



INEQUALITY FOR ALL

GRADES 9-12
CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILM:

Inequality For All is a feature documentary that puts a historic lens on the widening income gap in the United States and examines its implications for the health of the American economy. Economist Robert Reich is featured in the film in which he presents an engaging argument that may be readily incorporated into a social studies or US history curriculum. Taught in conjunction with this guide, **Inequality For All** will challenge students to analyze the human impact of 20th century political and economic policy and facilitate further research into related topics such as globalization, tax policy and the role of the state in creating a healthy middle class.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **Inequality For All**. Support

materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

ABOUT THE FILM

Inequality For All is an engrossing tour of US economic policy and its social implications throughout the 20th century. UC Berkeley professor, political economist, author and former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich guides the narrative and infuses the film with his personal blend of self-deprecating humor and plainspoken analysis. The film weaves its theoretical argument over a progression of personal stories, anecdotes, graphic diagrams and historical footage to put a human face on policy and to locate the mysteries of boom and recession within a predictable cycle of cause and effect. The result is an eye-opening and highly informative examination of the contrast between American values and US policy. In conversation with experts and everyday people, Reich removes rhetorical veils to clarify and define the power structures at work in contemporary economic policy. A team of Davids against the Goliath of corporate America, Reich and **Inequality For All** make a persuasive and inspiring argument that the strength of American culture lies in the middle class, and we should look to history as a model for rebuilding.



Jacob Kornbluth (USA, 2013)
90 minutes, Color, English, Grades 9-12



Recommended Subject Areas:

- Economics
- Ethics/Religion
- History
- Journalism
- Political Science
- Social Studies

Key concepts / buzzwords:

- Capitalism
- Citizens United
- Deregulation
- Documentary
- Economics
- Entitlements
- Globalization
- Income Tax
- Lobbyists
- Social Contract
- Socialism
- Unions
- Wall Street

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Inequality For All is an eye-opening film that will help students to clarify and draw connections between political and economic trends throughout the 20th century. It will be especially relevant to a curriculum that focuses on current events and their historical foundations.

Students may already be familiar with the politicized rhetoric surrounding the growing income gap, particularly terms such as *the 99%* and *the 1%*, *job creators*, *socialism*, *the middle class* and *class warfare*.

- It may be useful to define these terms as a group, acknowledging that they are rhetorical tools that are used by interested parties to spread a political message.

To lay a philosophical groundwork for the film, you may ask students to define prosperity.

- What are the markers of individual prosperity?
- What are the markers of national prosperity?
- How can you tell if you're living in a rich country?
- Students may complete the exercise in a group discussion or individually in their journals.

WHAT ARE HIS GOALS AS A POLITICIAN, A PUBLIC FIGURE AND A TEACHER?

POST VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Characters and Story

1) What did you learn while watching **Inequality For All**? What was your reaction?

- Were you surprised by anything in the film?
- The film moves through a lot of information very quickly. What do you think is the message, thesis or argument that the film is making? Limit your answer to three sentences.

2) Describe Robert Reich. What kind of a person is he? What are his values?

- What are his goals as a politician, a public figure and a teacher?
- How do you think his personal experience shaped his political conscience? Use specific examples.

3) Make a list of characters in the film from different parts of the American social spectrum.

- Who stood out to you?
- Which stories made an impression on you?
- With whom did you agree and disagree?
- Did anyone's views surprise you?

Context

1) Consider the pillow company CEO. He is already rich, so why is it in his interest to lessen income inequality?

- Think about the problem: "the rich spend too little." Why is a prosperous middle class important for the pillow industry (or any industry)?

- 2) Describe the “virtuous cycle” that created a strong middle class in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.
- What role does education play in that cycle?
 - Why does education help a national economy thrive during globalization?
 - Why are iPhone parts manufactured in Germany and Japan instead of in the US?
 - What would America need to do to get Apple to start manufacturing its parts domestically?

- 3) Explain the “vicious cycle” that leads to high inequality, a stagnant middle class and a debt crisis.
- According to the film, what factors contributed to our current economic woes? Do you agree with the film, or do you disagree?
 - How can we get out of a vicious cycle and into a virtuous cycle?
 - If we know how to fix the problem, why are we still stuck here?

- 4) What is a lobbyist? How does money move from the private sector into the legislature?
- What is Citizens United, and how did it change the political process?
 - Do you agree with the Supreme Court’s decision in Citizens United?
 - When money is allowed to enter politics, and a few people hold a disproportionate amount of the wealth, what happens to the democratic process? Be specific.

- 5) Define capitalism and socialism. What is regulated capitalism?
- Do you think that public services such as education, healthcare, transportation, national defense, water, garbage collection, etc. should be managed by the government or by private companies?
 - Should we pay for these services with our tax dollars, or should we buy them on the free market? What are the drawbacks and benefits of each option? Is there a compromise?

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 STUCK HERE?

