>> Lauren: Thank you everyone for joining us today! My name is Lauren Appelbaum, and I am RespectAbility's Senior Vice President of Entertainment and News Media. My pronouns are she and her. I am a white woman with shoulder length brown hair wearing a navy blue shirt. Behind me is a gray background with the RespectAbility logo in white. As an individual with an acquired non-apparent disability, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, I work at the intersection of disability employment and the entertainment industry, overseeing our content advisement work and trainings to ensure authentic representation of disability, as well as building the disability community within the industry through our various Entertainment Labs. This work helps increase diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systemic change in how society views and values disabled individuals. Today, we're going to have a conversation with the talent behind the making of Dahlia, a disabled character from Walt Disney Animation Studios' most recent film "Wish." And if you haven't heard the news yet, you can watch "Wish" on Disney Plus on April 3rd. In "Wish," a young girl named Asha wishes on a star and gets a more direct answer than she bargained for when a troublemaking star comes down from the sky to join her. Asha is joined by an ensemble, led by her best friend Dahlia, the best baker in town who also happens to use a crutch. We will discuss the making and development of Dahlia's character today, ensuring authenticity and disability representation, and why intersectional representation matters. So I'm going to invite panelists on one by one to share a little bit more about themselves, and then we'll get into some questions. Jennifer?

>> Jennifer: Good afternoon everybody, my name is Jennifer Kumiyama. My pronouns are she/her. I am the voice of Dahlia in Disney's "Wish." I have long black curly hair. I'm wearing a black button-down top. I have tan skin, and I am an Asian Pacific Islander and black female. I have experience in live performance. I was in Disney's Aladdin Musical Spectacular for 13 years -- the entire 13-year run. I also had the opportunity to do Undercover Boss: Celebrity Edition with Idina Menzel, another Disney star. And I currently work as the Citywide Accessibility Coordinator for the City of Long Beach.

>> Lauren: Thank you Jennifer. Tom?

>> Tom: Hi, my name is Tom Caulfield -- I use he/him pronouns. I'm a white male. I'm wearing a cap and glasses. I'm wearing a green cardigan. And my background is a gray color. Yeah, I'm a story artist who worked on "Wish," bringing Dahlia to life. I'm an Emmy award-winning director, working -- when I worked on Rapunzel's Tangled Adventure for Disney TV. I've also, way back when -- still in Disney -- I animated on the Lion King 1 1/2, Lilo and Stitch 2, Mickey, Donald, and Goofy: The Three Mouseketeer's. So yeah, I came over to feature animation in 2022, where I started as a board artist on "Wish."

>> Lauren: Thank you. Juan Pablo?

>> Juan Pablo: Hi, my name is Juan Pablo Reyes. My pronouns are he/him. I identify as a gay Mexican man. I have tan skin, short hair, a black shirt with white stripes. And I am a producer on Disney's "Wish," and I have the pleasure of working with all of these fine people. And before that I worked on creative development in movies like "Encanto" and many others, but it's a joy to be here.

>> Lauren: Thank you. Erica?

>> Erica: Hi, my name is Erica. I use she/her pronouns. I am a white woman with red hair and green glasses, and I worked as a consultant on "Wish," and I am a writer.

>> Lauren: Excellent, thank you very much Erica. Maddy?

>> Maddy: [Hi] everyone, my name is Maddy. I use she/her pronouns. I am an Asian woman with long black hair, and wearing a colorful sweater. I worked as a cultural trust consultant with Erica and all these great people. I am a writer, photographer, and overall storyteller based in Dallas, Texas. My experience in the industry runs throughout assistant work, development, and working on TV shows. I hope to become a TV writer, and I'm so happy to be here.

>> Lauren: Thank you to everyone for sharing a little bit about themselves. I'm going to go to Juan Pablo. Representation of disabled characters in family films is pretty low -- just 8% according to the Geena Davis Institute. This is in comparison to 20% of individuals, when you include children, who have a disability in the U.S. Why was it so important for your team to include a disabled character in "Wish?"

>> Juan Pablo: Yes, that's a great question. So the world of "Wish" is really a fantastical world that -- for anyone that knows the premise -- it's where -- it's a place where your wishes can be granted, you know? So -- the whole idea is that people from all over would come, because who doesn't want to get their wish granted? So knowing that, it had to be a multicultural kingdom or a place where people from different backgrounds would come. So we were -- that's where we decided to set it in that Mediterranean area between continents North Africa and the south of Europe. So organically, it made sense to have people -- from different backgrounds, you know? And when we're looking at that, we were talking about all of the diverse backgrounds that logically would come in -- and there's always, like, the people with disabilities are almost never represented, because we're talking about the larger scheme -- of these people, and so it felt like we should also include people with disabilities, because they're also a big part of the -- communities that are not represented -- and then we also -- I have to give a shout out to Tom, because he was in the story room early on, and he has always been very vocal about the -- these statistics that you just talked about, you know? Something that he has top of mind, and always -- is always a champion for it. So -- it just felt organic to the story, to the communities that we were showing -- and then having champions like Tom in the room.

