



Smile Pinki Discussion Guide

Film Summary

Smile Pinki, Academy Award® winning best documentary short subject (2008), is the heartwarming and true story of a brave little girl named Pinki who waited six long years for life-changing cleft surgery.

When Pinki was born with a severe cleft lip, everyone in her village was surprised. They had never seen anyone with an untreated cleft before. With no education and unable to read or write, Pinki's parents had no idea that their daughter's cleft could be treated.

But one day, a social worker told Pinki's parents about a free cleft treatment program for the poor. Pinki and her father set off on foot, to find Smile Train's local partner hospital in Benares, India, that would ultimately give Pinki not just a new smile, but a second chance at life.

What is Cleft?

- Globally, 1 in every 700 children are born with a cleft lip and/or palate. Clefts are the leading birth difference defect in many developing countries.
- Children with untreated clefts not only often live in isolation, but also can experience difficulty eating, breathing, speaking, and hearing. As a result, most of these children don't attend school or hold a job.
- Most families cannot afford to pay for the cleft repair surgery for their child, which can cost as little as \$250.

How Does Smile Train Help?

- Donations provide funding for local hospitals in the developing world to provide year-round 100%-free cleft repair surgery for children in need.
- Local partner surgeons are empowered to help their own communities with Smile Train's training on the latest cleft techniques, while ensuring they abide by our strict standards.
- After surgery, our local medical professionals evaluate whether or not additional dental, orthodontic, and therapeutic care is needed. Our speech therapy programs ensure each child gains confidence with their smiles.

Discussion Questions

1. The film begins and ends with Pankaj, a social worker from GS Memorial Hospital. From urban areas to remote villages, he visited train stations, schools, farms and spoke to anyone he came across in his travels. No matter his audience, his message was the same: cleft surgery can be simple and through Smile Train's program is free. What does his journey show us about the importance of raising awareness of the issue of cleft? Why do you think that there are so many children in India who have not received cleft treatment? What does the language that Pankaj repeated such as "free treatment", "simple surgery" and "nothing to feel shame about" tell us about the fears of some of the people that he encountered?
2. One theme that we hear throughout the film is the widespread misconception that a cleft is caused by something that the mother did during her pregnancy. While experts agree that the causes of cleft lip and/or palate are multifactorial and may include a genetic predisposition as well as environmental issues, in many places throughout the world cleft is still incorrectly seen as a curse. At registration day at GS Memorial hospital we heard families say, "I cried when I saw the baby", "I wish God had not given birth to him", and "my husband told me to leave." What do you think is the best way to combat these negative narratives? Did it seem that the families felt differently after meeting with other families and the doctors and nurses at GS Memorial Hospital?
3. In Smile Train's annual survey of our partner hospitals, lack of transportation is often reported as one of the most difficult challenges that patients encounter. How many types of transport did Pinki and Ghutaru's families' take as they traveled to GS Memorial Hospital? We heard Pinki's father Rajenda say that he did not know how he would pay for the train and heard Ghutaru's mother borrow funds from a neighbor. What other non-medical obstacles do cleft patients and their families face?
4. One of the most impactful points of the film was registration day at GS Memorial Hospital. We saw hundreds of cleft patients and their families, all waiting to receive surgery. While waiting her turn in line, we saw Pinki staring intently at an older girl with an untreated cleft. Why do you think that GS Memorial Hospital hosts a registration day? What impact do you think it has on families who have never seen another child with a cleft to be surrounded by so many others who are dealing with the same issue? In what ways is it comforting to be surrounded by others who are dealing with the same issue? In what ways is it challenging?
5. There is a clear focus on education all throughout the film. We first hear about Pinki during Pankaj's visit to a classroom in her village. During registration, Dr. Subodh asks all of his patients if they will be going to school after surgery. And the film ends with both Ghutaru and Pinki back at school amongst their peers. Why do you think that Pankaj and Dr. Subodh put such emphasis on their patients receiving an education? What are their hopes for these patients?