Style and Message/ Reading the Film for Media Literacy

- 1) What role did graphics play in this film?
- Make a list of the diagrams and illustrations that you found most effective.
 - What kind of information are the images illustrating?
 - Is each image different, or is there a consistent style throughout the film? If you think there is a style, what words would you use to describe it?
 - Why do you think the graphic artists chose to make the illustrations in that style?
- 2) What was the role of music in this film? When did you notice music playing, and what kind of a mood did it evoke?
- How does music help to communicate the passage of history? How does it interact with the historical footage to create a sense of the time?

3) Robert Reich brought his personality and his own story into the film.

- Do you think that this film would have been as effective if it had a different narrator? What if it had no narrator?
- What contribution did Reich make to the film besides just conveying information?
- If you were making a documentary film, what qualities would you look for in a narrator?

4) **Inequality For All** is a political film with a strong argument.

- Have you seen any other films that make political arguments?
- Can you identify political films that argue perspectives from the right as well as the left?
- Would you say that Inequality For All has an agenda? If so, what is it?

POST VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1) Ask students, do you agree or disagree with the arguments made in the film? Read an article that argues the issue of inequality from a different perspective (see supplemental materials).

You may ask students to complete a short writing assignment to develop their opinions on the issue:

- Write a paragraph summarizing your own opinion on the question of inequality: will increasing the minimum wage and raising taxes on the richest 1% help the middle class? Why or why not? How do you think these changes would affect your life and your economic situation?

Following the writing assignment, set up a classroom debate wherein students argue their opinions against those of their peers.

For homework, students may be encouraged to write letters to their local representatives.

- With these queries in mind, write a letter to your local congressperson explaining how the widening income gap affects your life and your future. Use concrete examples from the film, the article and from your life, and ask your congressperson to vote in your best interest.

2) Images can often be more powerful than words. Drawing inspiration from the graphics in the film and from political cartoons (see supplementary resources), create a visual representation that speaks to income inequality in modern America. Feel free to make it personal, political or just stick with statistics. Be creative.

California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare's Henry V with Kenneth Branagh's 1990 film version).
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.14 Analyze the techniques used in media messages for a particular audience and evaluate their effectiveness (e.g., Orson Welles' radio broadcast "War of the Worlds").
- Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.2 Analyze the impact of the media on the democratic process (e.g., exerting influence on elections, creating images of leaders, shaping attitudes) at the local, state, and national levels; Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Common Core Standards in this Lesson:

- Reading informational texts 9-10
- Reading Informational Texts 11-12
- History and Social Studies 9-10
- History and Social Studies 11-12

MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) Medium: the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) Author: the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) Content: the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) Audience: the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) Purpose: the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed. How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone. Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>Media Is A Language For Information. What is the subject of the media message? What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content? What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response? To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience. Who receives the message? For whom is the message intended? What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message? What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message? How might others perceive this message differently? Why?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason. Why was the message constructed? Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How? To what extent does the message achieve its purpose? What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?</p>

THE NON-FICTION FILM WHAT IS A DOCUMENTARY?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. Leni Reifenstahl's propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth. The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

1895 The Lumiere brothers developed the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called "actualities" (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)

1900-1920 Travelogue or "Scenic" films became popular, showcasing exoticised images from around the globe.

1926 John Grierson coined the term "documentary" to describe Robert Flaherty's romantic nonfiction film, *Moana*.

1929 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino-Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With a Movie Camera*.

1935 Leni Reifenstahl released *Triumph of the Will*, the infamous propaganda film that chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.

1939 John Grierson collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in support of the war.

1960s The cinema vérité movement began in Europe, shortly followed by "direct cinema" in the U.S. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* opened the door to the activist cinema of the 1970s, which used film as a tool to counter capitalist and neo-colonial politics in Latin America.

1988 The US Congress mandated that the US government support the creation of independent non-commercial media, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium vastly more affordable to independent and amateur filmmakers. Video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo allowed amateur filmmakers to broadcast their work.

PRESENT DAY The term "documentary" has come to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of truth in film and to explore new avenues and applications for the medium.

THE MAKING OF A DOCUMENTARY

Idea, Issue, Story.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

The Production Process.

To capture candid moments on film, modern documentary makers often leave the camera running, collecting far more footage than the final film requires. They may do this during interviews or in observational-style encounters with their subjects. To get increased access and an observational aesthetic, documentary makers often use handheld cameras and natural light, rather than staging a more formal filming environment.

Post-Production and the Documentary.

Because a documentary film relies upon candid footage, a large part of the film's construction occurs in the editing room, where you work with what you've captured. A documentary editor will sift through long interviews just to find a few phrases that will summarize the film's message. To emphasize important points and build the story, some documentaries use a voiceover, an interview or a scripted narrative that brings candid footage together into a coherent statement. An original score can work alongside the voiceover to unify the

footage and shape the mood of the film. Audiences often underestimate the power of sound to generate an emotional response. Many documentaries also use charts, graphs and historical footage to add context and emphasize key points.

Distribution.

