparing the Participants	9
VI. Suggested Learning Experiences	
A. Questions/Discussion	10
B. Projections	10
C. Who Are You?	10
D. Quiet Revelation	10
E. Gestalt Spinnolio	15
F. Group Interpretation	15
G. How They See Us	15

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Synopsis

Spinnolio is an allegory in which a wooden figure of a boy forces us to examine how people relate to each other. The story shows how many people in all walks of life identify only with the form of Spinnolio — a wooden figure in the shape of a person — playing out their roles and expectations without realizing how little they are relating and how shallow their vision of Spinnolio — and other people — is.

Spinnolio is carved out of firewood by Guiseppo, a lonely watchmaker who needs to love and care for someone. Although Guiseppo wishes the Good Fairy would bring Spinnolio to life, she never makes an appearance. Nevertheless, Guiseppo imagines that Spinnolio is, in fact, a real little boy and happily sends him to school with the other children who treat Spinnolio as a companion. The wooden boy earns a report card and a handshake from the principal at graduation.

Eventually, Spinnolio finds himself analyzed by a career counselor who

recognizes Spinnolio's natural ability as a complaint clerk in a department store. Spinnolio's success at causing the number of complaints to drop dramatically focuses corporate attention on him and, soon, his cool head in emergencies earns him respect. The company finds a place for Spinnolio in the employee counseling division, and Spinnolio's career is cast.

The years go by. Spinnolio is replaced by a computer, given a retirement party, a gold watch, and shown the door. Arrested as a vagrant and sentenced to jail, Spinnolio makes a great companion for his fellow prisoners who pour out their boasts about their various underworld achievements. When Spinnolio is released, he's picked up by a garbage truck and taken to a junkyard where two hip motorcycle gang members admire Spinnolio as a spaced-out freak. But his tough-minded new friends soon turn on Spinnolio and beat him up in an alley, disassembling his various parts. A drunken derelict finds what's left of the wooden boy and puts

him back together, using him as a "little buddy" in a begging scam. Spinnolio then teams up with a small salvation band where he's used as an example of depravity.

We last see Spinnolio as a comrade of a group of derelicts who finally toss him into a garbage can. The Good Fairy makes a belated appearance and, with a tap of her magic wand, transforms Spinnolio into a real person. The now-human Spinnolio stirs, stretches his real arms, yawns, looks around and smiles and falls back to sleep in the garbage can where he lives happily ever after.

In the end, we see Spinnolio living life as he — now a real person in a garbage can — perceives it should be lived. Not only have people reacted to Spinnolio in a one-dimensional way, blinded to his true identity by their own needs, dominating roles, and expectations of him, now even Spinnolio sees himself through his own perception, choosing to live life in a garbage can.

Interpretation

Spinnolio's story is open-ended, allowing for many interpretations and perceptions of what the symbolism of the story signifies.

One interpretation is that Spinnolio is a lifeless dupe, an Everyman, who is manipulated and controlled all his "life" until awakened. At that point, he makes his first conscious decision to accept his fate and spend the rest of his life in a garbage can. Spinnolio, then, has truly evolved from a wooden existence to be an independent spirit.

Another interpretation is that Spinnolio acts as an agent to show us how different people see him. He forces us to look at the relationships between people and how the blind needs and expectations of different people distort reality to the point of being absurd. Could it be that all the people we deal with in our lives see us as Spinnolios? As wooden figures to be used as best as they see fit? Even our parents? Our friends? Our business associates?

Each person Spinnolio encounters sees him

as a mere figure of a person, an outline and nothing more. Each uses or takes from him the things each needs the most. To Guiseppo, he is a loving boy because Guiseppo needs to have that love and companionship. To the schoolchildren, he's a friend to play with. To a troubled company employee, Spinnolio is a sympathetic listener, because that is what the employee needs at the time. To the policeman and the judge, Spinnolio is quickly recognized as a vagrant. Of course, Spinnolio was none of these. He was only what people saw in him, and they saw what they needed to see or were programmed to see in others.

