

KEITH JONES



Keith Jones is an activist, public speaker and hip-hop artist living in Boston. Jones grew up in the 1970s, when almost all kids with significant disabilities were completely segregated from the kids without disabilities. Like Samuel, Jones has cerebral palsy.

During elementary school, Jones lived in St. Louis and attended a separate public school for children with disabilities. “The teachers really didn’t push,” he says. “You’d get your medicine at lunch and you’d see half the kids slumped over at the table from taking Valium or Demerol (which are narcotics). It just was really not conducive to learning. Looking back now, it was like a nursing home facility.”

In 1981, when Jones was 12, his family moved to Boston. He started attending regular sixth-grade classes at a public school.

There, Jones said, “I had the support of the special education staff. I’d move from classroom to classroom like everybody else, but the support was there for me to be able to participate in the class. That is the key.”

“You cannot box people up in a room, 20 by 20, eight hours a day, and then ship them off into the world and expect them to have social interaction skills.”

– KEITH JONES



“ I had a family that knew what they wanted for their child. They also expected a lot out of me. It’s not all on the school; it’s a two-sided equation. ”

– KEITH JONES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Jones said he asserted himself and asked for math instead of Popsicle sticks. Why was he given such simple assignments? Do you think young people with disabilities are still viewed with low expectations?
- ▶ Why do adults often separate children with disabilities? What do you think young people with and without disabilities learn—or don’t learn—by being separated?
- ▶ Jones said that “Being black and disabled, it’s unique, in the fact that people say, ‘What happened to you? When did you get shot?’ ” Did that surprise you? Why or why not?
- ▶ When Jones told people he wanted “a house, a wife, a dog...” people told him, “That’s really not for you.” Jones did get married, and he now has a daughter and a son. Do you think the other people featured in the film can also have those things? Why or why not?
- ▶ Why do you think the filmmaker included scenes of Keith getting dressed and making his way around Boston? How is his daily life similar to yours? How is it different?
- ▶ Do you think a civil rights movement creates true equality? Do you think true equality has been achieved for blacks, women, gays and other groups?
- ▶ What role did Keith’s family play in his education? How did they help mold his self-esteem and identity?