>> Lauren: Thank you. I love how you said "felt organic" -- as it should, because we're just part of society. So Tom, would love to head over to you. As you know, already identified yourself as a person with a disability, you were able to bring your life experience and perspective -- to animation, including with the character character of Dahlia -- I really appreciate from my perspective of seeing how the Disney team brought you in for your expertise without tokenizing you as a disabled creative, but as a story artist who's extremely talented, and just happens to have a disability. And -- I really believe that Dahlia would not have been as vibrant as a character without your involvement. Can you share with folks about how did you help ensure Dahlia was portrayed authentically and that Dahlia was not the only disabled character represented?

>> Tom: Thank you, yes. And yeah -- from day one, there was a lot of research put into it -- we researched all kinds of disabilities and advocacies and -- specialists in all that kind of stuff. And then when we did kind of hone it down to the disability she has and then I could bring my -- I live with MS, and I was able to bring my understanding of how I navigate through the world with a crutch and translate that -- to Dahlia. I mean, we went big big picture to -- the streets of Rosas, how would she get around the streets of Rosas? How would a person with disability get around the streets of Rosas? And to the minute minute details of how would her shoes look? I mean, I know one of my legs is weaker than the other, and one of my shoes is always scuffed, it always wears before the other one out. So we try to bring that level of detail into Dahlia. You probably will not see that on screen unless you really really look, but everyone on the crew was so diligent and really paid attention to that -- like how long should a crutch be? How much padding should be on the the armrest of the crutch? A lot of work went into it to make it feel authentic.

>> Lauren: Excellent. You can see it -- you can see a lot of it from watching, and I really appreciate all the work that you've helped do to make sure that that was true. Jennifer: for years, you know, there have been lots of campaigns for Disney to create a disabled Disney princess. While Dahlia is not a princess -- she's very much in this Disney world. How did you react when you first read the script for Dahlia?

>> Jennifer: Well, the funny thing is is I had no idea what it was for. So when you audition for big projects like this, all you know is that it is a big project, and that it's animated. So I was like, oh my gosh, this is so wild -- this is crazy. I think in the audition process the only thing that I knew was that she was a baker, and that she ambulated with a crutch, and that really excited me. You know, I didn't realize how big the project was, of course, until I got signed on. And it really -- I've been in this industry for a very long time, and it's a win for all of us when we can see ourselves or people like us on the screen. So I think that's what really really made me most happy about being a part of this project is that -- being a Disney kid myself from the age of, like, five -- that kids who are growing up today will have -- the ability to look on screen and see themselves in Dahlia.

>> Lauren: Yep. Kids being able to see themselves reflected is so so important. I noticed people are starting to put questions in. You are more than welcome to put Q&As in, we will get to them towards the end, about halfway through, so there's a Q&A box where you can enter your questions and so thank you for doing so. Juan Pablo, I wanted to come back to you real quick. Your team recognized the importance of -- Tom not being the only one talking about disability from a disability perspective, pulling in a team of individuals to back him up. Can you share a bit about the importance of including cultural story trust consultants on films like "Wish?"

>> Juan Pablo: Yeah no, of course, and obviously we have a lot of our consultants here in the room, so I'm very grateful for that. Yeah -- the consultant process just in broad strokes at Disney is very important -- call it Moana, call it Encanto, which I was, again, a part of -- we had a Colombian cultural trust. So it's very important to bring in people that can bring in the specificity -- of both the lived experience but also scientific or historic or whatever background that needs to be brought into that particular case, you know? So it is something that we take very seriously, because whatever it is -- if it's a star or a person from a particular country or whatever it is, we want it to feel real and authentic, you know? In the case of Dahlia -- obviously we have you all, which -- RespectAbility was a huge part of it and -- working with wonderful people that help facilitate that -- like the RISE team or Kalikolehua Hurley who those two -- are big part of the work -- so I cannot attribute everything to the production. We wouldn't be here without RISE or with Kalikolehua -- so I am very thankful to have that team and that support that helped in Wish, but helps in every other project that we have. So it's a robust group of internal folks as well. And then we have -- we start to bring in consultants -- we have RespectAbility, we also worked with a neurosurgeon from UCLA, her name is Dr. Linda Liau, and she was also very crucial to the process of developing Dahlia, because -- as Tom mentioned, and as you all also talked about in all of our meetings, we need to know what -- what type of situation is the one that Dahlia is facing -- and she helped us diagnose the character -- we talked about moyamoya being an important one that a lot of female Asian women -- it's normal for that community to be -- to have moyamoya, and then she would probably have a stroke -- which would make part of her body -- be a little bit -- challenges with motion. But -- she -- also through the lived experience, we talked about how it's just a part of who she is -- and -- she needed to be celebrated and -- just let her be -- and we are -- we had folks like Maddy and Vanni -- and then Jennifer herself, to be honest -- Jennifer brought a big part of Dahlia's personality. When she was recording she would always talk -- about what Dahlia would say or do in particular occasions. So that is -- and we'll talk about casting later, but I consider Jenifer also a consultant in her own right -- so -- we -- we're surrounded by wonderful people.

