

ROMEO IS BLEEDING



GRADES 8-12
CLASSROOM GUIDE

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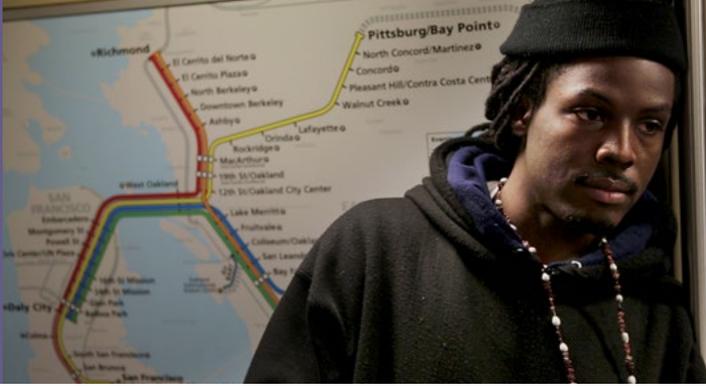
Romeo is Bleeding is a feature documentary about young poets in a Richmond, California after school program, who rewrite the script of Romeo and Juliet to address gang violence in their neighborhoods. A class screening of the film may supplement a Drama, Literature, Ethnic Studies, or Social Studies curriculum. Taught in conjunction with this guide, *Romeo is Bleeding* will challenge students to think critically about youth culture, gang violence and social justice, and will facilitate further 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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SAN FRANCISCO
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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 **Romeo is Bleeding**. 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

ROMEO IS BLEEDING follows DONTÉ CLARK (23) on a quest to heal his warring city by creating a poetic vision of the future. Hailing from a notorious family from North Richmond, CA, Donté was born into a decades long turf war against Central. Rather than succumb to the pressures of his environment, Donté found a positive outlet through poetry, and gained Bay Area notoriety by writing about the traumas he's experienced. Over the past five years, Donté has become a pillar of Richmond's burgeoning poetic community, and is currently Co-Director of an arts organization called RAW Talent (Richmond Artists with Talent), one of the few positive outlets Richmond has to offer.

When Donté finds out that RAW Talent will be cut from the budget of its parent program, he knows he must do something big to prove the organization's worth and secure its future. Donté decides to step into the spotlight, by writing and starring in an autobiographical version of Romeo and Juliet – set in Richmond – and taking aim at the root causes of the turf war that grips his city. Donté's adaptation, titled Te's Harmony, flies in the face of Richmond's violent and prolonged post-war decline, and attempts to restore the pride to "The City of Pride and Purpose." Will Richmond share in Donté's poetic vision for the future, or will the city's cycle of violence continue to claim the lives and dreams of its youth?

Jason Zeldes (USA, 2014)
 91 minutes, Color, English
 Grades 8-12

Recommended Subject Areas:

African American Studies
 Art/Media
 Culture
 Drama
 English
 Leadership
 Literature
 Poetry
 Social Studies
 Youth

Key concepts / buzzwords:

Community, Documentary, Family, Gun Violence, High School, Incarcerated Parents, The Juvenile Justice System, Mentorship, Performance, Poetry, Pride, Shakespeare, Spoken Word, Trauma, Urban America, Young Actors



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Teachers might prepare the class for **Romeo is Bleeding** by discussing the concept of an adaptation. Shakespeare has been adapted countless times for varying audiences.

- Why do modern writers adapt historic literature for the stage or screen?
- What are some of the best adaptations of famous plays from the literary canon?
- What makes an adaptation successful? Why does the form have strength?

As students are watching the film, ask them to consider what themes in Romeo and Juliet make it relevant in a modern context? Why is this story still interesting today?

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

- 1) Describe Donte.
 - What kind of a person is he? What is his personality like?
 - What do you think of Donte's poetry?
 - What is Donte's background? Describe his family and his community.
 - What struggles has Donte overcome to achieve everything that he has accomplished?
 - Is Donte someone that you would like to know in your own life? What qualities make him an admirable role model, artist and citizen?
- 2) Describe life in Richmond, California.
 - What challenges does the community face?

