

# ACCIDENTAL HERO: ROOM 408

a film by Terri DeBono  
and Steve Rosen

## Community Action Guide



**This guide describes ways to use ACCIDENTAL HERO in your community or your classroom.**

**You may duplicate this guide without permission. Due credit is requested.**

Mac and Ava Motion Pictures  
677 Lily Street, Monterey, CA 93940  
tel: 831-646-9532  
mac2ava@aol.com

*"I expect them to be champions, conduct themselves that way, and they respond."  
—Tommie Lindsey, National Forensics Coach of the Year, 2000*

## CONTENTS

- USING ACCIDENTAL HERO P. 2
- THE ACCIDENTAL HERO STORY P. 3
- VIEWER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS P. 4
- HOW DO STUDENTS BENEFIT? P. 5
- HOW TO INITIATE DEBATE IN  
YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT P. 6
- WHAT IS FORENSICS? P. 7
- HOW TO SCREEN ACCIDENTAL HERO P. 6
- HOW DO STUDENTS BENEFIT? P. 8
- WHAT ARE FORENSICS EVENTS? P. 10
- HOW CAN WE HELP YOU? P. 12
- RESOURCES & HOW TO BUY P. 13
- ABOUT TOMMIE LINDSEY P. 14

## Using **ACCIDENTAL HERO**

*ACCIDENTAL HERO: ROOM 408* speaks to many of the daunting issues facing children and teachers today, yet gives hope to the American education system.

*ACCIDENTAL HERO* can be a tool for encouraging investment in youth, public schools, and community programs. A screening can be a centerpiece for a community event, with any number of outcomes. Some possibilities:

- Organize a screening at your high school or middle school to introduce forensics. Invite speech communications professionals and youth advocates to provide information to the audience about the impact forensics and youth investment can have. Invite a local forensics team to perform.
- Screenings of the film can be used for outreach, organizing,, fundraising, public awareness or in support of specific educational initiatives. Invite members of groups you are targeting: consider your current and prospective funders, school-based organizations, parent and youth groups, school policy organizations.
- *ACCIDENTAL HERO* also provides an excellent opportunity to discuss issues surrounding race and diversity. Use it in diversity training, in workplace settings, or for educational purposes. Ask us for additional resources in this area.
- Screen *ACCIDENTAL HERO* at conferences. Bring together stake-holders in youth leadership, race/diversity, community-building, and educational achievement. Screenings can be both informative and motivational, providing opportunities to organize and mobilize your constituencies.

The performance material confronts issues of race, poverty, cultural awareness, single-parent homes, racial tension and even teenage suicide. Viewers follow Lindsey's team to the California State Forensics Tournament, and as a virtual member of the audience, experience the anticipation and drama as the postings for each round are announced — sharing in the joy of the few that advance and the heartbreak for others who are left behind.

## NOTES

## About Tommie Lindsey

**"National Forensics Coach of the Year" - 2000**  
**National Glen Pelham Award - 2002**  
**1999 NFL School of Excellence Award**  
**2000 NFL School of Excellence Award**

*Since 1996, James Logan High School has sent over  
250 people to State Championships.*

*Since 1996, James Logan High School has sent  
58 people to National Championships.*

Tommie Lindsey graduated from the University of San Francisco with a major in Communication Arts and Social Science. He was the first African-American to be valedictorian at USF. After his parents died, his grandmother raised him along with his brothers and sisters. He attributes his grandmother with giving him his sense of family, his key motivator in working with teenagers today.

Tommie first taught public speaking at Alameda Juvenile Hall in 1976. "It was there I saw so many lives being wasted and decided I needed to reach them before they got here (juvenile hall)." Moving on to the high school level, his first forensics team consisted of 8 teens from continuation school. "These kids would show up for competition, and people would ask 'Where are they from?' They weren't supposed to succeed and yet they were."

His program at James Logan High began 14 years ago with 15 in the program. Today the program surpasses 200 students. His team has won the California State Forensics Championship four out of the last seven years (1996, 1998, 1999, 2001).

