

FROM FACT TO FICTION

GRADES 6 - 12
CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILM:

Collected from around the world, this compilation of short films explores a variety of storytelling techniques, from documentaries exploring the heart and soul of small town America to animated films using traditional hand-drawn and stop-motion techniques to bring their characters to life. This collection gives students the perfect smorgasbord of all the SFFILM Festival has to offer.

Total runtime 75 minutes.

USING THIS GUIDE:

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of the Fact to Fiction program.

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.

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

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SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Which film in this series was your favorite? Why?
2. Which film in this series was your least favorite? Why?
3. Which film in this series do you think was the most challenging to make? Why?
4. Many of these films are about art and creativity. Which of these films presented an artist(s) who you found inspiring?
5. Many of these films are stories of the relationship between a person and their place. Did any of these stories remind you of communities that you know? Did you identify with any of these characters? Do you relate to the strong sense of community that these people share?
6. These films introduce the audience to stories that might not otherwise be told.

4. Many of these films are about art and creativity. Which of these films presented an artist(s) who you found inspiring?

- Skywards is made in an experimental style using split screens and cell phone footage. How does this artistic decision make way for the topic to unfold?
- How does quilting inspire the women of Gee's Bend?
- Negative Space is a stop-motion animated film. How does this artistic decision visually add to the narrator's story?

5. Many of these films are stories of the relationship between a person and their place. Did any of these stories remind you of communities that you know? Did you identify with any of these characters? Do you relate to the strong sense of community that these people share?

- Describe the relationship Zion has with his wrestling team, and the community he was able to develop with the sport.
- How has San Francisco shaped the identity of the man in 73 Questions?

- How do the citizens of Webster City, Iowa come together to reshape their town's identity?

6. These films introduce the audience to stories that might not otherwise be told.

- Why do you think it's important to hear these stories?
- Were you surprised by any of the stories that you saw?
- Which films had the most compelling characters?
- How did the filmmakers use the film medium to put you inside the character's world?
- Did you want to know more about any of these characters?

WHICH FILM IN THIS SERIES WAS YOUR FAVORITE?

7. How would you describe the series as a whole?

- What common themes surfaced when watching?
- Did any films seem out of place?
- Do you think these films were interesting to watch together?



73 QUESTIONS

Synopsis

A long time San Francisco resident offers some sage and sincere advice for all those who love the Bay.
(Leah Nichols, USA, 2017, 10 min)

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the subject of this film. What does he care about most?
2. Describe the relationship between the subject and the city of San Francisco. How does he feel about the city?
3. Describe the animation style in this film. Do you like this style of storytelling?
4. Is there a message in this film?

BIRD KARMA

Synopsis

Dazzled by the colors of its sparkling prey, a cunning and dexterous bird makes a fateful decision that alters the cosmos, and results in a swift and fitting conclusion.
(William Salazar, USA, 2018, 5 min)

Discussion Questions

1. Describe what happened in this film. How did the animation style depict the story?
2. What is the message of this story? What cinematic elements were used to illustrate the message?
3. How does the music in this film reflect what is going on in the story?
4. What happens in the end of this film? If you were writing this story, would you end it differently? Why or why not?

MADE IN IOWA

Synopsis

Webster City, Iowa, faces economic challenges when the local Electrolux factory closes, but finds revived hope in one man's drive to revive their shuttered cinema.
(Mohammad Gorjestani, USA, 2017, 12 min)

Discussion Question

1. Describe the emotional arc of the people in the town of Webster City, Iowa. What changed to make them more positive and future-thinking?
2. What does the movie theater give to this town? Is the theater just about movies, or does it give other things too?
3. Is Webster City a resilient town? What comment is this film making about the power of community?

NEGATIVE SPACE

Synopsis

This sweet, comic animated tale poignantly illustrates how we all learn from our parents. Nominated for an Academy Award.
(Max Porter, Ru Kuwahata, France, 2017, 6 min)

Discussion Question

1. How does the animation style add to the narrative? How do the visual image and the spoken word pair together to tell a full story? What are some creative scenes in this film?
2. How does packing a suitcase provide a bond for the father and son?
3. What is the tone of this film? What does the filmmaker include to create this tone?



