



# A LOVELY DAY

GRADES 9-12  
CLASSROOM GUIDE

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## TEACHING THE FILM:

**A Lovely Day** is a feature documentary about a group of Oakland High School students who overcome obstacles to put on an original hip-hop show. A class screening of the film may supplement a Media Arts, Ethnic Studies, or Social Studies lesson. Taught in conjunction with this guide, **A Lovely Day** will challenge students to think critically about the pressures of growing up in urban America, and will facilitate further research and exploration of the relationship between personal experience and creative expression.

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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**FILM SOCIETY**



## USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **A Lovely Day**. 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

**A Lovely Day** tells the story of nine members of the Oakland High School Hip-Hop club, who come together through the Beats Rhymes and Life program to produce and perform an original show. Beats Rhymes and Life teaches urban youth to use hip-hop music as a vehicle to process trauma and to channel conflict. Filmmaker Kerri Gawryn lets the program participants speak for themselves, and their thoughtful self-reflection paints an inspiring picture of resilience and strength of character in the face of adversity. The film is set in Oakland, but it exemplifies the challenges that young people face in urban centers across America, as they struggle to find their voices and carve their lives against a backdrop of endemic violence. **A Lovely Day** is an uplifting film that brings audiences deep into young America, to sympathize with the teens' struggles and celebrate in their success.

{ Kerri Gawryn (USA, 2012)  
72, Color, English, Grades 9-12 }

### Recommended Subject Areas:

American Studies  
Arts/Media  
English  
Middle School  
Music  
Peer/Youth Issues  
Social Studies

### Key concepts / buzzwords:

Documentary  
Hip-hop  
Creative Storytelling  
Art Therapy  
Gun Violence  
Incarcerated Parents  
Urban America  
The Juvenile Justice System  
The Case of Oscar Grant  
High School  
Young Actors.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Teachers might prepare the class for **A Lovely Day** with a contextual lesson on the history and culture of the city of Oakland. Black history in Oakland is especially relevant, and historical photographs and maps would make good supplementary materials. If time allows, the class might examine the historical factors that contribute to poverty and violence in post-industrial urban America, including the legacy of racial discrimination, cyclical poverty in underserved communities, and a decline in real job opportunities, notably manufacturing jobs. The lesson can emphasize that these problems are not only happening in Oakland, but in many cities across the country, notably Detroit, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. To end on a bright note and to lead into **A Lovely Day**, the class can discuss the way that creative expression can carve a pathway out of the cycle; street art, spoken word, and music give people the tools to reclaim space and to make their voices heard. Art can empower the artist and the community.

### POST VIEWING DISCUSSION:

#### Characters and Story

- 1) Describe the hip-hop club at Oakland High School.
  - Who are its members?
  - What are their personal goals, and what are their goals as a group?
  - What challenges do the individual members face, and what challenges do they face as a collective?
  - Which characters do you relate to most?

- 2) The group leaders for Beats Rhymes and Life encourage the students to write songs that explore painful memories.
  - Do you think it would be difficult to write about your fears or about experiences that have hurt you?
  - What positive effects come when someone takes a difficult personal experience and translates it into an artwork?
  - Can you think of other songs or works of art that use storytelling to redefine something sad?

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- 3) The film follows the students through their daily lives, from the hip-hop club meetings and into their homes. Describe their home lives, their support systems, and their families.
  - How does the hip-hop club complement their existing support systems?
  - How do the group leaders facilitate a supportive environment? List examples.

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- How do the group leaders facilitate a supportive environment? List examples.

- 4) What changes do you notice in the students during the course of the film, as individuals and as a group?
  - Cite three scenes where you see them coming together to support one another.
  - Do you think these students would make good role models for younger kids?

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- Do you think these students would make good role models for younger kids?

#### Context

- 1) How do these young people view the city of Oakland? Make a list of their descriptions. Compare Oakland, as you see it in the film, to your own city and your own neighborhood.
  - How is Oakland like your city and your neighborhood and how is it different?

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- ▶ ● Do you think Oakland is a typical American city? Why or why not?

2) Niyah is the only girl in the hip-hop club.

- What challenges does she face in that role?

At one point in the film, there is an argument about gender and lyrics.

