Rain Man

By Leonore Fleischer

**SUMMARY**

The novel Rain Man is based on the screenplay of the hugely successful 1988 film. The performances of its stars, Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman, played a great part in this success, but the story is powerful and moving, and Leonore Fleischer's novelization of the film deserves to be read in its own right.

Rain Man begins with Charlie Babbit, a tough young man eager to 'get rich quick'. His business is in trouble and he needs money badly. He receives news of his father's death. 'Nothing I did was ever good enough for him,' says Charlie bitterly to his girlfriend, Susanna. Then Charlie learns that his wealthy father has left him only his 1949 Buick and his roses; he has left all his money to 'someone very important to me'. Understandably, Charlie is angry; he feels the money belongs to him. He discovers that his father has left his money to Charlie's older brother - a brother he never knew he had. This brother, called Raymond, is 'autistic'. He cannot have relationships with other people........ he can't 'feel'. He needs a very secure environment and is living in an institution.

Charlie 'kidnaps' his brother, although he will not admit to his girlfriend that this is what he has done. He tells her, 'I'm keeping him until I get my money'. He and his brother drive across America to Los Angeles; he plans to live with his brother there. As they drive across the country, Charlie gets to know Raymond, who has some extraordinary skills. He can count 200 toothpicks in a second, and can memorize a page of telephone numbers in a minute. But more importantly, Charlie realizes that Raymond is the 'Rain Man'. As a child, Charlie had a 'secret friend' whom he called the 'Rain Man' - Charlie did not know it, but this 'secret friend' was Raymond.

Charlie takes Raymond to Las Vegas. He has decided to solve his money problems by using Raymond's unusual skills to win at cards. Raymond does indeed win $90,000 for Charlie. But by now, Charlie is beginning to care for his brother. When Charlie reaches Los Angeles he finds Raymond's guardian there and the two agree that a specialist will decide who should look after Raymond. Raymond's guardian offers Charlie $250,000 'to have Raymond back now'. Charlie refuses, 'I don't want your money, Dr Bruner,' he says. 'I want my brother'. He has changed. The specialist questions Raymond, and Charlie realizes that his brother needs to be cared for in an institution. By now, Charlie loves Raymond enough to want what is best for him. 'Can I visit him?' he asks. And so the story ends.

**AUTISM**

Autism is a rare mental disorder. Autistic children are physically well-developed but they are very limited in their ability to understand and communicate; they seem isolated from the world around them. Many autistic people hardly speak at all. About 10 per cent, often called 'idiot savants', have a condition called Kanner's syndrome. They have an exceptional memory and often have unusual skills in music, art or mathematics. They insist on 'sameness' in the environment. Raymond Babbit suffers from this syndrome.

**ABOUT THE WRITERS**

Rain Man is based on a story by Barry Morrow. Barry Morrow then collaborated with Ronald Bass to write the screenplay; Ronald Bass was the principal screenwriter. Leonore Fleischer's novelization is based on the screenplay.

Barry Morrow was the lead singer in a rock and roll band for a long time. He became interested in handicapped people and formed a touring theatre company which performed for them. He has written a number of plays for television; Rain Man is his first screenplay.

Ronald Bass has a law degree from Harvard University. He published three novels and then began to write successful screenplays. He now writes full-time but still works as a lawyer occasionally.

Leonore Fleischer has worked in every aspect of publishing over the last twenty-five years. She has 'novelized' about fifty original screenplays.

**RAIN MAN: THE FILM**

This was the most successful film of 1988. It won four Oscars at the Hollywood Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Dustin Hoffman) and Best Original Screenplay. Few people knew much about autism, and cinema audiences all over the world were moved by Dustin Hoffman's portrayal of an 'autistic savant'. It is difficult to play a man who cannot 'feel', and yet remain sympathetic to the audience. Hoffman
managed to do this, he conveyed the desperately insecure world of the autistic person, with his small, monotonous voice, and the tense set of his shoulders. Tom Cruise, who played Charlie, had a less obvious challenge. Unlike Raymond, who is unable to change, Charlie undergoes a transformation in the film. He begins as a hard, ‘me-first’ materialist. He ends by learning that there are some things more important than money. Cruise played the part with great subtlety; the interaction between himself and Hoffman was convincing at a deep level.

