



GRADES 8-12 CLASSROOM GUIDE

USING
THIS GUIDE ▶

ABOUT
THE FILM ▶

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS & ▶
POST-VIEWING
ACTIVITIES

MEDIA LITERACY
RESOURCES ▶

SUPPLEMENTAL
RESOURCES ▶

ARTICLES AND
REVIEWS ▶



TEACHING THE FILM:

Democrats is a documentary film about two politicians, from opposing political parties, who are appointed to write a new constitution for Zimbabwe. The men tour rural areas and urban neighborhoods in Zimbabwe to collect input from citizens and to educate and encourage Zimbabweans to exercise their new democratic rights. This screening may complement a Social Studies, African Studies or World History curriculum. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will invite students to witness political struggle in a young democracy and to think critically about citizenship, freedom and the democratic process worldwide.

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.

Please direct all comments and queries to Keith Zwölfer, Youth Education Manager:

San Francisco Film Society Youth Education
39 Mesa Street, Suite 110 · The Presidio San Francisco, CA 94129-1025
kzwolfer@sffs.org
415.561.5040



SAN FRANCISCO
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 **Democrats**.

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

How does a country transition to democracy after decades of autocratic tyranny—and when the primary tyrant is still in place? The answer: With great, great difficulty. Such was the Catch-22 position Zimbabwe found itself in after the elections of 2008, when President Mugabe's ZANU-PF party lost Parliamentary control to main opposition party MDC. The widespread violence and accusations (hardly for the first time) of vote rigging that ensued triggered sufficient international outrage to force the regime's hand. It appointed leaders from both parties to draft a new democratic constitution. But how far could that noble mission get, with the biggest obstacle to true democracy still holding the highest position in the land? Camilla Nielsson's Danish crew gained extraordinary access over a long haul to the two men presiding over this most delicate and treacherous of negotiations. Their personalities are a study in contrast: The President's right-hand-man Paul Mangwana has the alternately back-slapping and tantrum-throwing manner of someone accustomed to always getting his way. Longtime MDC activist Douglas Mwonozora exudes the weary, even-tempered patience of Job, which proves handy when he's briefly packed off to jail on dubious charges. But then, even the blustery Mangwana is not immune from such a fate (or worse), should the final results fail to please Mugabe. As their committee struggles to make progress, each step fraught with drama, *Democrats* proves an unforgettably vivid illustration of a paradox: The people's will might be an unstoppable force, but Mugabe is one hell of an immovable object.

Program Note: brief profanity

{ Camilla Nielsson (Denmark, 2015)
100 minutes, Color, In English and Shona
with English Subtitles }
Grades 8-12

Recommended Subject Areas:

African Studies
Ethics/Religion
History
Political Science, Social Studies, World Affairs

Key concepts / buzzwords:

Africa
Civil Rights
Constitution
Democracy
Dictatorship
Election
Freedom
Government
International Intervention
Opposition Party
Political Agenda
Press
Robert Mugabe
Voting



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Democrats takes its audience deep inside the political process in a volatile developing country. Before watching the film, you should look at Zimbabwe on a map, and discuss students' previous knowledge about sub-Saharan Africa and contemporary African politics. You may wish to familiarize students with a basic history of Robert Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe and the political climate in the region. See the Supplemental Materials section for references.

- What is a democracy? What is essential to a democracy? What kinds of government are alternatives to democracy?
- What do you know about the history of democracy in Africa? In Asia? In Latin America? In other parts of the world?
- Where is Zimbabwe?
- What do you know about Zimbabwe's political history?

Students should keep these questions in mind while watching the film.

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

1) Who are the two politicians in the spotlight of this movie?

- Which parties are they involved in?
- What are their ideologies?

- How would you describe their personalities?
- How would you describe their relationship with each other?
- What is your impression about them? Do you think they are good leaders?

2) What political parties govern Zimbabwe?

- What are their political agendas?
- What motivates their political agendas?
- To which party does Robert Mugabe belong?
- Do you think both parties have equal power in the political stage? What determines the balance of power in Zimbabwean politics?

WHAT MOTIVATED THE POLITICIANS TO WRITE A NEW CONSTITUTION ?

3) What impression of Zimbabwe did you get from watching this film?

- What did you think about Zimbabwe and about modern Africa before watching Democrats?
- How was the country that you saw in the film similar to or different from your previous impression of Zimbabwe and modern Africa?
- Describe the range of lifestyles that you saw in the film. How is it different to live in the city and to live in the country in Zimbabwe?
- How did the political views differ in rural and urban areas?

4) What motivated the politicians to write a new constitution?