The film tells us that people tend to relate to one another on a one-dimensional level. In this case, it was the simple outline of a person which caused the responses. What is amazing is that the people who reacted to Spinnolio didn't see how shallow their view of other people was; all they saw was an outline, one dimension.

In the end, even Spinnolio sees himself as a dweller of garbage cans, stuck in a one-dimensional relationship with himself.

Summary

People tend to view others through "filters" which are developed from needs, beliefs, expectations and even fear. These "filters" make Spinnolio a different person to all the people he encounters. Each one sees him — a wooden figure — according to their own personal needs, roles, and goals. Each one seeks to use him in their own way. No one sees the reality, simply an outline of a person made of wood.

People tend to react to each other on a one-dimensional basis, seeing others as clients, patients, students, teachers, co-workers, but rarely as a whole person. This view tends to blind us to the reality of the person we are dealing with.

People tend to view themselves through the same filters, looking at their lives as a role or image which may have little to do with reality. A person is more than what

he does for a living — salesperson, nurse, social worker, business manager. Each is a full person with many facets and complexities which make relating to other human beings a rich, sometimes surprising, experience. The relationships in Spinnolio are absurd and stilted.

How to Use the Film

Preview the film:

View the film in its entirety before showing it to an audience.

Prepare the participants:

Tell the participants what they are about to see. Prompt them with questions, and get them to begin thinking about how people relate before the film begins.

Conduct learning experiences:

When the film is over, lead the participants through some of the exercises prepared in this guide or develop some approaches of your own.

Summarize the major points:

Pull together the themes that the participants were discussing. Write the conclusions in hand-out form or on a blackboard.

Review the Film:

If time permits, show the film a second time. The ideas you've just developed should be reinforced and the participants will see the points emerge from the story.

Use Spinnolio

To open a meeting

As a self-contained mini-course

To make a point during a discussion

To stimulate discussion and interaction

To end a meeting with a message

To provide an example of allegory and use of symbolism

As a cartoon

As a change of pace in an intensive learning session

As part of a larger program of learning activities

To stimulate written projects and theme writing

For brotherhood week school activities

For group therapy exercises

For Sunday School programs and church activities meetings

For in-service training of professionals of all types

Use Spinnolio With

Managers and Supervisors Allow them to see that people who work for them are more than just a face behind a desk.

Salespersons Let them view their clients and their co-workers as people with needs.

Health Care Professionals Make them sensitive to patients, family members, and other professionals.

Social Workers and Their Clients Open people up to the possibilities of each person; develop a positive attitude of dealing with problems.

Group Therapy Allow clients to reflect on how they viewed people in the past and how role models affected behavior.

Career Counselors/Personnel Managers Give them the perspective that each person is truly different and that "cookie-cutter" approaches to handling people may be counter-productive.

Law Enforcement Personnel Provide law officers with an in-depth view of all types of citizens, allowing them to treat people as persons with a variety of needs and backgrounds.

School Administrators/Teachers Examine the role of education as a process of molding people into society; allow teachers and administrators to develop a philosophy and plan to develop individual potentials.

Retail Store Employees Give them the feeling that people are not faceless consumers, but people with buying needs and specialized styles which, when appreciated, can lead to increased sales.

Religious Groups Offer the message that people are individuals and that problems in living start when a person is manipulated by outside forces to the point where he feels powerless.

Possible Audiences

Managers and Supervisors
Salespersons
Health Care Professionals
Social Workers and
Their Clients
Group Therapy
Career Counselors
Personnel Managers
Law Enforcement Personnel
Mental Health Professionals
School Administrators
Teachers
Students
Retail Store Workers
Customer Service
Representatives
Airline Employees
Rehabilitation Programs

Learning Objectives

The participants will interpret Spinnolio's role as a symbol of a one-dimensional relationship with another person and explain how that role affects the quality of the relationship between the characters in the film.

