The Emmy®-nominated series *Born This Way™* on A&E® follows a group of seven young adults born with Down syndrome along with their family and friends in Southern California. Viewers get to know these unique young adults as they pursue their passions and lifelong dreams, explore friendships and romantic relationships, and work — all while defying society’s expectations. In their willingness and courage to openly share their lives, through a lens that is not often shown on television, we learn about their career and personal aspirations, and their desire to be treated equally in all aspects of life. The series also gives voice to their parents, allowing them to talk about the joy their son or daughter brings to their family, and the ways they help their children live as independently as possible. *Born This Way* gives viewers insights into the lives of those with developmental and intellectual disabilities and the many ways these young adults live their lives to the fullest.

“I don’t want the whole society to limit me.”
—Megan, cast member, *Born This Way*

**VIEWING SUGGESTIONS**

*Born This Way* would be a great fit for a range of classes including social studies, media, and current events. It would be useful to show or discuss during after-school programs and events. This series offers an excellent opportunity for students and general audiences to discuss and explore the lives of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Born This Way* is appropriate for upper middle school, high school and college students.

**PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES**

- Watch the *Born This Way* trailer to prepare to watch the series.
- Ask students to read the language guide (page 2). This will help to explain Down syndrome as well as set a framework for understanding the experiences of the cast of *Born This Way* and others with developmental disabilities.
- Discuss the ways descriptions can affect people. Why is it important to use language carefully when talking to anyone? Why is it important to use language carefully when talking to people with differing abilities like those with Down syndrome?
W A T C H

*Born This Way*™ airs on A&E® on Tuesdays at 10/9c. Learn more about the series on aetv.com and spread the word.

L A N G U A G E  G U I D E

These tips, provided by the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS), will help provide appropriate language choices when talking about people with Down syndrome. The Preferred Language Guide can be downloaded here for print and distribution.

• People with Down syndrome should always be referred to as people first.
• Instead of “a Down syndrome child,” it should be “a child with Down syndrome.”
  Also avoid “Down’s child” and describing the condition as “Down’s,” as in, “He has Down’s.”
• Down syndrome is a condition or a syndrome, not a disease.
• People “have” Down syndrome, they do not “suffer from” it and are not “afflicted by” it.
• “Typically developing” or “typical” is preferred over “normal.”
• “Intellectual disability” or “cognitive disability” has replaced “mental retardation” as an appropriate term.
• NDSS strongly condemns the use of the word “retarded” in any derogatory context. Using this word is hurtful and suggests that people with disabilities are not competent.

D o w n  v s .  D o w n ’ s

• NDSS uses the preferred spelling, Down syndrome, rather than Down’s syndrome.
• Down syndrome is named for the English physician John Langdon Down, who characterized the condition, but did not have it. An “apostrophe s” connotes ownership or possession.
• While Down syndrome is listed in many dictionaries with both popular spellings (with or without an apostrophe s), the preferred usage in the United States is Down syndrome. *The AP Stylebook* recommends using “Down syndrome,” as well.
DISCUSS

1. Each of the young adults in *Born This Way™* has goals and aspirations. What are some of their aspirations? How are they working to achieve them?
2. Megan states that she does not want limits placed upon her because she has Down syndrome. What are some of the actions she’s taking to defy limits and exceed expectations?
3. In this series, we also hear a lot from the parents who talk about the joy their children bring to their lives. What are some of the notable comments shared by the parents?
4. Many people with Down syndrome and other developmental or intellectual disabilities want to live as independently as possible. Based on the series, what are some ways people with Down syndrome can be in control of their own lives?
5. What are some of the career goals of the cast members in *Born This Way*? In what ways can society support those with Down syndrome and other disabilities in their career paths?
6. What role do friendships play in the lives of those in *Born This Way*? Why are friendships so important in people’s lives?
7. How do you think this series might change perceptions about people with Down syndrome? How did it change your own views?
8. In what ways has society become more inclusive of people with disabilities? In what areas could there be improvement?
9. What can you do now in your school and community to be more inclusive?
10. What surprised you the most about this series?
11. What are some of the challenges faced by the cast members in *Born This Way*? How are their challenges unique, and how are they similar to the challenges many young people face?
12. What do you feel is the most important takeaway from this series? What impact do you hope this series has on our society? What can you do to help?
MEET THE CAST
OF BORN THIS WAY™

Rachel
Working in the mailroom for an insurance company, she will be the maid of honor at her brother's upcoming wedding. Rachel would love to get married herself, but first she has to find the right guy.