- What political and societal problems was the new constitution aiming to address?
- Do you think that Zimbabwean society will change now that they have a new constitution?
- Do you think that the process of drafting and signing the constitution was a success?



- 5) What instances of conflict did you see in this film?
- How did the politicians treat one another during their disagreements?
 - How did the citizens respond to people with differing political views during the public hearings?
 - What conflicts or threats of conflict existed beneath the surface of the political process?
 - Historically, how has conflict and violence shaped the public consciousness in Zimbabwe?
 - How do you think this society will overcome a history of repression?

Context

- 1) After watching this movie, how would you describe democracy?
- Has your definition of democracy shifted or evolved?
 - Is Zimbabwean democracy different than American democracy?
 - Can you have different kinds of democracy, or is there only one kind?
 - What must exist in order to call a political system a democracy?
 - Can you point out scenes, people, or events depicted in this movie that show signs of a growing democratic country?
 - Do you think that Zimbabwe is a democratic country, even if it is in an early phase?
- 2) The word 'free' is interchangeable with 'democratic' in this film. Does democracy mean freedom?
- What is the difference between freedom and democracy? Where do they overlap and how are they distinct?
 - Why do you think the people of Zimbabwe use the word 'free' a lot?

WHAT KINDS OF LEADERS ARE NEEDED IN ORDER TO BUILD A NEW DEMOCRACY?

- 3) Zimbabwe is one of many countries worldwide that are working to create democratic governments.
- What is the process by which a government transitions from an authoritarian society to a democracy?
 - What struggles and challenges does a young democracy face?
 - What kinds of leaders are needed in order to build a new democracy?
 - What factors contribute to the success of a growing democracy?
 - What social and cultural institutions support the growth of democracy?
- 4) What is the relationship between the politics, political figures and the media in Zimbabwe?
- How does the media benefit and/or hinder the political agendas of various politicians?
 - In this film, is news media a trustworthy source?
 - The newspaper shown in the film is written in English, but in fact there are 16 official languages spoken in Zimbabwe. Why do you think English is the favored language for politicians and news media?
 - What challenges in communication and politics might arise when a population speaks so many different languages?
 - How might a language barrier hinder the formation of a democracy?

Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

- 1) Did you enjoy watching **Democrats**?
- Do you think the film gave an accurate picture of



the Zimbabwean political process?

- Do you trust that this film told you the truth?
- What makes a documentary film trustworthy and believable?
- **Democrats** follows the political process in Zimbabwe, but its story has implications for democracies around the world.
- What connections can you draw between the struggling democratic process in Zimbabwe and democracy here in the United States?
- Do you think that as Americans we can learn something about ourselves by watching a foreign political process?
- What insights do you think American politicians could draw from **Democrats**?
- **Democrats** is an observational documentary, which means that the filmmaker does not offer commentary on her subject; she simply lets her viewers watch the story unfold.
- How do you think this film would be different if the director had added a voiceover narration to tell the story?
- How would the film have been different if she had used interviews with experts?
- Did you like the observational style of **Democrats**?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1) Journaling Activity:

- What did you know about Zimbabwe before watching **Democrats**?
- What did you learn about Zimbabwean culture, history and politics through watching this film?
- How is Zimbabwe like the United States, and how is it different?
- Do you think that Zimbabwe will succeed in its political transition to democracy?

2) Research the History of Zimbabwe.

Using resources available in the library and on the internet, write a brief essay on the modern history of Zimbabwe.

- What are the most important things that happened in the past 50 years in Zimbabwe?
- Who is Robert Mugabe and why has he remained in power for so long?
- What kind of a ruler was Mugabe when he first took office, and how has he changed during his tenure as Zimbabwe's leader?
- What role did European governments and the United Nations play in shaping Zimbabwe's modern political history?
- How has Mugabe responded to foreign and international intervention in Zimbabwe?
- How has life changed for regular Zimbabwean citizens during the last 50 years?

Look at the story of **Democrats** through a historical lens: are you hopeful about the new constitution and the work of the politicians profiled in the film? Why or why not?

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

Zimbabwe History and Politics

BBC Country Timeline: Zimbabwe: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14113618>

Our Africa: Zimbabwe profile: <http://www.our-africa.org/zimbabwe/history-politics>

Website of the Zimbabwean Embassy: <http://www.zimembassy.se/history.html>

The Guardian: Robert Mugabe profile: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/robert-mugabe>

The New Yorker “The Destroyer: Robert Mugabe and the Destruction of Zimbabwe”: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/10/27/the-destroyer>

Time Photo Essay “The Reign of Robert Mugabe”: <http://content.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1726919,00.html>





REVIEWS

Variety

Even the slyest political satire couldn't outdo this riveting docu study of Zimbabwe's troubled coalition government.