Tommie is married to Lois Lindsey and lives in Union City. He has two children: a daughter, Erica, who now attends UCLA and a son, Terence, who plans to enroll in his dad's forensics class next year.

"Every kid wants to be something. They want to be able to prove to someone that they are successful. And if given a chance, they will move forward to do that. When they have that kind of desire, there is not much that can hold them back."

## ACCIDENTAL HERO Story Summary

Following a San Francisco East Bay public high school teacher and his class for over two years, *ACCIDENTAL HERO: ROOM 408* tells the story of Tommie Lindsey, an extraordinary man who is changing lives by introducing his students to a little known academic sport called "forensics."

Tommie Lindsey teaches forensics (competitive speech, debate and oral interpretation) at James Logan High School, a working-class school where fewer than 38% of the students go on to four-year colleges. Nearly 100% of Tommie Lindsey's kids go to colleges and universities. This powerful African-American encourages his students to succeed against all odds while preparing for competitions. "These kids are not supposed to be in forensics, let alone win the top awards," says Lindsey. But by instilling his students with poise and self-confidence, and by giving them the motivation and opportunity to use these skills to win, he inspires kids to dream and make those dreams reality.

Guiding his students toward literary material that allows them to draw on their own culture and experience, Lindsey helps kids channel their emotions positively into spellbinding interpretations – performances that are startling in their professionalism. His teams regularly win state and national competitions usually dominated by upper-class private schools. Their success demonstrates the tremendous potential that can be found in high school students from public schools in under-served and challenged areas — and how one teacher's support and faith in his students is encouraging them to move beyond society's stereotypical expectations of them.

***"The next time you pick up the paper and read something negative about kids or public schools remember these students. There are kids—lots of kids—doing good things."***

***Tommie Lindsey, National Forensics Coach of the Year, 2000***

## Viewer Discussion Questions

*These questions are designed to get at 'the heart' of ACCIDENTAL HERO. They are useful not only to a group discussion, but also for individual consideration, and might be distributed as a flier or other hand-out. They are also useful discussion-starters for a group screening of the film, but keep in mind that the most important outcome of the screening is that viewers are discussing the issues, not that you make it through all of these questions verbatim.*

During the performance of "The Rain Came to Mayfield", the students' emotional output is highly-charged. How are emotional triggers helpful to students' education?

How are these situations supposed to make the audience feel? Describe your own emotional reaction.

Inflammatory terms are used in ACCIDENTAL HERO. Why is it important to explore the use of these derogatory terms as used in our culture? Why is the use of these words so powerful in the film? How might you discuss this with youth without hurting anyone's feelings?

In one of the interviews, a student talks about "...being given a chance". Educationally, do you feel you have "been given a chance"? Why, or why not?

Tommy's program provides a model for success. His students see success happen in front of them. They know it can be done. How can you use that model to inspire your child?

What did you learn about the time it takes these students to perfect a "piece"?

How can you convince your child that the fear of speaking in front of an audience will disappear with practice?

Tommie gets to know his students personally before he gives them pieces of literature to memorize and perform. His topics deal in issues faced by all educators today: alcoholism, abuse, homelessness, teen suicide and racism. Why do you feel he chooses such strong subject matter? What is unique about his methodology for assigning work? How might his students benefit from his approach?

## Resources for Communities

The ACCIDENTAL HERO website contains numerous resources for communities, teachers, parents, and scholars. Among these are organizations who provide support and reference material, debate associations, journals and textbooks, and colleges and universities who offer forensics scholarships.

**Visit us online at [www.pbs.org/accidentalhero](http://www.pbs.org/accidentalhero).**

### How to Buy a Copy of the Film

*ACCIDENTAL HERO: ROOM 408* speaks to many of the daunting issues facing children and teachers today, yet gives hope to the American education system.

*ACCIDENTAL HERO* can be a tool for encouraging investment in youth, public schools, and community programs.

