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# During the Quiet Parts

## THE DCMP PROVIDES PARENTS A BETTER WAY TO HELP STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARN FROM THE VISUAL COMPONENTS OF MEDIA

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### Introduction

Watching TV with their child who has a visual impairment, parents are accustomed to providing a few words of explanation during the quiet parts: what the laughter was about, a shift in plot when the narration was poor, or why the father on the sitcom was so upset about his daughter's outfit, for example. Public school teachers have had to do the same, and often assign a teacher's aide or sighted classmate to explain visual content during the showing of an educational video.

Description (learn more at [www.dcmp.org/description](http://www.dcmp.org/description)) provides the groundwork for accessible educational media that teachers and parents desire for their students with vision loss—but described video has not been widely available. We at the Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) are working hard to change that! We are now adding description to hundreds of educational videos, available for free-loan to parents and schools.

We are able to do so thanks to the support of the U.S. Department of Education, which has long funded the captioning and free-loan of educational media for the benefit of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

### Little Use of the Quiet Parts

In classrooms all over the U.S., teachers utilize a variety of media—charts, graphs, illustrations, audio, video, and more—every day to supplement their lessons. When used along with traditional teaching methods, educational media provide a more comprehensive experience for modern students than lecturing or “book work” alone.

For students with vision loss, however, the integration of media into the classroom has historically represented yet another hurdle with which they, their teachers, and their parents had to contend. A 2009 survey found that only 45% of teachers of students who are visually impaired (TVIs) use video in their classrooms, and only a minority of *that* minority (12% overall) report that 25% or more of the total amount of video used in class is described.

When faced with long waits for—or unavailability of—accessible textbooks and materials, a shortage of trained teachers of the blind, and underfunded school budgets, the free-loan media provided by the DCMP becomes all the more attractive to parents and teachers of students with visual impairments.

## Planned Use of the Quiet Parts

If you are a parent of a child who is blind or visually impaired, you may already be familiar with description (elsewhere called “audio description,” “video description,” Descriptive Video®, or DVS®) from watching a film or television program, or from attending a live event or museum exhibit that was described. For those not familiar with description, it is the verbal depiction of key visual elements in media and live productions. In media, description is typically recorded to coincide with pauses in the program’s original audio. The recorded description is then mixed with the original program audio and placed on an additional audio track where it can be accessed by viewers who are blind or visually impaired.

Description has existed in live theater and entertainment media since the early 1980s, but it has not been widely adopted in educational media. Beyond a few standout programs, such as PBS’s *Nova*, we estimate that less than 5% of the over 600,000 educational media titles available for classroom use are described.

Since the Captioned Media Program (CMP) became the DCMP in October 2006 (our program has existed for nearly five decades as Captioned Films for the Deaf, Captioned Films and Videos, and the CMP), all new titles added to our collection will feature description. Titles to be added to our collection—many of which are recommended by teachers and parents across the U.S.—are chosen after careful evaluation by former educators to ensure that content is relevant and of the highest technical quality. Our free-loan media can be ordered on DVD, and many titles can be streamed instantly via the DCMP website. However, the DCMP is more than just a library.

## Find Out More About the Quiet Parts

In addition to its free-loan service, the DCMP also maintains a collection of hundreds of articles and resources related to accessibility in educational media, known as the “DCMP Clearinghouse.” These articles, written by DCMP staff, experts in the field of media accessibility, parents, and other professionals, are available free-of-charge for a multitude of uses. We have also partnered with a variety of organizations serving the blind through the use of our Gateway search feature. Powered by Google™, the Gateway delivers search results from DCMP as well as from our selected partner organizations to provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date information available.

## A Blueprint for the Quiet Parts

In November 2008, the DCMP released the *Description Key for Educational Media*, which is available via our “Keys to Access” website at [www.KeystoAccess.org](http://www.KeystoAccess.org). Developed in partnership with the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), the *Description Key for Educational Media* represents the first-ever guidelines for describing educational media. Contained in this comprehensive—and growing—resource, one can find information about what to describe, and how to describe it, along with general qualifications and tips for those who create description. The Key will also be used to develop a blueprint for evaluating both the description of media added to the DCMP collection as well as the description providers who wish to be included on the U.S. Department of Education-approved description vendor listing create.

## Expanding the Quiet Parts

So now you know what description is, but the question remains: What happens if the quiet parts are not quiet long enough for a comprehensive description of important visual content? Much of the media produced today is aimed at grabbing—and keeping—its viewers’ attention by filling every available second with content. Certainly, there must be some way to expand the horizons for description in productions such as these.

The solution lies in a new description method called “expanded description.” When you watch a production with expanded description, the program pauses automatically at points where description is needed, the description is provided by the voicer, and then the program resumes automatically. CaptionMax, a nationally renowned captioning and description agency, is working to bring expanded description to a wider audience. In 2007 they were awarded two U.S. Department of Education grants to develop expanded description and other emerging technologies in educational media. A long-time DCMP partner, CaptionMax tapped DCMP to be the primary distributor of these materials, bringing even more accessibility to DCMP’s members.

## Don’t You Be Quiet (Please!)

The DCMP’s evolution is driven by the same parents and teachers who utilize our services. Here are some ways that you can contribute to our program and help us improve our services and advocate for accessibility:

- ☞ Contact us to make media recommendations, ask questions, suggest improvements, and ask how you can help spread the word to other parents and teachers whose students would benefit from the DCMP at [dcmp.org/recommend](http://dcmp.org/recommend).
- ☞ Write an article to be posted on [dcmp.org](http://dcmp.org).
- ☞ Share DCMP brochures with other parents, or tell your children’s teachers about our program.
- ☞ Encourage parents, teachers, and others connected to students with visual impairments to watch and share the DCMP’s 12-minute “Equal Access in the Classroom” production, available from [dcmp.org/equalaccess](http://dcmp.org/equalaccess).

We encourage everyone who cares about accessibility to commit themselves to this valuable cause. The DCMP is here to be utilized by as many qualifying students as possible, and we ask you to join us in fostering an accessible educational environment for America’s students.

To sign up for a free DCMP membership, visit our website at [www.dcmp.org](http://www.dcmp.org) today!

What if we told you that we could improve your child’s access to educational media?

Educational media that is accessible to students who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind?

A clearinghouse of information about accessible media?

All of this, completely free of charge?

**YES!**

Visit [www.dcmp.org](http://www.dcmp.org) to register for your free membership and jump-start your child’s experience with accessible educational media!

**DCMP** Described and Captioned Media Program

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