Guy Lodge
 Film Critic
 @guylodge

Long the subject of international uproar but comparatively little analysis, the quasi-Kafkaesque administration holding Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe's corrupt dictatorship in place finally gets the first-hand scrutiny it merits in Camilla Nielsson's riveting documentary "Democrats." Tracing the tortuous process of cross-party negotiation behind the country's 2013 constitution, Nielsson's film lays bare one country's specifically soured dreams of democracy while imparting more universal insight into the art and craft of political diplomacy. The result, filmed over three years with an astonishing level of internal access, is at once important and impishly entertaining, brightened by the kind of eccentric local color that cannot be forged or imagined. Festival programmers across the globe will rightfully pounce, as should docu-oriented distribs.

"Democracies in Africa are a difficult proposition, because always the opposition will want more than it deserves," says a smirking Mugabe — not a man without wit, as tyrannical despots go — in a speech recorded at the outset of "Democrats." Such is the degree of confident disdain with which Mugabe's ZANU-PF party has regarded its rivals, however formidable, since coming to power in 1980, even in the face of official defeat. When Morgan Tsvangirai's more liberal-minded Movement for Democratic Change earned enough

votes in Zimbabwe's egregiously mishandled 2008 parliamentary election to force a coalition government, ZANU-PF made minimal allowances for its new co-pilots, effectively acting as a party in denial.

Nielsson's film finds participants on both sides of the political divide agreeing that the situation is something of a charade, though their agreement goes no further: "The game of politics is pretending," says ZANU-PF representative Paul Mangwana with genial indifference, while his MDC counterpart Douglas Mwonzora separately fumes that the country at large is "a nation of pretenders." This neat semantic flip introduces and defines the two men who emerge as the qualified heroes of this political quagmire: Elected co-chairpersons of parliamentary select committee COPAC, Mangwana and Mwonzora are charged with creating a new constitution ("the second most important book after the Bible") that satisfies the principles of both parties. Furthermore, the Zimbabwean public is also invited into the process by means of countrywide grassroots consultations.

What sounds noble in theory, however, proves increasingly shambolic in practice. Nielsson and d.p. Henrik Bohn Ipsen are somehow quietly present for any number of calamitous conflicts and fallouts both behind and beyond closed doors, as the poisoned project falls months, and eventually years, behind schedule. The boardroom back-and-forth between the parties' respective teams is heated enough — amplified by media leaks and petty arrests — though it's the public hearings, some of which resulted in fatal riots, that contain much of the film's most blistering material. One scene of a crowd, drilled in advance by ZANU-PF secret police, unanimously requesting that



President Mugabe retain the exclusive right to appoint court judges, is as horrifying as it is farcically hilarious. (Mwonzora's dry response: "I should commend them for being very disciplined.")

What should be the stuff of furious political satire, then, is instead presented as untempered reality. With such truthfully absurdist material to hand, Nielsson's cleanly constructed film has no need of voiceover, secondary talking heads or any manner of bells-and-whistles editorialization. Neither, however, does the film carry the remote chill of a nonfiction procedural: There's ample humanity to balance its cruel ironies, courtesy of the charismatic odd couple at its center. The personal war and distinctly gradual meeting of minds between Mangwana and Mwonzora — the former bullish and conservative, the latter urbane and progressive, both smarter than they initially deem each other to be — is as compelling as the political battle they're fighting.

In the process, each man is revealed as something far more complex and compromised than a mere mouthpiece for party policy: "Convincing my party that it needs to change is not easy," Mangwane sighs, suggesting even ZANU-PF brass have one eye on a tricky post-Mugabe future. (The final constitution includes a loophole that allows Mugabe's presidential term to continue indefinitely, though its most contentious clause involves capping future leaders' terms.) While the road to freedom enjoyed by Zimbabwe's neighboring nation South Africa has been generously celebrated on film in the twenty years since its landmark 1994 election, "Democrats" serves as a rare, vital snapshot of a democracy still very much in the planning stages.

Tech contributions are remarkably polished, given the self-evident challenges of the production, with Ipsen's smooth, intelligently composed widescreen lensing an appropriately unassuming asset. Jeppe Bodskov's deft

editing ensures the nervously extended passage of time is felt at no cost to the film's own efficient pacing, while making room for memorable sideshows and incidental players — the eerily flamboyant, semi-voguing march of a hotel sentry guard is a miniature star turn in itself.