The participants will explain how beliefs, needs, roles, and expectations influence and distort the way reality is perceived in self and others.

The participants will identify those people and things in the world who relate to them or to whom they relate in a one-dimensional way.

The participants will examine their motives for taking a one-dimensional view of various people encountered in everyday life, such as people of different races, cultures, religions, and beliefs, as well as co-workers, clients, supervisors, etc.

The participants will suggest what alternatives, if any, can be used to see people and the self more holistically.

The participants will speculate on what results can be expected from

relating more fully to people in personal and professional interactions.

Preparing the Participants

Ask the participants in the group to define what it means to relate to another person. Develop the idea that to relate to people means to relate on a number of levels, personal, public, and professional. Introduce the film by stating this is the story of the life of a piece of wood which was related to by lots of people.

Draw Spinnolio on a blackboard or flipchart. Ask the participants to give you a profile of what the figure is like, what job he is suited for, what grades you would expect from him, what his future is like. Let the participants expand and embellish their ideas as widely as possible. Then introduce the film as the story of Spinnolio.

Suggested Learning Experiences

A. Questions/Discussion

Follow this line of questioning to logically develop the points to be made from the film.

Q. How do people react to Spinnolio?

(As if he were a real person.)

Q. Spinnolio is a wooden doll. Why do the people in the film relate to Spinnolio as if he were a real person?

(Some people have a need to relate to something, like the old watchmaker and the employee having family problems. Others relate simply because there is a form in the shape of a person which must be dealt with, like the policeman, the judge, and the corporate executive.)

Q. What is there about Spinnolio that makes these different groups react so differently towards him? (There is nothing inherently different about Spinnolio that causes the different reactions.)

Q. Then where does the response come from?

(The response to Spinnolio comes from the needs, beliefs, roles, expectations and even fears of the people who encounter Spinnolio. The response is based on each individual's perception of what Spinnolio is, not the reality that he is a wooden doll.)

Q. How would you react to Spinnolio in your current role? What would you do to him, with him, or for him?

(Generate the idea that we all have

different needs and roles to play. Some people might want to protect Spinnolio, repair him, or even rehabilitate him. Others may have more practical goals, such as sell him something, take his vital signs, or find a job for him. The answer depends on what roles, needs, expectations and beliefs, enter into our perception of Spinnolio. Some people might say they wouldn't react to Spinnolio at all because he's merely a doll. Point out that is simply one perception of what Spinnolio is.)

Q. Do you find yourself automatically reacting to people depending on your needs at the moment, your beliefs of what should happen, your expectations

for people's behavior, or your underlying fear of the person? What happens? To you? To the other person?

(The idea here is to bring out examples from the group of how each one experiences some degree of prejudice, selfishness, and rigid thinking — all of which distort our perception of reality.)

Q. Why do people react to others in such a one-dimensional way? (People learn to filter their perceptions of other people and the world from their experience — their family and cultural background, the values of society and the roles they play in life.)

Q. How can you learn to see people more wholistically with less one-dimensionality? (Become aware

that people are more than wooden figures, that each has depth — needs, beliefs, and values which should be factored into our dealings with each other. Also be aware that people may tend to view us one-dimensionally, leading to frustration and need for recognition, loss of self-esteem.

Q. Should we do that in a professional, business, industrial, or school setting? (Have participants defend their answers.)

Q. What will it mean to our relationships with the people we deal with if we see them more wholistically? (Have participants defend their answers.)

Additional Questions

Another interpretation of the film is that if a person

doesn't act on his environment — take responsibility for his life — he will be viewed as just another wooden figure, another form on this planet. If a person doesn't strive to define himself for his own sake, the outside world will do it for him. Taken that way, Spinnolio was a dupe for the various needs and expectations of the people around him, used as a puppet for a number of people who controlled him. When Spinnolio was turned into a person by the Good Fairy as he slept in the garbage can, he recognized that at least at this point in his life he could make a choice. So, in determining his own fate and making his own choice, Spinnolio went back to sleep, content in that he had made his statement, despite how awkward, unconventional, and disappointing it may appear to our perception.