RAIN MAN: THEMES
Rain Man shows us something new - the strange world of the autistic individual. But the novel is also an in-depth study of character and relationships. In seven days the selfish Charlie Babbit learns to love someone who really cannot give him very much. But there is more to the story than this. The critic Roger Ebert puts it well when he says that Rain Man is ‘about acceptance. Charlie Babbit’s first appearance ... has him trying to control his life and the lives of others .... What Raymond teaches him is that he can relax, because .... he will always be powerless over other people. They will do just about what they choose to do, no matter how loud Charlie Babbit screams. Raymond has a lot he can teach Charlie Babbit about acceptance, even if it is the solitary thing he knows.’

Communicative activities
The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. Further supplementary exercises, covering shorter sections of the book, can be found on the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers, but with the exception of pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK
Put students into pairs. Ask them to read the Introduction in their books and look at the cover. Then they discuss the following questions:
Which person is Charlie Babbit, do you think? Which person is Raymond Babbit? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION
Chapters 1-3
1. Put students into groups, and ask them to discuss the following question.
Imagine you are in Charlie’s situation. Your father is rich but he leaves all his money to someone you do not know. How do you feel? What will you do?
2. Teach students the word ‘childhood’. They then in groups, students discuss the following question. Afterward, have a whole-class discussion on the question.

Chapters 4-6
1. Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss the following question. Teach the word ‘experience’.
What new experiences does Raymond have in these chapters? Do you think they are bad for him or good for him? Give reasons for your opinion.
2. Put students into groups of four and ask them to play the following characters: Susanna, Raymond, Charlie and Dr Bruner. Ask them to discuss the situation as it is at the end of Chapter 6. They can say what they want to each other.

Chapters 7-9
1. Put students into pairs. They decide on seven words or phrases (but not sentences) to tell the story of each of these chapters. For example for chapter 7, the words could be:
2. Put students into small groups. They answer the following question: ‘In the end, everyone gets what they need.’ How is this true in the last chapters of the story?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK
Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss these questions:
(a) What have you learnt from this book about autism and autistic people?
(b) Do you think Charlie Babbit’s father was right to send Raymond away? Give reasons for your opinion.

Glossary
It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the ‘Before You Read’ sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1-3
anxiously (adv) in a worried way
astonished (adj) very very surprised
expression (n) the look on somebody's face
funeral (n) this is when the body of a dead person is put into the ground or burnt
lawyer (n) a person who helps people with the law as their job
mutter (v) to talk in a quiet voice which is difficult to hear
notebook (n) a book in which you write things which you need to remember
upset (adj) feeling unhappy about something
will (n) a piece of paper which says who will have a person's money after they are dead

Chapters 4-6
breathe (v) to take air into your body and let it out again
custody (n) the right by law to look after a child
relationship (n) the feelings between two people
toothpick (n) a very small piece of sharp wood to clean your teeth
Read the Introduction in your book. Answer these questions.

(a) Do you think Charlie is right to fight for his father's money?
(b) The Introduction says: 'When the brothers meet, it's the start of an adventure that will change them both.' How do you think it will change them?

CHAPTERS 1 - 3
Chapter 1

1 Answer these questions.
(a) What kind of work does Charlie do, do you think?
(b) What is the problem with his business at the moment?
(c) Why are Charlie and his girlfriend driving through the desert?
(d) What news does Charlie receive?
(e) When is his father's funeral?
(f) Why does Charlie say, 'Sorry about the weekend'?
(g) Why does Susanna say, 'the weekend'?
(h) How does Charlie feel about his father? Why?
(i) What do you think Charlie will find out when he meets his father's lawyer?

2 Work in pairs, or write your answers.
(a) Describe Charlie. How does he look?
(b) Do you like him? Why/why not?
(c) Describe Susanna. How does she look? Do you like her more or less than Charlie? Say why?

Chapter 2

1 Are these sentences right or wrong? If they are wrong, make them right.
(a) Charlie goes to his father's house.
(b) His father's house is in a poor part of Cincinatti.
(c) Charlie loves the roses.
(d) Charlie's father was seventy when he wrote the letter.
(e) Charlie's father only gave Charlie the Buick.
(f) Charlie's father gave someone else two million dollars.
(g) This person will use the money immediately.
(h) Charlie is very angry about his father's will.