Sean
An excellent golfer and avid sportsman, Sean is a self-professed ladies' man who is not shy about introducing himself to every eligible woman he meets.

John
From a very young age, John made it clear to his parents that he craved the spotlight. A born entertainer, John is committed to his music and is pursuing a career in rap.

Steven
Working as a dishwasher at Angel Stadium in Anaheim and in customer service at a local grocery store, Steven is a huge movie buff and knows the title and year of every Oscar®-winning film.

Cristina
This loving and compassionate young adult works in a middle school. In her free time she loves talking on the phone with Angel, her boyfriend of four years and the man she plans to marry.

Megan
A budding entrepreneur, Megan has created a clothing brand called “Megology.” She is pursuing her dream of becoming a film producer and is a proud advocate committed to spreading the word that society should not limit adults with disabilities.

Elena
With a flair for the dramatic, this young woman embraces life. She loves to cook, dance and write poetry and takes a great pride in her independence.
**DID YOU KNOW?**

According to the U.S. Census, nearly one in five Americans have a disability. Currently 70 percent of working-age people with disabilities are not working — even though most of them want jobs and independence. The numbers are even worse for people with Down syndrome. Many studies have shown that people with disabilities, including those with Down syndrome, can work successfully and live relatively independently. *Born This Way™* highlights the career hopes and dreams of seven young adults with Down syndrome.

The Institute for Corporate Productivity has created a research report about the capabilities of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Visit [here](#) to download the report.

**SPOTLIGHT ON BEST BUDDIES®**

A&E® is pleased to join with Best Buddies to share information about their organization.

Best Buddies® is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Two cast members, Rachel and Sean, have been involved in Best Buddies’ friendship programs which partner peers — with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities — in one-on-one friendships.

Founded in 1989 by Anthony K. Shriver, Best Buddies is a vibrant organization that has grown from one original chapter to more than 1,900 middle school, high school, and college chapters worldwide. Today, Best Buddies’ eight formal programs — *Middle Schools, High Schools, Colleges, Citizens, e-Buddies®, Jobs, Ambassadors, and Promoters* — engage participants in each of the 50 states and in over 50 countries, positively impacting the lives of more than 900,000 people with and without disabilities around the world. In many cases, as a result of their involvement with Best Buddies, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities secure rewarding jobs, live on their own, become inspirational leaders, and make lifelong friendships.

For more information, please visit the Best Buddies website, and follow them on facebook.com/bestbuddies and twitter.com/bestbuddies.

**FURTHER EXPLORATIONS FOR EDUCATORS**

RespectAbility’s website offers lesson plans and classroom explorations related to disability.

**SHARE**

Spread the word about *Born This Way!*

Hashtag: #BornThisWay

A&E Facebook Page: [www.facebook.com/AETV](http://www.facebook.com/AETV)

A&E Twitter Handle: @AETV

Promotional video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7zIJPbfOM&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7zIJPbfOM&feature=youtu.be)

**EXPLORE**

Visit the A&E website to follow this series.

Visit these organizations online to learn more about them and to access their services and resources:

- **Best Buddies**
  www.bestbuddies.org

- **Global Down Syndrome Foundation**
  www.globaldownsyndrome.org

- **National Down Syndrome Society**
  www.ndss.org

- **RespectAbility USA**
  RespectAbilityUSA.org

- **Special Olympics**
  www.specialolympics.org
**RECOMMENDED READING FOR CHILDREN:**


Llano, Gabriella and Tiziana Vazquez. *In My World: Down Syndrome* (AuthorHouse, 2013). With the support of her family, a girl with Down syndrome lives her life and learns to accept being herself. Appropriate for children in elementary school.


**RECOMMENDED READING FOR ADULTS:**


Solomon, Andrew. *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity* (Scribner, 2012). A deeply touching look at how parents and children can learn to accept and embrace differences. The people featured in this book demonstrate how lives with extreme challenges also have extreme value.