>> Lauren: Thank you -- I can echo thanks for the RISE team and -- all the other folks within Disney who really made it a priority and such to ensure, and it's lovely to see how much the RISE team and Kalikolehua kind of back the production up in ensuring that you have the resources to be able to do your job. So Erica, you were working as a National Leadership Fellow with RespectAbility when you were pulled in to work on "Wish." When we were chatting last week, you mentioned how much you enjoyed -- watching early cuts of the film, and I'd love for you to kind of share a little bit more about some ways that you were able to help this team while watching.

>> Erica: Yeah, I think it's very important that none of the other characters say anything that could be considered patronizing or ableist in some other way. So I would just watch the film and make sure that there was none of that to ensure that it wouldn't hurt anyone watching it.

>> Lauren: Thank you. And Maddy, you also were on our consultant team -- can you share a bit about how we help the team ensure the animation of Dahlia was done authentically -- things that you -- saw and shared with the team?

>> Maddy: Thanks for the question. So as a person with cerebral palsy, there's a lot of little things that people won't think of, and that's what I really honed in on. Like Tom, my shoes don't last long -- I have the exact same problem. And I'm just like, oh my goodness -- so I really focused on the little details. Like in the beginning, her shoes were pointy, and that's not very good for balance, and her skirt was a bit long, and I know when I have a long skirt, I trip over it a lot. So I have shorter skirts so I can walk well. And then it -- and then how would the crutch be supported? Like, where to position it? Would she be seated or would she be standing? And it's very important, because Dahlia could -- it was what's feasible, so Dahlia could not only be in her own space, but thrive in it, and be an active part of the story without sacrificing accommodations.

>> Lauren: Thank you Maddy. And Tom, coming back to you. Obviously you were very involved with the animation, but as Juan Pablo said -- shared additional insights throughout the production of the film. Can you share about any instances of how you added kind of disability representation throughout the storyline, or just ensuring the authenticity of representation?

>> Tom: Yeah, it was great that the different departments really connected -- Juan Pablo was very instrumental in making sure we spoke to each department -- animation spoke with visual development, which spoke to storyboard. So we all worked together to be on the same page, so -- the animator Andrew -- Andrew Ford -- he borrowed my crutch for a bit just to get the feeling of how it was to move with a crutch, and I was acting it out for him. And then with visual development -- there was a scene where Dahlia -- is in her house, and looking at it saying, "oh, there's too many rugs in there. I think we're going to have to take them out, because that's a tripping hazard for -- what material is the ground made of, because that's not going to be very stable with a crutch. Is this sofa too squishy, cause yeah, you're not getting out of that sofa if it's too squishy. So it was a great way for all the departments to really take a look at the accessibility for Dahlia, and again, like Maddy just said, just so she has the room to -- the accessibility to live in this world, and to just be the best character that she turned out to be. And so again, I credit Juan Pablo and the production that really married the whole pipeline together to make sure everything was accessible for Dahlia.

>> Lauren: Thank you. And we're going to get to kind of casting and such in a moment, but first I kind of want to stay with this idea of -- consultancy, because I know some of the things that the RISE team also kind of reached out to us about were kind of products. Whenever you're talking about a children's film -- family film -- there are books, there are toys and such, and so I think that was something that all four of us -- really really enjoyed being able to kind of provide input on that. And so Lego actually introduced the first Lego Friends character who uses a crutch. Erica, could you share a little bit about how we worked with the team to ensure that Dalia's crutch was portrayed as authentically as possible, while staying within the limits of what Lego could do?

>> Erica: Yes. I was amazed that there was such detail that went into making Legos. And one thing that we had to really work on was her crutch, and how it would fit the doll, because Lego doesn't really use round shapes, which is what crutches usually have around the arms, so we had to figure out a way to make it work with Legos. And that was really cool.