- What extra challenges do the youth of Richmond face?
- What strength and beauty do you see in the community in Richmond over the course of the film?
- What should people know about North Richmond?

3) What is the Raw Talent program, the after school spoken word workshop where Donte works?

- What does Raw Talent offer to the young people who write and perform there?
- What values does Raw Talent promote? How are these values different from the street culture of Richmond?
- Why do you think the program is successful. Why is their poetry so good?

- What kind of leadership do Donte, Molly and the other staff of Raw Talent provide to the young poets? How does their leadership style encourage growth and creative expression?

4) Describe D'niese, the high school senior who plays Juliet.

- What is D'niese's life like outside of Raw Talent?
- What is her family like?
- How does D'niese bring her personal story into her writing and her acting? Is this a struggle for her? What is the ultimate result when she digs deep into herself?
 - What extra challenges do girls face growing up in Richmond?
- What role do girls play in gang culture?
- Do you think D'niese is a good role model for her community? How was she able to overcome stereotypes and find her inner strength?

WHAT DOES
 IT MEAN TO
 BE A LEADER
 IN YOUR
 COMMUNITY?

5) The community in Richmond is in crisis, but it has a strong identity and a shared culture. What does it mean to be part of a community?

- How do Donte, D'niese and the young poets of Raw Talent feel about their city?
- What does it mean to them to be from Richmond?

Context

1) Describe the conflict between Central and North Richmond.

- What causes gang violence?
- Why do young people get involved with gangs?
- What are the effects of gang culture on the surrounding communities?
- The Richmond police described a series of new laws that they say have reduced gang violence. How do the residents feel about those laws?
- How can gang violence be eliminated without hurting the community?
- What can young people do to break the cycle of gang violence?

2) When did the black community first come to Richmond, California?

- Why did they settle in Richmond, instead of in some other part of the Bay Area?
- What are the hazards of being near the Chevron Refinery? What health risks does the refinery create for the communities of North and Central Richmond?
- What does it mean to be unincorporated? What effect does North Richmond's unincorporated status have on public services for residents?
- What does it mean to say that a community is "underserved"? What changes could be made to help the people of Richmond?

3) How do the young people of Richmond cope with the violence that surrounds them?

- How do they feel when their friends and family

members die?

- What is the relationship between death and more violence? How does a cycle of violence develop?
- How does Donte's poetry help him to process his anger and grief? Are there other things that help him?
- What is the impact of Donte's work in his community?

4) What is the connection between pride and gang violence?

- Why do you think it is so important for people hustling on the street to defend their pride?
- Is there a relationship between pride and trauma?
- What traumas have these individuals and their communities suffered?
- One of the men interviewed describes trauma as feeling like "I am angry as hell and I don't even know why."
- Is it possible to heal trauma peacefully?
- What might help this community to heal and to restore a feeling of mutual respect?

5) How does Romeo Bleeding connect to a larger conversation about civil rights in the 21st century?

- What systematic problems may contribute to the violence and lack of opportunity in Richmond?
- What is the relationship between the residents and the police and the legal system? Do you think that the schools that these young people attend are part of the "school to prison pipeline"?
- How do poverty and cyclical incarceration contribute to the power of gangs and street culture in Richmond? How many of the young people had incarcerated parents?
- What kinds of social support and systematic changes might improve life in Richmond?
- How are these concerns connected to current social movements like Black Lives Matter?



Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

1) Describe the process that Donte used to adapt Romeo and Juliet.

- How did he realize that the story was relevant to him?
- How did he and his team make Romeo and Juliet about Richmond? What changes did they make to the story to modernize it?
- How did they make it about themselves? What pieces of their own stories did they bring into the poetry?
- What about Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet has allowed it to withstand the test of time?

2) How do the young poets support each others' creativity?

- What does it mean to create a safe space?
- What fears and emotional obstacles did the writers and actors overcome?
- What are the rewards of performing?

3) The camera captures personal moments in the lives of the film's main characters.

- What relationship do you think the filmmakers had with the youth and leaders of Raw Talent?
- How do you think the filmmakers gained these young peoples' trust?
- Would you trust someone to follow you around with a camera? How could a filmmaker convince you to appear in a documentary?

