

CODA Movie Review Written By ASLHS

Introduction: Ruby, a child of Deaf adults (CODA), learns to navigate life not only as a young adult, but also as the only hearing member of a completely Deaf family. As her passion for music comes to light, she begins to battle her internal identity of belonging to the hearing community or her loyalty to her family and the Deaf community. Conflict arises when Ruby wants to set off on her own adventure, leaving her family without a portal between the two worlds. Is she abandoning her family or just wanting to explore her own desires, disassociated from her role as the family interpreter?

Plot/Story Line: Ruby is a crucial member of her family's multigenerational fishing business. As the only hearing member of her family, she feels a sense of responsibility to break down the communication barriers between her family and the surrounding fishing community. After joining choir class at her high school, she discovers her talent and passion for singing and dreams of going to a prestigious college of music. She has interpreted for her family throughout her entire life and feels that her own accomplishments are overshadowed by her dedication to her family. It is incredibly difficult for Ruby to explore her talent for something that her parents can not hear because they do not understand why it means so much to her.

Despite their differences, her family comes to terms with Ruby's dream of going into music. After attending Ruby's choir concert at school, her family realizes that although they do not understand the music, it is something of great importance to Ruby and an area of potential for her. It was also at this pivotal part of the movie that Ruby realizes she doesn't have to choose to live in either a hearing or Deaf world - the hearing community and her Deaf family/the Deaf community can coexist together. It was not an easy transition for them, however, it sparked some much needed change for the family to explore their own paths. It allowed them to focus on their goals and to understand that Deafness is not a limitation. The community and the family learned to work together to begin to understand each other's needs and hopes. While Ruby and her family had to learn to open up to the community in order to be fully embraced by them, the community in turn had to work together to build their communication skills to best embrace one another. Their joint efforts allowed for the community to come together and grow together as well.

Actors:

- Marlee Matlin: the first Deaf nominee and winner for "Children of a Lesser God" in 1986
- Troy Kotsur: Oscar-nominated Deaf actor
- Daniel Durant: Deaf actor
- Emilia Jones: hearing actress; learned ASL for 9 months prior to filming

Representative/Awareness:

"CODA" director and writer Sian Heder takes on the role of bringing representation to the Deaf community through her role in the creation process. As a hearing individual, Heder worked to bring awareness to the world of Deaf culture by bringing in many ASL interpreters into the

production team to aid in the script translation as well as teaching the actors about the culture they were portraying on screen. On the subject Heder shares "I think whenever you're coming in as an outsider to a community that's not your own and particularly a community that's been underrepresented and misrepresented for so long, I think I felt a really incredible responsibility that if I was going to do it, I had to do it right." "CODA", which is based on the previous French film "La Famille Bélier", is notable for including three Deaf actors in the main and supporting roles of Ruby's family where previously these roles would have been filled by hearing actors. This work supports the Deaf community even further by promoting the employment of Deaf people to fill Deaf roles in Hollywood.

Typically, Hollywood avoids portraying the lives of Deaf people. Deafness is not something that needs to be fixed or something to be ashamed of. CODA is the first movie to showcase the true experiences of a Deaf family. Actress Marlee Matlin states that "Sian put these characters front and center, that's part of the film's appeal; audiences haven't seen this before; this movie fulfills the thirst of audiences for something new."

Thanks to the phenomenal Deaf cast, the production team was able to learn so much about the Deaf culture and Deaf community. The team discovered various furniture placement and lighting techniques that are instrumental in Deaf households. For example, having the living room set up in a way to simultaneously watch television and have a conversation in sign language. Interpreters were on set to ensure that everyone's ideas were heard and understood. It is noted that Jones even trained for nine months to prepare for the movie. She mentioned that she did not just want to memorize her lines, but instead learn enough sign language to communicate with her co-stars.

The movie has already been nominated for three Oscars including best supporting actor for Troy Kotsur. They won the Darryl F. Zanuck award for outstanding producer of theatrical motion pictures at the PGA awards and is expected to receive the Oscar for best motion picture.

American Sign Language Honor Society (ASLHS)

This movie review is brought to you by the ASL Honor Society chapter here at Appalachian State. The chapter was founded by Cammie Hogan and Madison Fournier with the help of our faculty advisor Dr. Greta Knigga-Daughtery in the Spring of 2021. Over the last year, we have accumulated twenty-five outstanding students that have met and maintained the requirements for participating in the club. To join ASLHS, you must be a junior or senior level student, have completed or have the intention of completing ASL III, maintain an GPA of 3.5 overall and for ASL classes, and be in good standing with the ASL club. If anyone is interested in joining ASLHS or they have any questions they can contact Dr. Greta!

Sources:

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