Once a film is completed, the filmmaker needs to help it find its audience. Many documentaries are made independently on small budgets, but what's the point of all your work if no one hears your message? Some documentaries will be released in theaters around the country or get programmed on public or cable TV channels, but most documentary filmmakers will start by submitting their work to film festivals, in hopes of attracting distributors for the theater and television markets. Filmmakers may also make their films available online and use social media to reach their target audience.



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Counter-argument: “In Praise of Income Inequality” from the Hoover Institution journal *Defining Ideas*
<http://www.hoover.org/publications/defining-ideas/article/140746>

Collection of political cartoons on the subject of income inequality
https://www.google.com/search?q=cartoons+income+inequality&hl=en&rlz=1C1LENP_enUS524US524&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=ThReUeqxM6a6iAertYDoCw&ved=0CDYQsAQ&biw=1920&bih=955

Lots of charts and graphics illustrating income inequality in the US, from *Mother Jones*
<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/02/income-inequality-in-america-chart-graph>

Robert Reich’s blog with links to his books
<http://robertreich.org/>

Article in *The Atlantic* that examines income inequality from the perspective of the founding fathers. “U.S. Income Inequality: It’s Worse Today Than It Was in 1774”
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/09/us-income-inequality-its-worse-today-than-it-was-in-1774/262537/>

Global Post article: Joseph Stiglitz discusses US income inequality in global terms
<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/united-states/121226/joseph-stiglitz-us-income-inequality>

Director Jacob Kornbluth’s website and the Robert Reich video project
<http://jacobkornbluth.com/robert-reich-video-project.html>

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS:

Inequality for All: Sundance Review

4:01 PM PST 1/19/2013 by Sheri Linden

Policy wonk Robert Reich cuts through fiscal-cliff jargon to explain the true economic crisis facing the U.S. in this illustrated lecture.

It's hardly news that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, but *Inequality for All*, the latest entry in the illustrated-lecture school of documentary filmmaking, gets beyond the duh factor, deploying urgent statistics in an even-tempered lesson. Its subject, the abyss-wide, 99/1 income disparity in the United States, has been at the center of a good deal of recent political discourse and name-calling. Filmmaker **Jacob Kornbluth** acknowledges the anger fueling the Occupy and Tea Party movements, but his chief focus is the litany of hard facts energetically presented by **Robert Reich**, a public policy professor and longtime Washington insider.

Reich's modulated outrage is that of someone who not only has worked within the system but who also still believes in it. Whether viewers will share his optimism is yet to be seen, but the compelling clarity of his argument makes the polished film, premiering at Sundance in the Documentary Competition, a shoo-in for small-screen distribution and a solid candidate for niche theatrical exposure.

Like another policy-lecture documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, this one interweaves personal information



about its central figure, although in the case of Reich, as opposed to **Al Gore**, the background material is judiciously used, and far more relevant. Not quite five feet tall, Reich, whose physical growth was affected by the genetic disorder Fairbanks syndrome, is a high achiever given to self-deprecating jokes about his diminutive size. A revelation about a neighbor who helped to protect him from bullies as a child is a fascinating life-story tidbit that ties together the personal and the historical.

As an instructor, Reich is spirited and passionate. At times he speaks directly to the camera; at others he's

addressing the huge lecture hall of undergrads taking his Wealth & Poverty class at Berkeley. With the help of nifty animated graphics by **Brian Oakes**, he lays out the disheartening/enraging figures, quantifying what's already clear to anybody who can remember the way things were before they stopped adding up: Middle-class wages are stagnating or falling while the cost of living keeps rising.

At the heart of the film's argument is the tax-records research of **Emmanuel Saez** and **Thomas Piketty**, which draws striking parallels between 1928 and 2007, years in which peak income inequality served as prelude to disastrous financial crashes. To put a face on the great divide — 400 Americans possess more wealth than half the country's population — Kornbluth (*Haiku Tunnel*) profiles a few middle-class families in their day-to-day struggles, as well as a venture capitalist, **Nick Hanauer**, who debunks the “job creator” myth and explains the fallacy of trickle-down theory.

Like most contemporary political dialogue, *Inequality for All* spends little time on the matter of outright poverty, instead homing in on the middle class. Inspired by Reich's book *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future*, the doc, which began as a Web-series collaboration between Kornbluth and Reich, spells out

the importance of the working classes, blue- and white-collar, as the engine of the nation's economy. His model for a flourishing American Dream of upward mobility is the “great prosperity” of the 1950s through the '70s — a period of strong unions, government investment in public education and substantial tax rates for those in the upper-income brackets.

Reich, who served in the Ford, Carter and Clinton administrations, possesses an unwavering belief that history is on the side of positive social change. Though he regrets his “failure” to implement all his ideas as Clinton's Secretary of Labor, he maintains an exuberant trust in the future of policymaking. That trust can feel conveniently vague: He elides key facts about Clinton's dismantling of social safety nets and key role in the deregulation of the financial sector. And although his thesis points to the need for higher taxation of the wealthy, he doesn't address the right's intransigence on this issue.

If Reich's optimism doesn't jibe with the political realities of his own experience and his inability to effect change from the inside, he is still asking the right questions. *Inequality for All* could bring them to a wider audience.