2 Write some sentences.
(a) Describe Dr Bruner. How long did he know Charlie's father for? (b) Describe Raymond.

3 Talk with another student:
Charlie discovers the truth about Raymond. What do you think will happen now?

CHAPTERS 4 - 6
Chapter 4

1 Work with another student. Make the conversation between Dr Bruner and Charlie about Raymond and his problems.

2 Answer these questions.
(a) What happens in the last part of the chapter?
(b) What question does Susanna ask Charlie?
(c) What is Charlie's answer?
(d) What do you think will happen now?

Chapter 5

1 Answer these questions.
(a) Why doesn't Raymond like his room?
(b) How does Charlie make him feel better?
(c) Why does Raymond go into Charlie and Susanna's room?
(d) Why has Charlie taken Raymond away from Wallbrook?
(e) Why is Susanna angry with Charlie?

2 Answer these questions.
(a) Susanna says, 'I did love you, Charlie. But you are not the man I thought you were.' What does she mean by this?
(b) What is your opinion of Charlie so far? Can you understand his actions?

3 Write a letter from Charlie to Dr Bruner. Explain what you have done and why you have done it.

4 Who do you think has the most difficult life, Charlie or Raymond? Give reasons for your opinion.
Chapter 6
1. Choose the right answer.
   (a) Raymond knows Sally Dibbs’s number because
(i) it’s on the front of her dress.
(ii) he read the telephone book.
(b) Raymond knows the number of toothpicks because
(i) he picked them up and counted them.
(ii) he just looked at them and knew the right number.
(c) Raymond is worried about the plane because
(i) he knows about a similar plane that crashed.
(ii) he has always hated flying.
(d) Charlie needs to go back to his office in Los Angeles because
(i) Dr Bruner wants him to go there.
(ii) his bank and the customer for the Lamborghini car are not happy.
(e) Charlie rings Dr Bruner to tell him that
(i) he will bring Raymond back when he gets his money.
(ii) he will bring Raymond home soon.

2. Answer these questions.
   (a) How is Charlie kind to Raymond in this chapter? How is his behavior to Raymond different from chapter 5? What does he say at the end of the chapter that shows this kindness?
   (b) What new things do we learn about Raymond in this chapter?

CHAPTERS 7 - 9
Chapter 7
1. Answer these questions.
   (a) What makes Charlie realize that Raymond was the Rain Man?
   (b) What other things does Charlie remember about his brother?
   (c) How do we see in this chapter that Raymond and Charlie are getting closer to each other?

2. Write the questions for these answers.
   (a) Thursday, January 21st, 1965.
   (b) Just after New Year.
   (c) About eighteen years old.
   (d) Two years old.
   (e) Because he made the bathwater for Charlie too hot.
   (f) Custody of Raymond.

3. Imagine you are Susannah. You have just spoken to Charlie on the phone. Write a letter to Charlie telling him how you feel.

Chapter 8
1. Work in pairs. Answer these questions.
   (a) What bad news does Charlie get from the office?
   (b) Charlie has a good idea. What is it?
   (c) What gives Charlie this idea?
   (d) What does Charlie teach Raymond?
   (e) Where do Charlie and Raymond go?
   (f) How much money does Charlie win?

2. How does Susanna show that she loves Charlie? How is she kind to Raymond?

3. Work in pairs and discuss this question. Do you think Charlie is right to use Raymond in this way?

Chapter 9
1. Who says these things?
   (a) ‘I’m a very good driver.’
   (b) ‘Raymond will see a special doctor on Friday.’
   (c) ‘You’re sending Raymond back to Wallbrook.’
   (d) ‘They can look after him there. They understand his problems.’
   (e) ‘How was your holiday, Raymond?’
   (g) ‘You’re upsetting him.’
   (h) ‘Can I visit him?’
   (i) ‘Are you all right, son?’

2. How do the doctors show Charlie that Raymond is still autistic?

3. Charlie has changed a lot. How does he show this in this chapter?

Activities after reading the book
1. Talk with another student or write your answer. Charlie says, ‘I have helped Raymond more in one week than you have in twenty years.’ Do you agree with him? Or do you think it is better for Raymond to go back to Wallbrook? Give reasons for your opinion.

2. Answer this quiz.
   (a) What is the name of Sanford Babbit’s lawyer?
   (b) What colour is the Buick now?
   (c) How many people were in the plane crash that Raymond talked about?
   (d) How many businessmen were at the table in the hotel restaurant?
   (e) How long were Raymond and Charlie together?
   (f) What day is it when Charlie meets Dr Marston?
   (g) What was the address of Charlie and Raymond’s family home?
   (h) Raymond knows the telephone number of a waitress. What is her name?