4) How did **Romeo is Bleeding** make you feel?

- How do you think the filmmakers want you to feel after the story has ended?
- Is there a message in this film?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1) Journaling Activity

What does it mean to be a role model? Are the young people in Raw Talent role models? How do you think younger people see them? What impact are they having on the future of Richmond?

Write about a moment when you acted as a role model for someone else, or when someone modeled a behavior for you. How did it feel to know that you were providing a positive example? What did it mean to have someone to look up to when you were unsure of how to proceed? What is the importance of role models in a community, a school or a family?

2) Spoken Word

Write your own poem using the first line of D'niese Robinson's spoken word from the beginning of the film: As you look into the midnight sky and watch the stars as they glow, I want you to think of me.

Students may wish to perform their poems for the class.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN
TO CREATE A SAFE
SPACE FOR CREATIVE
EXPRESSION?



California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- **Grade 8:** Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.
- **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 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 1.3 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 Addressed In This Lesson:

This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts standards for Reading Informational Texts grades 8-12. Additional specific standard applications are listed below:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.



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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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>All Media Is A Language.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 Film's Official Website:

<http://www.romeoisbleedingfilm.com/>

Contextual Information About Richmond, CA

New York Times article "Eminent Domain: A Long Shot Against Blight": <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/12/business/in-richmond-california-a-long-shot-against-blight.html>

Grist.org: "A Year After Refinery Explosion, Richmond, CA is Fighting Back": <http://grist.org/climate-energy/a-year-after-a-refinery-explosion-richmond-cali-is-fighting-back/>

PS Mag: "The White Cop Who Embraced #BlackLivesMatter: <http://www.psmag.com/politics-and-law/white-cop-embraced-blacklivesmatter-saving-richmond-97346>

Mother Jones: "Did This City Bring Down Its Murder Rate by Paying People Not To Kill?": <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/06/richmond-california-murder-rate-gun-death>

Resources Related to Gang Violence and Gun Violence

The Atlantic: "Guns in the Classroom": <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/12/guns-in-the-classroom/281663/>

Well & Often Press: Lesson Plan: Talking About Gun Violence: <http://wellandoftenpress.com/reader/in-the-classroom-talking-about-gun-violence/>

Schools of Thought Blog, CNN.com: My View: How We Talk About Guns in My Chicago Classroom: <http://schoolsofthought.blogs.cnn.com/2013/02/15/my-view-how-we-talk-about-guns-in-my-chicago-classroom/>

Gang Prevention Services : <http://www.gangpreventionservices.org/resources.asp>

Civil, Environmental and Social Justice Resources

Black Lives Matter: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>

GreenAction.org: <http://greenaction.org/>

Teaching for Change: <http://www.teachingforchange.org/>

Edutopia: Creating Classrooms for Social Justice: <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/creating-classrooms-for-social-justice-tabitha-dellangelo>



REVIEWS

Indywire

By Ryan Lattanzio

April 14, 2015

An editor on Oscar winner “20 Feet from Stardom,” rookie director Jason Zeldes’ debut doc “Romeo Is Bleeding” shadows Richmond-based poet and activist Donté Clark as he fights to heal a community ravaged by violence. Here’s the synopsis:

With the help of teacher/mentor Molly Raynor, Clark collaborates with youth at RAW (Richmond Artists With) Talent to adapt Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet to modern-day Richmond, CA. Instead of Verona and Mantua, Te’s Harmony unfolds in Central and North Richmond and tells a tale of love, revenge and murder amid poverty and family disintegration, with the lines delivered in slang-filled iambic pentameter and hip-hop metaphors. Occasionally, the new script incorporates Shakespeare’s words, adding an extra layer of meaning.

The film features interviews with the budding writers of RAW Talent and residents of Richmond, which isn’t far from where BART passenger Oscar Grant was shot by a police officer on New Year’s Day, 2009, to the outrage of the entire Bay Area.

Check out an exclusive clip from the film below. A recipient of the SF Film Society’s 2014 Documentary Film Fund, “Romeo Is Bleeding” world-premiered during SFIFF at El Cerrito High School on April 29.