>> Lauren: I know my eight-year-old asked for it [laughs] and got the -- got the set, built it at my grandparents house -- or build it at her grandparents house, sorry. So many productions have really shied away from hiring disabled actors due to perceived but incorrect notions that it may cost more or take more time for a disabled actor to participate. However, we know in practice that that really isn't the case. Juan Pablo, as -- producer on the film, why was it so important to ensure that you cast a disabled actress in this role?

>> Juan Pablo: Well yeah, I think both in production and our casting director -- we think it's extremely important -- because it is a big part of the character. Like again, as I was saying, Jennifer was such a big part of building the character as well, so that's something that someone that cannot relate to the character, whatever the dimension of diversity is -- or any other type of thing -- they just bring so much more than just the voice -- they bring -- life experiences, they bring in a personality. So we actually think it's just for the best of the creative process -- to start with that. And yeah, our Casting Director Grace Kim was just phenomenal in the process of finding Jennifer. She actually was familiar with Jennifer being a part of the Aladdin musical in California Adventure -- and said "I need to track her down." So she did. She got in touch with Jennifer, who did her her audition, and then Jennifer met with us and with the directors, and that's kind of how it happened -- we had that first conversation with her, we talked about the character, we talked about where the character would go, and give a little bit more detail than the one that was initially given, as Jennifer was saying, at the beginning it's a little secretive. But yeah, it was -- it was just very organic, to be honest. And we're very thankful to Grace for doing such wonderful job as well.

>> Lauren: Jennifer, I loved how you were saying how you didn't know -- what this film was or anything, so once -- you were hired and you were here to do the work, did this Disney team provide you with any accommodations in order for you to succeed in your role?

>> Jennifer: Yes. I was able to bring my -- caretaker with me, which they also accommodated financially for their hours there. In addition to that -- transportation, as you know for people with disabilities, is often not as reliable as we need it to be. So I was provided transportation as well. But everybody was just so welcoming, and it felt like being at home. I hadn't been at the theme parks or worked with the company since 2016, and it was just so nice to be back and embraced, and -- I felt like everybody was excited about Dahlia, which made me even more excited about Dahlia, to learn more and more about her. But yeah, accommodations provided -- by the production staff and team were amazing.

>> Lauren: That is great, and I imagine there might have been a few other things that didn't even cost any money, like lowering the microphone for someone sitting versus standing -- and such, that obviously are very easy to do.

>> Lauren: Yeah. It was a very wide open studio so I didn't feel like I was -- it was plenty accessible for a wheelchair. I use a big motorized wheelchair, and I felt -- grateful to be there, but I also felt that they were equally grateful to have me there as well.

>> Lauren: That is wonderful, and as anyone who's been able to see "Wish" yet can tell how talented you are as a voice actor,

>> Jennifer: Thank you.

>> Lauren: And I can't wait for others to be able to see it when it's out on Disney+ next month.

>> Jennifer: [Me] too.

>> Lauren: So another topic that kind of has come up is the importance of intersectional representation. Maddy -- you've talked about as a Chinese American adoptee with cerebral palsy who's also diabetic and neurodiverse, you've not really had the opportunity to see yourself represented on screen much. But when you saw the character of Dahlia, you felt represented. What does that mean to you?

>> Maddy: It meant everything, because I was a Chinese adoptee and because I was disabled and because I belong to so many communities and I grew up in a really small town. So I really felt isolated. There was no one like me. And I truly believe that if I had seen Dahlia as a kid, it would have changed my life, because there isn't very much representation -- that represents people with disabilities as confident, productive members of society, who actually deserve to have rights, and deserve to have accommodations and accessibility. And it's so hard, because I felt like I was the only one, and Dahlia would have told me I wasn't. And Dahlia is such a strong character. She has a disability, but it's just a part of her. And she still thrives. She has possibilities. She has -- she really just lives life. She's an integral part of the story without being a plot device. It's how she can exist, and I hope that this starts -- the theme of more disabled people being represented in a really good light, because we deserve that. I will forever be grateful to -- Juan Pablo and the Disney team, because that would have just changed my life, and I'm just so grateful. Working on "Wish" has been one of the highlights of my entire life and I will never forget it.

>> Lauren: Thank you Maddy. Jennifer, coming back to you, similar type question. Why is it so important that Dahlia is not only disabled but also Asian, and what do you hope the impact of this character will have for the next generation of children looking to see them themselves represented?