To order a copy of *ACCIDENTAL HERO* for \$29.95 plus shipping and tax call GPN at 800-228-4630

*ACCIDENTAL HERO: ROOM 408* takes you through the struggles, triumphs and celebration of the students and their teacher as they beat the odds.

*Wayne Johnson, President  
California Teachers Association*

*College admissions directors are relying less on grade point averages and standardized test scores and are relying more on success in academically related extracurricular activities such as speech and debate as well as drama.*

*Excerpt from "Forensics and College Admissions"  
Professor Minh A. Luong, Yale University*

## How Can We Help You?

- Visit our web site at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org). There you will find the most recent material available, including the following:
  - An electronic version of this information;
  - Tips and tools for working with the media;
  - Background information about forensics;
  - Links to partners who are using the film;
  - Links to organizations that provide opportunities for forensics students, including scholarship information;
  - How to purchase videotape copies of *ACCIDENTAL HERO*.
- Call or email us to get support, or assistance with your plans. (See back cover for our address.)

## About The Filmmakers

**Terri DeBono** (Producer/Co-Director/Sound), an MFA Graduate of UCLA, has produced plays and films including a feature-length anthology of John Steinbeck short stories, "Three by Steinbeck," which won numerous educational awards and is being distributed by L.A.'s Pyramid Films. Jack Lemmon narrated DeBono's film "Time Captured in Painting," a CINE award winner.

**Steve Rosen** (Co-Director/Camera/Editor) is a graduate of UCLA's Film Department. His previous films include "Huelga," with Cesar Chavez; "Knowing It Survives Us" with Sander Vinocur; "Save Our Seas," with Eddie Albert; "Acapulco Gold," "Silver Harvest;" and "On Location, East of Eden," featuring Jane Seymour.

"Beyond Barbed Wire," DeBono's and Rosen's critically-acclaimed documentary, was broadcast nationally on PBS.

### Funders

Major funding for *ACCIDENTAL HERO: ROOM 408* is provided by the **National Black Programming Consortium** through a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Additional funders include the Fleishhaker Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the California Teachers Association and the National Educational Association.

## How Does Forensics Benefit Students?

**The below known facts provide additional material for your discussion about the ways students can be positively impacted by participation in forensics, and the value of these benefits to your own community.**

(Resourced from James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA)

1. Forensics offers students an opportunity to develop research, critical thinking, organization, persuasion, and oral communication skills.
2. Forensics appeals to students with different goals and interests. It provides useful career preparation in law, education, politics, broadcasting, religion, public affairs, business, and other professions requiring critical thinking and communication skills.
3. Forensics enables students to clarify their personal and social values through confrontation with the value judgments of others.
4. Students learn respect for dissenting opinions and acquire knowledge and skills crucial to effective participation in a democratic society.
5. Forensics provides students with an opportunity to develop social skills, including teamwork. Students develop realistic attitudes toward competition through competing responsibly and effectively in an intellectual environment.

According to Yale Professor Dr. Minh Luong: "participation in drama and debate has significantly increased the success rate of college applicants at all schools which track such data." State and national award winners have a 22-30% higher acceptance rate at top colleges, and being captain of a debate team improves acceptance chances by 60%+.

## How to Initiate Debate in your District...

1. Meet with instructors at the district's high schools to determine if speech is currently offered and get a course syllabus. Inquire whether the classes are popular.
2. Meet with the superintendent and school principals to discuss current curriculums. Is speech offered? Can the subject be introduced as an elective? Ask "What can I do to help start forensics and debate in our school district..."
3. Find the closest chapter of the National Forensics League. What would it cost in time and money to participate in regional tournaments?
4. Have patience. Be persistent. It usually takes 3 to 4 years to build a large enough pool of interested students to offer a successful forensics and debate program.
5. Inquire at other local districts about their own speech programs.
6. Contact local speech clubs, like Toastmasters, to locate assistance.
7. Identify foundations, which could provide funding and marketing assistance to communicate the educational rewards of forensics and debate to the community.
8. Find funding for an instructor to teach beginning speech as an elective, if it is not already offered. Initial funding will probably have to be secured with a grant.
9. Convince students to sign up for the elective. Creating a pool of students for a new program may require the district to make speech a required course for graduation. As a required course, the district would probably have to commit to financing the program from the general fund.
10. Identify a full-time instructor/coach.
11. Create a pool of tournament judges.
12. Build from the existing class curriculums, first offering competitive speech as an elective and later as a graduation liberal arts requirement.