- How does the group resolve that argument?

3) Tommy is the only member of the hip-hop club who is an immigrant to the US. He and his family moved to Oakland from Vietnam.

- How do you think the experience of immigration influences Tommy's music?
- How does music help Tommy navigate a multicultural environment?
- Tommy comes from a particularly musical family; what is their reaction to his involvement in the hip-hop club?
- Based on your own experience, describe the rewards and challenges that families face when parents learn about American culture from their children.

4) Many of the students in the group have parents who are absent from their lives or incarcerated.

- How do they think about their absent parents?
- What challenges do they and other young people face when their parents' decisions change family dynamics?

5) Historically, hip-hop has given a voice to a young

urban population. Hip-hop music and culture began in schools and community centers in the Bronx, New York, in the 1980s, and it spread across the US and the world.

- How is Beats Rhymes and Life connected to the tradition of hip-hop?
- How does it build on that tradition, and take hip-hop culture in a new direction?

## WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOUNG PEOPLE FACE WHEN THEIR PARENTS' DECISIONS CHANGE FAMILY DYNAMICS?

### Style and Message/ Reading for Media Literacy

1) What emotions did you experience during the film and afterwards?

- Why do you think that Kerri Gawryn chose to name the film **A Lovely Day**?

2) Why do you think Kerri Gawryn decided to make a film about the Beats Rhymes and Life project, and this group of Oakland teens?

- What is Gawryn's goal as a filmmaker? List three scenes that help to achieve this goal.

3) The film has no single narrator, but instead combines the voices of all the group members to tell the story.

- Why do you think Gawryn chose to construct the narrative using many different voices?
- Were there any voices that stood out to you more than others? Why?

### POST VIEWING ACTIVITIES:



1) Journaling activity: think of an experience in your life that was scary or difficult or painful. Make a list of your memories from that event: sights, sounds, your feelings at the time. Using that list, write a poem or a song that reclaims that memory and makes it into a piece of art that other people who have been through a similar struggle can relate to.

2) **A Lovely Day** gives us a glimpse into some of the challenges facing young people in Oakland today. Using references in the school library and on the internet, research the history of Oakland from the perspective of a high school student. Beginning in the year 1900 and moving to the present, write one paragraph for each decade, as if you were a student living in that time. Write about your family, your house, your school, the challenges you face, and your goals and dreams. This assignment can be spread across the class with each student writing from one decade, or it can be a comprehensive assignment.

### 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 (style and message question 1).
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.14 Analyze the techniques used in media messages for a particular audience and evaluate their effectiveness (style and message q1, q2, q3).
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.10 Evaluate when to use different kinds of effects (e.g., visual, music, sound, graphics) to create effective productions (style and message q3).
- 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) (context q2).

- 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](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

<b>MEDIUM</b>	<p><b>All Media Is Constructed.</b> 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>
<b>AUTHOR</b>	<p><b>All Media Is Constructed by Someone.</b> Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
<b>CONTENT</b>	<p><b>Media Is A Language For Information.</b> 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>
<b>AUDIENCE</b>	<p><b>All Media Messages Reach an Audience.</b> 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>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<p><b>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.</b> 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

The Beats, Rhymes and Life website  
<http://brl-inc.org/>

Rapido: The History of Hip-Hop, documentary, 55 minutes long, in six parts on YouTube.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw\\_AUOY3\\_uw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw_AUOY3_uw)

Scratch. A feature-length documentary film about hip-hop DJing, otherwise known as turntablism. From the South Bronx in the 1970s to San Francisco now, the world's best scratchers, beat-diggers, party-rockers, and producers wax poetic on beats, breaks, battles, and the infinite possibilities of vinyl.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bj1r6u8zLPo>

The history of hip-hop by Davy-D, an alternative format with similar content to the Wikipedia article.  
<http://www.daveyd.com/raptitle.html>

Students might be encouraged to visit the African American Museum and Library in Oakland (or just visit its website)  
<http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/locations/african-american-museum-library-oakland>

Oakland Local Article on Black History in Oakland  
<http://oaklandlocal.com/article/black-history-oakland-much-more-it-you-know-reflectionslideshow>