>> Jennifer: You know, in Asian cultures, the model myth minority is that Asian kids are quote "perfect." They're great at math, they're obedient to their parents, and very often -- actually all of the time, you don't see any of them with a physical disability. I think being an API with a disability and having that representation in Dahlia is so important, because Dahlia is perfect. She's perfect, cane or not. She is a darn good baker -- to bake enough for the king, I mean that is in itself -- super super awesome. But I think it just encourages people from the API communities to not really see disability as something that is negative, because it's not, but to really accept the fact that us as a human race -- there's no perfect human that could do everything, so essentially, why are we even -- why are we even categorize -- able-bodied people or people with disabilities? We're just people , and I think that's really important. Also too, I think it's great for kids who might live in households where their disability is kind of not really talked about in the household. I think it's important for a child to be recognized in the many different ways that you could recognize a human being, and disability is included in that. But at the same time, piggybacking off what Maddy said, the greatest part of Dahlia's storyline is that she has a disability, but that's not really talked about. Like, she's seen as a human being first. Disability is not part of her story in the film. She's a baker, she's a loyal friend, she's get-her-done kind of girl. She's kind of bossy. She's really sassy and -- she's a great best friend. And I think that's -- those are the important things to take home about -- intersectionality. And another thing that I also really like about Dahlia is that she's kind of chubby -- chubby girls don't always get a great rap, and she's -- that's another intersectional community that we don't talk about very much. But yeah, Dahlia is just perfect in every way. She's a great -- a great role model for kids and -- kids at heart from the API Community, from the disability community, from the plus-size community. It's just -- I couldn't say enough.

>> Lauren: Thank you for adding that third intersectionality in there, because you're right. Being able to see -- people that look like you is so important and -- a lot of characters that are drawn out there are drawn -- very thin and such, and so being able to see someone who reflects more of the average person in the U.S. and probably worldwide -- is really nice to see. I'm going to kind of broaden that question out to -- the rest of the members of the panel of -- is there anything that you hope audiences will take away from watching? And kind of open it up to -- all of our panelists?

>> Erica: I just hope that people can see that Dahlia is just like other people. And she even uses her disability at times to save the day, like when the other characters are sneaking into the castle, she works on more of the side and stuff, so I think that's very important to show that disabled people can do things too.

>> Lauren: Yep, I kind of feel without Dahlia -- like, she does help save the day, right? Without giving anything away for folks who haven't seen it yet and such. But -- she becomes very integral to doing so. [laughs] Anyone else want to add to that of what do you hope audiences will take away from watching? Maddy?

>> Maddy: I hope that audiences -- will be aware of just how much you can do, but also I'd like to add that whatever you can do is enough, and you deserve that accessibility in that space, because her -- like, anything that she did, her friend just helped out. She leaned on the queen, she did that, but she still kicked ass, and she wasn't focused -- or there wasn't the narrative of what she can't do, and she can't do, but it's also just really important to look at yourself and say that what you can do is enough, and you can still rock it, and it may look different than everyone else, but you deserve the space and exist without having to fight for it, without having to feel [less than.]

>> Lauren: Thank you. And I want to remind folks that they can put their questions in the Q&A box, you click on the little Q&A icon, and you'll be able to ask a question, either providing your name or asking anonymously. And we'll be getting to them in just a moment. I have another -- while we're waiting for more to come in, I'd love to kind of ask another question for all of our panelists. What advice do you have for disabled creatives wanting to enter this industry, whether as an actor, an animator, writer, producer, or any other role -- advice for disabled creatives? Who would like to start?

>> Jennifer: I will, if that's okay -- people ask this question a lot, and I always start off by saying you have to be your own champion, and you have to believe in yourself, because if you don't, you can't expect anyone else to. One of my favorite TV shows is RuPaul's Drag Race, and she always says, if you don't love yourself, how the hell are you gonna expect anybody else to? And that's -- those are words that I really live by. You have to -- put in the work, you have to hone your craft, take classes -- I still take voice lessons. I still do things to motivate myself as a creative, going to theater or being a part of projects with friends -- creating our own content and things like that. And I think you just really have to be your own cheerleader. Get some good head shots, get out there, find yourself an agent or a manager or both -- and find somebody who's gonna fight as hard for you as you will yourself, who will see you as a person first and understand that your disability is not a hindrance, rather, it's something that makes you super cool.

>> Lauren: Erica did you -- Tom?

>> Tom: Sorry, I don't want to keep repeating, because I think everyone has just hit the nail on their head there with just being your own advocate. But I -- just going back to your last question, again, is like, how do we see Dahlia in through people with disabilities' eyes -- I also hope that people without disabilities see Dahlia, and they begin to recognize that -- I mean, as a gay man with a disability, I know there's a lot of hurdles to run through, but to see it more out in the open or more normalized, I hope that it gives the public less of that, because there is a perception the public have of disabled people, and I hope Dahlia being front and center -- and as sassy as she is, I hope it just makes people think about the disabled community a bit more. And so yeah -- and again, I agree with everything that has been said by Maddy and Jennifer and Erica whole hearted -- I 100% agree -- just be your own advocate and just don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.