### Policy Debate

Policy Debate is a two-person team debate, in which you and a partner support the affirmative or negative position of a resolution against another team.

### Congress

Congress is modeled after the procedure for floor debate in a legislature. Bills and resolutions to be debated have been determined in advance, and students have had time to prepare to speak on these issues. It is designed to test a student's ability to speak to an issue in both an extemporaneous and impromptu manner and to reveal the individual's knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Each session of Congress is one hour and twenty minutes long.

**Each forensics event provides skills-based learning for students involved. This chart breaks down these areas by event. See the key, below.**

	D	LD	Ex	Im	OO	IE	C
Research Skills	+	+	*	+	+	*	+
Interpretation Skills	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Rapid Info. Processing	+	+	+	-	-	-	*
Notetaking Skills	+	+	-	-	-	-	*
Analytical Skills	+	+	+	+	+	*	+
Application Skills	+	+	+	+	+	*	+
Refutation Skills	+	+	-	-	-	-	+
Evaluative Skills	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Persuasive Skills	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Writing/Editing Skills	+	+	*	*	+	-	+
Creativity	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Interpersonal Skills	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Content							
History	+	+	+	*	+	-	*
Literature	-	*	-	*	*	+	-
Philosophy	*	+	*	*	+	-	*
Current Events	+	+	+	*	+	-	+
General Vocab.	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

D=Policy Debate    LD=Lincoln-Douglas Debate  
Ex=Extemporaneous Speaking    Im=Impromptu Speaking  
OO=Original Oratory    IE=Interpretive Events    C=Congress

**+ Extensive    \* Considerable    - Minimal**

*courtesy ROSTRUM Library, NFL, Curtis G. Heir.*

## What Are the Events?

### *Humorous Interpretation*

Humorous interpretation is a humorous cutting which represents one or more characters from a play or plays of literary merit.

### *Dramatic Interpretation*

Dramatic interpretation is a dramatic selection representing one or more characters from a play or plays of literary merit. This material may be drawn from stage, screen or radio.

### *Duo Interpretation*

A cutting from a play, humorous or serious, involving the portrayal of two or more characters presented by two individuals. The material may be drawn from stage, screen, or radio.

### *Original Prose and Poetry*

Original prose or poetry is a selection that has been written by the student. It represents one of more characters.

### *Original Oratory*

In original oratory, speakers choose a topic that interests them and develop a 10 minute persuasive speech on that subject to address current problems and propose solutions.

### *Thematic Interpretation*

A selection that must be drawn from more than one source of literary merit, but all selections are related by a theme. The use of a manuscript is required. Maximum time limit is 10 minutes, including an introduction.

### *Expository*

Contestants will be given three topics in the general area of current events, choose one, and have 30 minutes to prepare a speech that is the original work of the student.

### *Lincoln-Douglas Debate*

Lincoln-Douglas Debate is a one-person (per side), persuasive, policy debate on traditional stock issues. Competitors in Lincoln-Douglas will be evaluated on their analysis, use of evidence, and ability to effectively and persuasively organize, deliver, and refute arguments.

## What is Forensics?

The word, "forensics", is derived from Latin and is closely related to "forum". A forum is an open exchange of ideas in an atmosphere of respect and responsibility. As practiced by the ancient Greeks, the "forum" was the actual seat of government, a place where the people got together to make the decisions by which they ruled. Later, in Roman times, the "forum" became a place where people could speak out in an attempt to persuade their representatives to one course of action or another. A forensics team competes in speech, debate, and oral interpretation. The object is to seek the truth.