Great clip from [The Black Power Mixtape](#) showing archival footage of the Black Panther Party headquarters and educational programs in Oakland, circa 1970. Some of the messages in the footage advocate for armed struggle against police brutality, so classroom discussion about guns and gun violence might be advised.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjxrWI09JNQ>

Online archives from the Oakland History room at the Oakland Public Library  
<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt5b69q5bc/#onlineitems=http%3A//www.oac.cdlib.org/search%3Fstyle%3Dattached%3Brelation%3Dark%3A/13030/kt5b69q5bc>

Images of contemporary Oakland  
[https://www.google.com/search?q=oakland&hl=en&rlz=1C1LENP\\_enUS524US524&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=fO1MUenUKMmziwK\\_noGwCw&ved=0CAoQ\\_AUoAQ&biw=1920&bih=955](https://www.google.com/search?q=oakland&hl=en&rlz=1C1LENP_enUS524US524&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=fO1MUenUKMmziwK_noGwCw&ved=0CAoQ_AUoAQ&biw=1920&bih=955)



## REVIEWS

### About the Director

Kerri Gawryn is an Oakland-based documentary film director and producer. Her last film, *EXPOSING HOMELESSNESS*, chronicled the experiences of three formerly homeless women as they learned to express themselves and educate others about homelessness through the art of photography. The film, an SF Weekly “Pick of the Week,” was featured in the San Francisco Chronicle and won the “Best Local Voice” award from the San Francisco Women’s Film Festival, and the Society for Visual Anthropology’s Jean Rouch award. *EXPOSING HOMELESSNESS* is presently playing at a number of film festivals and is globally distributed by Documentary Educational Resources, a company devoted to the distribution of social justice films.

For DVD previews, high resolution photos or to schedule an interview with the director or any of the film’s participants, please contact Kerri Gawryn at [kgawryn@gmail.com](mailto:kgawryn@gmail.com).

## OAKLAND FILMMAKER TO DEBUT DOCUMENTARY HIGHLIGHTING YOUTH, HIP HOP MUSIC THERAPY

*from Oaklandlocal.com*

After pushing and grinding for six years, documentary filmmaker Kerri Gawryn will finally see her jewel project come to fruition -her movie, “A Lovely Day” will debut on Oct. 11 at the Grand Lake Theater.

“It feels a little surreal to be finished,” Gawryn said. “It’s been a long road.”

“A Lovely Day” documents nine youth at Oakland High School immersed in a six-month hip hop music therapy workshop.

The premier screening comes after lots of fundraising, shooting footage and editing.

“The first two years it was pre-production,” Gawryn said. “I had an idea that I wanted to do a film about young people and the experiences of young people growing up in the Bay Area.”

Then, she met Tomas Alvarez the social worker responsible for a program at Oakland High School called Beats, Rhymes and Life. Alvarez, the founder of Beats

Rhymes and Life, pioneered a hip hop therapy program that utilized the process of creating rap music to promote behavioral health among teens.

“It was interesting to me and it felt like it could have a very positive effect on young people,” she said. “I was interested in seeing how it all came together and how (Alvarez) used hip hop as a way to provide mental health services and structure group therapy around the art of hip hop, so I decided I want to partner with them.”

Gawryn said the students kept her going through the whole process.

“It was four years of filming and I must say the obligation and commitment from the youth highlighted in the film is what kept me working towards getting the film done,” she said.

Oaklanders played a huge role in fundraising, Gawryn said.

“It was Oakland people coming together as a community to really get the film done,” Garwryn said. “Oakland has been amazing. I love Oakland and making this film has made me love Oakland even more.”

Gawryn said that as a documentary filmmaker, it is important to let students take the lead in storytelling.

“You use film as a way for young people to tell their stories, not me telling their stories, but proving a medium for them to tell their stories,” she said.

Gawryn said she’s glad that her work was a vehicle for the students of the hip hop workshop.

“There are all of these assumptions about young people. As people get older, they forget what its like to be a teenager and I just thought it important to let young people tell their stories and speak for themselves.”

Gawryn said that the students wanted to make sure their story got told on a big stage.

“I made a promise to our youth that the Oakland screening would be at the Grand Lake Theater,” she said.