>> Lauren: Jennifer, did you have something you wanted to add?

>> Jennifer: Yes, about the first question that you asked -- at the beginning of this conversation, Juan Pablo said something really interesting about how Rosas was created, it was a place of -- many different cultures and community, right? And when we think about community and how we see community perceived in media, it's not how -- how community really is -- 20% of our population at least here in America has a disability, some sort of disability. And when we see these communities being crafted in movies or TV shows, we very seldomly see people that look like us. So if there's anything that people take away from Dahlia being such a integral part of the story is that people with disabilities are very much a huge part of the fabric of our lives, no matter where we live.

>> Lauren: We're getting lots of questions in the Q&A, so we'll try to get to as many as possible. So I know you can't really talk about future productions, and I know a lot of questions are about that, but here's one from anonymous: "Dahlia means a lot to many of us, this is wonderful, thank you for having this chat and including intersectionality. How did this experience inform future productions when it comes to including more disability representation? For example, are their conscious plans to represent more neurodivergent or immunocompromised individuals?" So I know you can't share any details of anything that may be in the pipeline, but has there been more conversations about disability, especially among non-disabled individuals that were involved with "Wish" that may be going on to other productions? I guess Juan Pablo, that might be to you and Tom maybe?

>> Juan Pablo: Yeah, I mean what I can say is -- we -- again, we're so lucky to have teams like the RISE team and other many teams that are -- very much in the pulse of where we need to move towards when it comes to representation, and I know that they talk to Disney Animation, but they talk to every division of the Walt Disney Company. So I know that that is certainly happening -- obviously -- the -- specific types of representation needs to feel organic and truthful to the story, so we will see, I think, all of these beautiful different type of characters come up in different media -- so yeah -- I guess it's -- it's hard to predict the future, but I know that we have wonderful people and advocates and people that really care for the nature of this type of work that I think are still pushing forward.

>> Lauren: Thank you. Jennifer, this next question is for you, and I apologize if I mispronounce a name, but it says "hi, it's Luticha! I'm so proud of you kumi-chan! My wheel sister. Can you tell us what you did to prepare for this role, especially how you thought about personality while singing?"

>> Jennifer: Hi Luticha, I love you too! That's a really good question -- my inspiration for wanting to be a singer specifically within Disney came from The Little Mermaid, and I remember how I was eight years old when that film came out, I remember how that made me feel, and I really thought about how -- or the potential of Dahlia and how she can make other kids feel. So I wanted to really think about how I can make her seem as magical as every other character in this beautiful piece of work is -- and try to go back to thinking about what it was like for me as a teenager -- I'm the oldest of six kids, I was bossy. Full stop. Anyone will tell you that. But -- also too -- being -- the leader of her little group is something that I'm kind of familiar with being an organizer in the community, and I just wanted to really make sure that whatever I was doing, whether it was dialogue or singing, was motivating in a way, I guess, for any sort of child. And not motivating in the annoying kind of sense, more like just -- sprinkling a little bit of that Disney magic on the character, and making people feel that when they see or hear Dahlia. So I guess I would just -- I watched a lot of cartoons, I watched a lot of cartoons -- a lot of Disney cartoons, my old favorites. And I would just think about things that were -- kid-like, teenage-like, because we all know my teens was a very long time ago [laughs] so I had to re-familiarize myself with what it was like to be a teenager. [laughs]

>> Lauren: Excellent. This next question is from Amber, and it's for all of our panels that would like to weigh in. Aside from Disney's "Wish," do you have other media, books, shows, movies that you would recommend that showcase characters with disabilities in a positive way? And I can think of a few that I know that are on Disney+ right now, but Tom, I see you nodding, I don't know if you want to take that first?

>> Tom: Yeah, I love this. This is my wheelhouse right here. And first of -- to keep in with the Disney team -- you've got Finding Nemo. Like, Nemo has -- one of his fins is -- it's stunted or something, and then you've got Dory as well with the memory loss. Another great movie that really builds a really safe world for disability -- for people with disability, and it's so comfy that I want to live there, is "Turning Red," and it -- they went to the minutia of even adding Braille onto the school. Like, blink and you miss it, but they added Braille onto the doors of the school, and they had accessibility ramps, and --

>> Maddy: Diabetes, too.