Q. Henry David Thoreau once said, "I'd rather sit on a pumpkin and have it to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion." How does that

relate to Spinnolio in the garbage can?

(After being totally controlled and manipulated, Spinnolio makes his first conscious decision on his own — to be content with his lot. Taken that way, Spinnolio has become a true independent spirit which the quotation embodies.)

Q. What could be another interpretation of why Spinnolio was content sleeping in the garbage can?

(Not only do people respond to us because of their own perceptions of what we are, we also see ourselves as we think others see us. Spinnolio's self-image was that of a garbage can dweller; that is what he believed he was, therefore that's what he acted out.)

Q. Why do lots of people find

themselves content with a "garbage can" existence?

(People's self-image is confirmed in the way they think the world treats them. It becomes difficult to see themselves as anything else. To some, the role of the independent spirit, albeit in a garbage can, is satisfying; for others, the security of a low-profile existence is a safe way to endure life.)

Q. Spinnolio finally made the first choice in his life — to stay forever after in that garbage can. What is our perception of that? Should we condemn him for staying? Why? Why not?
(This is based on the interpretation of Spinnolio's decision. Opinions should be defended.)

B. Projections

Cut out pictures from various magazines or use films or video tapes to depict individual faces of ordinary people. Ask the participants to make up descriptions or profiles of these people's lives, such as, where they live, what their jobs are, where they went to school, hobbies, who their friends are, what music they like. Have individual participants compare their responses. Then ask selected participants why they said the things they did, where the ideas came from, what was it about the picture that lead them to think of the person as one personality style and not another.

C. Who Are You?

As a group exercise, have the participants define what each other's profile is, i.e., life interests, goals, background, etc. Pair participants together to do this. Have the group justify its conclusions. Ask them where their perceptions originated. Ask them if

it is difficult to see more than a "wooden figure."

If various members of the group are familiar with one another, have them select five people the group knows in common and with whom they interact daily. Have individuals develop a profile list of what that person is like, what the unseen dimensions are. Let the participants share these perceptions and note the differences and similarities. After that, ask the participants to develop a profile list of what they think the individuals just profiled would write about them. Ask them what they do to earn such a description.

D. Quiet Revelation

Videotape the group's question and discussion session and any other activities that might occur. Play back the tape and ask the group to assess how they appear to themselves. Is what they see an accurate reflection of what they

are, what they said at the time, etc.? How does it differ? As we play our our roles, is it possible we don't see ourselves in what we're doing? Are we all Spinnolios to ourselves?

How many people in the group realized that they had said the kinds of things depicted on the video tape?

E. Gestalt Spinnolio

Draw Spinnolio on a blackboard or flipchart. Tell the participants they have an opportunity to takl with Spinnolio. Select one to lead a private discussion. Allow time for the participant to adapt to the situation and for the discussion to emerge and develop between the person and the drawing. Record on a tape recorder and play back. Do the same thing with reproductions of famous art work, such as the Mona Lisa, and with pictures of movie stars and famous people. Point out that they are using Spinnolio exactly as he was used in the film — to fill out and

fulfill people's roles, needs, expectations, and beliefs.

F. Group Interpretation

Set all of your personal interpretations of the meaning of the film aside. Let the group develop its own. Have the participants work in separate groups of three or four, outlining the meaning of the story, the symbolism, the applicability of the message of the film to their own lives. Let each group report; compare similarities and differences. Don't be judgmental.

G. How They See Us

Ask the participants to list as many people as possible with whom they come in contact in a day. Have them explain how each persons relates to them, i.e., family members, friends, bus drivers, teachers, co-workers, etc. Ask questions like these: What does each one want from you? Are they looking at you or are they looking at a Spinnolio who looks like you? Should that be changed? Why? How?