## What is Debate?

Debate is an essential activity in democratic societies. More than two thousand years ago, when democracy first flourished in Athens, citizens met regularly in public assemblies. Their votes determined the policy and the actions of the state. But their votes were always preceded by debate: citizens and leaders argued about what was morally right and legally right; they argued about the best way to achieve a desired outcome; they argued about what was possible and what was prudent.

### **Does this have anything to do with science or the study of dead bodies?**

No, although both do share some origins. "Legal speaking in the law courts was referred to as forensic discourse." (*Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 3rd edition, Kendall/Hunt, 1983, p. 39). Forensic medicine is the application of medical science to legal problems. It typically has to do with the application of scientific or medical knowledge to legal matters as in the investigation of crime. A formal argumentation or public debate usually takes place in the determination of the cause of death, thus the term forensics.

## How to Screen ACCIDENTAL HERO

To get the most out of a community screening, view it as having three components: (1) the event planning, (2) the event itself, and (3) the attention you can generate for your issues. You might get 10, 50 or 100 people to your event. But you should be able to get your ENTIRE COMMUNITY aware of your program or agency through media coverage or promotion associated with your event.

### Event Planning

Outreach: This is an opportunity to build alliances. Some potential co-sponsors: youth organizations, schools, corporations that support youth, existing communications organizations. For your supporters, this is an exciting opportunity to inject new interest, energy and excitement.

Location: Choose an auditorium or theater already set up for showing a video. It will likely have good audio and viewing capabilities, a sound system for your MC and/or speakers, and can often rent you the A/V equipment and projectionist. Colleges and museums, and even commercial movie theaters are good bets. Look for an adjacent area for tables and/or reception. Acoustics are also important.

Equipment: You will want a high quality video projector and a good screen. If this is not available, a standard VHS VCR is fine, particularly for smaller groups. Remember that bodies absorb sound, so plan your audio volumes accordingly.

Promotion: Personal invitations work best; fax, mail, email, hand out directly and **follow up with phone calls**. Your own networks and those of your co-sponsors are your best tools.

### The Event Itself

Comfort: Have popcorn or the like available during screening, if possible, and don't forget about ventilation.

Give the floor to your audience: Be clear about what you

want to get out of the evening and compose your opening remarks accordingly. Keep them brief. Welcome everyone, introduce yourself and your organization, and why you've organized this screening. Let the audience know what you'll be doing when the film ends (in brief, not in detail). Give the audience a one-sentence intro to the film that might include a tie-in to your organization (e.g. "This is one high school forensics program with a charismatic and dedicated leader and greatly talented kids—our community could learn from what Tommie Lindsey does and the impact the program has on his young participants.") and let the film begin.

When the Film Is Over: The audience will probably be moved and inspired, and wanting to talk or ask questions. MAKE THE MOST OF THE ENERGY OF THE AUDIENCE.

#### Do's and Don'ts

- DO have an MC or facilitator who has seen the film beforehand, is skilled at directing a public gathering and sensitive to the energy of the audience (Are they engaged? Bored? Antsy?)
  - DON'T thank a lot of people for making this evening possible.
  - DON'T make long speeches about the need for this kind of program: the film has already done that for you.
  - DO have speakers who can localize the issues.
  - DON'T dominate discussion from the stage.
- 
- You probably want to limit Q&A in the large group to 10-15 minutes. Then let people get up and mingle, talk to your people individually, and get to your reception, if there is one.
  - Give your audience a way to IMMEDIATELY use the energy from the screening to sign up, get informational pamphlets, make contributions, contact you the next day, etc. And make sure to have at least one person already outside, staffing tables to connect with those early departers (many of your audience will leave during the final credit roll), to receive donations, give out information, sell tapes or other items, and to answer questions.