>> Tom: Yeah, yeah, the diabetes -- the young lady in the -- it was -- the attention to detail was the buses that take on the wheelchairs, and to just go outside of Disney for a small bit [laughs] there was Nemona, which was fantastic. Again, a gay amputee was one of the main characters, and that was amazing. And then if you go back further -- you've got the Quest for Camelot -- there's a lot. So yeah, it is out there. It's very few and far between, but it has gotten a lot better as time has gone on, so yeah, there is -- they would be my main ones to really look at, and just -- they seem to celebrate people with disabilities. I'm sure I'm forgetting a lot, and then that anyone else can chime in on, so please.

>> Lauren: Would anyone else like to add their favorite disability representation, other than "Wish?"

>> Maddy: Crip Camp, of course. And then I love Judy Heumann's book, her memoir. I read that, and it was so -- it was so lovely. Also, Alice's -- Alice Wong's memoir as well, the Year of the Tiger, I think it is. And then -- The Good Doctor -- very good for other -- for invisible -- invisible disabilities, and there's a splattering of a lot too. But like Tom, I'm probably -- my mind is blank, but there's examples come to mind. [laughs]

>> Juan Pablo: I know that we said other than "Wish," but I also want to give a shout out to our partners in publishing, and I know that you all consulted with them as well, but there's other stories that add to Dalia's storytelling as well -- there's this book called "Wish: A Recipe For Adventure," which is a retelling of the movie, but from Dalia's perspective, so thank you all for working on that too, but -- I think it's beautiful, because it gives you a little bit more of her story as well.

>> Lauren: I'm actually reading "Wish: A Recipe For Adventure" with my almost nine-year-old now, and -- perfect for Middle School age. She's a little young for it, so helping some words, but I think it's -- it's wonderful for there to be a book from Dalia's perspective. All right. Anyone else wanted to share any books, movies, content that they like? Otherwise we will move on, going through some of these questions. So Deborah Sarna is asking, and I don't know if this -- if this exists or not, I know it exists for some other projects, but "is there a teachers guide that's available that educators could use with this movie and Dahlia's portrayal to elevate deeper understanding about neurodiversity, disabilities, and inclusion?" Is there any guide like that that's out?

>> Jennifer: I don't think there is but that sounds like a great idea. I know that there's not one specifically for "Wish," but Maddy talked briefly about her love for the documentary "Crip Camp," and "Crip Camp" has a great curriculum, in I think four or five huge sections that are centered around disability and power, power in language, intersectionality -- and disability history and disability justice, so I think that would be -- a great toolkit to refer to as far as disability in education -- I do think that the lack of disability history in elementary education or any education level is a huge reason why there's so much disconnect between people that don't have disabilities and people that do in our communities, and I think that it's great that you're looking for ways to teach your students about disability because -- the only way that we can learn how to coexist peacefully is to know about each other and know our history and where we came from.

>> Lauren: Yeah.

>> Maddy: So there is a great organization, it's called Asian [Americans] with Disabilities Initiative, and they're -- they have a website, they are on Instagram, all the stuff. They do a lot of studies in education and while not like a teacher's guide, they have some great resources on more information. Other than that -- this is gonna sound very niche, but there's a lot of education on TikTok, and social media. There's creators like Alice Wong, and like Tiffany Yu, and like -- just people just talking about it. I know there's -- yeah, there's a lot of representation on social media which is so great and so fun.

>> Lauren: Excellent, thank you. We have a few comments from folks I'm going to read out loud, because I think you all might like to -- hear them. Shannon Horne says first of all, hi Jen. Secondly, as a Disabled student advocate who has seen the movie, thank you for such great representation. Third, I'm a mother of non-disabled teenagers, and they loved the movie as they are growing up learning about disability representation, so yay. Also hearing this from both disabled and non-disabled individuals and such. And let's see -- from Crystal and Dominick, sending much love from Long Beach. We are in awe of Jennifer and her accessibility advocacy for the city. What do you see the role of disability representation in systems change? So we'll go to Jennifer for that, and if anyone else would like to add to it, we'll be glad to do so.

>> Jennifer: First of all, Crystal and Dominick are two of our Long Beach Public Service Corp Fellows, and they're working with me in the Office of Equity during their time at the City of Long Beach, so thank you all so much for joining -- I think prior to my time as a as a citywide accessibility coordinator, there was not somebody from the disability community in this position. I think when we talk about systems change, we need to really also look at who's leading the work -- I think we need to start realizing that disability -- the disability experience is experience, and we need to -- value that as we look at things that can change -- I'm very much an advocate for higher education and it being empowering to individuals, but at the same time, not everybody has had the opportunity or what they need to be able to pursue higher education. Therefore, lived experience should be equally valued, especially when we talk about things like disability -- nobody knows our lives better than we do, and when we talk about system change, I think that's the biggest thing for me.

