

Discussion Guide

The Things I Cannot Change

16mm Black & White 55 minutes 5 seconds



Produced by
The National Film Board of Canada
for the Special Planning Secretariat
of the Privy Council

The Film

This film is an actuality report. All of the events happened; all are shown in the way they happened as nearly as is possible in film-making.

The film lives through roughly three weeks in the life of the Bailey family. During this time the father tries to find work; a tenth child is born; and the father is involved in a street fight and difficulties with the police.

There is no narrative in the usual sense of the word, no real beginning and no ending. The family's existence has been much as it is portrayed

before the film began, and there is no evidence to suggest that it is likely to change very much once the film is over. *The purpose of discussion based on the film is fundamentally to explore why this is so, what causes people to live in this way, and what might be done about it, if anything can or should be done. The value of the discussion will not be in further elaboration of the particular plight of this family, but in the development of audience responses to the family's position.*

Useful Background Information

General'

Low family income is defined as less than \$2,500 for two people, less than \$3,000 for three people, and less than \$4,000 for four people.

Education²

30% of all young Canadians between 14 and 24 have left school with Grade Eight or less.

Medical Care³

The following are the findings of a survey on medical care to children under age 15: 3 out of 10 in low-income group received care, 4 out of 10 in middle-income group, and 5 out of 10 in high-income group. A study of poor families in four Canadian cities revealed health problems in 50% of the households and chronic physical problems in 43%.

Income*

23% of Canadian families have an annual income of less than \$3,000. Families in the low-income group spend 75% of their income on food and housing.

Issues to Consider

1 A major point for discussion turns eventually around the words, "things I cannot change", quoted by the father. Are these conditions that cannot be changed? If change is possible, with whom does the responsibility for change rest - with the father, the mother, or the society at large (meaning the members of the audience) ? What change in the life of the family would make a difference now? Is there hope for the mother and father? Is there hope for the children?

2 What are the clues to the actual standard of living? How well or badly off are they? How much money the family lives on is a matter of fact. What they do with it is quite another matter.

3 What kind of family relationships are there? What are the relationships between husband and wife? Between father and children? Between mother and children?

4 What are the father's attitudes to the society around him - to his inability to get work - to his standard of living? What hopes does he have, and how real are they? What indications are there of other people's attitudes to him (the police or his fellow workers)?

5 A law for the rich! A law for the poor! In your opinion is this a valid statement? Did Bailey receive the same form of treatment from the police that you would expect in a similar situation?

6 What were your impressions of the legal aid offered Bailey? Would you feel comfortable placing your future in the hands of legal aid?

7 What responsibility does society have to children in poverty families (including so-called 'happy' poverty families)?

8 Are the social services in your community, and the administration of these services, adequate to serve the total poverty group? (e.g. clients - ethnic values, age groups, handicaps, etc.; services and facilities -quality, quantity, location, hours of operation, etc.)

9 Where rents are paid by city welfare, what might be done to encourage families on welfare to self-help cleaning, painting and maintenance? Could, or should, city welfare promote self-help programs with assistance of other levels of government?

10 Does the neighborhood environment - with its apparent lack of social facilities (save for beer parlors) - tend to throw this family together to the exclusion of outside influence (save for school)?

11 Should families such as this be accommodated in large groups of subsidized housing or should there be a blending of different kinds of housing, for varying income levels and age groups within neighborhoods? What purpose would this serve?