>> Lauren: Thank you. We have a comment from Ruth Ellis: as a teacher educator, I use the characters in Finding Nemo with my teacher candidates to help them identify eligibilities for the different levels of systems of support in classrooms. Every time that Ruth uses the module, they love it, so another education -- resource, but also using film to like help try to create that change that Jennifer was just talking about, which I think is really wonderful. The questions keep coming in, and I'm trying to make sure I'm asking ones that are very different from ones that we have not asked already. Let's see. Another comment of being a -- plus-sized disabled woman, I appreciate this movie so much. Let's see -- another resource that's being shared is JustSayHiSchools.org, it is a disability inclusion curriculum, including Pre-K to 12 lesson plans, and Judy Huemann was involved in its development and such. So Just Say Hi schools is another -- it's another educational resource for people who are asking that. And let's see -- I'm gonna bring it back cause we're getting close to time, and as we mentioned, "Wish" will be on Disney Plus in just a few short weeks, and so I'm sincerely hoping that a whole lot more audiences that haven't had a chance to see it yet will get a chance to. I want to kind of do a quick round robin if there -- if you want to share, if there's something you're working on next that you're allowed to talk about -- please -- you can give a quick shout out. If you want people to follow you on social media, you can share that information, or just one last tidbit that you would like to share with our audience today. Jennifer, can we start with you?

>> Jennifer: Yes -- I'm just working right now, and going to school at Cal State Long Beach, but please follow me on social media. I'd love to connect with you all. I'm on Instagram @KumiRocks - KumiRocks. Thank you so much RespectAbility for all of your hard work on this, and to Tom and to Juan Pablo, thank you for always being so, just, kind and hospitable toward me. I really appreciate this opportunity, and so so proud and happy to be a part of this beautiful, beautiful film.

>> Lauren: Thank you Jennifer. We're really happy that you would be able to join us for this and kind of share this message with our audience. Maddy? You're on mute.

>> Maddy: I'm just so grateful that we have this representation, that we have -- this, yeah, that we have this representation. And I think it's such a big conversation in how small changes and small things can really help and change some life -- I mean, the shoes, and I know -- and like, putting the microphone down. Everyone can do these changes. Everyone can be inclusive, and I think this is such a huge step. And I'm yeah, again, so thankful, so grateful.

>> Lauren: Excellent. Thank you Maddy. Tom?

>> Tom: Yeah, I just want to say thank you for this -- for having this space and giving us this voice to express ourselves -- and again, to bring more awareness to disability and the intersectionality, because disability is in every community. Whether you like it or not, it's always there, and I think it's fantastic that it's -- that the spotlight is on this -- the disability community for a minute. But yeah, thank you so much for RespectAbility, thank you Juan Pablo, Jennifer, Maddy, Erica, and our ASL interpreter, and Lauren. Thank you everyone for making this space happen, and yeah, if you want to follow me I'm on Insta @TomCaulfield01, so yeah, follow me. And yeah, I post stuff about disability whenever I can so. But again, thank you from my heart. Thank you so much.

>> Lauren: Maddy? Oh sorry, Maddy, we already went to you. Erica?

>> Erica: I also just wanted to say thank you, and I'm also on social media everywhere. It's just my name, ericamones. And I also have a YouTube channel where I talk about disability in the media a lot.

>> Lauren: Thank you. And Juan Pablo?

>> Juan Pablo: Well to me, it's just really exciting to have been able to work with you all. Like, you all made Dahlia -- like, Jennifer's beautiful voice and singing and performance, and inside, Tom's beautiful craftsmanship, he's such an iconic artist too, so that's also why you should follow him on social media. And you all in RespectAbility -- it's such an honor to work with you all. You're so thoughtful and -- you pay attention to detail, and you brought so much to the character, so I just have to say thank you.

>> Lauren: Thank you. And I just want to thank you, Jennifer, Tom, Juan Pablo, Erica, and Maddy. It was really -- really a blessing to be able to spend this last hour or so with you chatting about how we were able to bring Dahlia to life. I also really would love to share a thanks to Vanni Le, who helped produce this panel. Vanni was also on the team working with Disney on Dahlia, so she was on the RespectAbility team. It was Maddy, Erica, Vanni, and myself and such, and so want to make sure that she gets her shout out as well. And a reminder to watch "Wish" on Disney+ on April 3rd. Everyone can watch it -- do community watchings and screenings and such, and really looking forward to talking about "Wish" with more folks as everyone gets to really see this wonderful film. So thank you all, hope you have a wonderful rest of your day.

>> Jennifer: Thank you everybody.