SHERBERT ROZENCANTZ, YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL

Synopsis

A shy young girl's world revolves around her beloved pet guinea pig. When her mother unsuccessfully attempts to find her a human friend, it allows her to see things from a whole new perspective.

(Natalie van den Dungen, Australia, 2017, 10 min)

Discussion Question

1. What does Milly learn about Sherbert's happiness towards the end of the film? How does she solve that conflict?
2. Describe the relationship between Milly and her family, versus Milly and Sherbert.
3. Do you have a best friend? How did you make that friend? What do you have in common?

SKYWARDS

Synopsis

A dazzling display of flying pigeons above the cacophony of Old Delhi.

(Eva Weber, United Kingdom, 2017, 4 min)

Discussion Question

1. How did you interpret the split screen effect of this film? How did the different screens work to tell one story?
2. Describe the sound effects in this film. How does the sound world make way for a story to unfold?
3. What did you learn about the relationship of pigeoning and religion on this film?

WHILE I YET LIVE

Synopsis

Maris Curran's luminous short film brings into focus the deep historical bond of African-American women quilters in Gee's Bend, Alabama.

(Maris Curran, USA, 2017, 15 min)

Discussion Question

1. In what ways is quilting a form of art? What ways is it different than what is generally considered art?
2. Describe the emotions and communities represented in this film. How does quilting unite the women in Gee's Bend?
3. How does the filmmaker use the topic of quilting to explore the subjects of civil rights, religion, and tradition?
4. If you were able to meet these women in real life, what would you ask them?

ZION

Synopsis

Born without legs and shuttled through the foster care system, Ohioan high school student Zion Clark becomes an amazingly powerful and agile wrestler.

(Floyd Russ, USA, 2017, 10 min)

Discussion Question

1. How does Zion use his disability to his advantage? How did he use wrestling to come to terms with his self-image and acceptance?
2. Coach Donahue describes wrestling as "two humans imposing their will upon each other." How does that description apply to Zion and his life experience?
3. How does the filmmaker employ visual and audio techniques to represent Zion's increased self-acceptance and personal growth?



POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY

Make Your Own Short Film

Drawing inspiration from the films, choose a moment in your life or story you have heard, and transform it into a plan for a short film.

- Write a logline -- a brief outline of the plot, meaning, and message of your film (3 sentences)
- Build your logline into a treatment, a short summary of what happens in your film (one paragraph).
- Write a screenplay for a three-minute film. It should be three to four pages long and include at least one character. Focus your screenplay around a single climatic event, with rising conflict
- Using your phone or a handheld camera, go and shoot your film. Bring a friend to work in a small team.
- Use video editing software like Pixorial or WeVideo to cut your footage into a film. Add music and titles if you want.
- Congratulations! You just made a movie! Share with your class and friends and family.





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 exoticized 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 ANIMATED FILM: WHAT IS ANIMATION?

Animation is a process used to create motion pictures through the combination of still images (e.g., digital graphics, photographs of drawings, photographs of objects, etc.) which, when played in sequence, create the illusion of movement. All television cartoons, for example, are animations, and are made up of thousands of still images (drawn by hand or on a computer) that are played sequentially, along with a soundtrack, to tell a story.

Types of Animation

2D Animation Techniques

- Classic animation (e.g. Disney's *The Lion King*, most TV cartoons)
- Rotoscope (e.g., *Star Wars* lightsabers)
- Flip books

3D Animation Techniques

- 3D animation (e.g., Pixar's *Toy Story*, *Wall-E*, *Up*)
- Stereoscopic 3D (e.g., *Avatar*)
- Cut-out / Silhouette animation (e.g., *South Park*)

Stop-Motion Techniques

- Claymation (e.g., Nick Park's *Wallace and Gromit*)
- Puppet animation (e.g., Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Coraline*)

History of Animation

The world's most famous animator, Walt Disney, began making short animated cartoons based on children's stories in 1923. In 1928 he introduced Mickey Mouse in the first animated sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, which became an immediate sensation. Throughout the next decade, Disney would add such elements as carefully synchronized music (*The Skeleton Dance*, 1929).

Technicolor (*Flowers and Trees*, 1932), and the illusion of depth with his multi-plane camera (*The Old Mill*, 1937), a device that allowed for animated cels to be photographed against a three-dimensional background. Although not the first animated feature, Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first to use up-to-the-minute techniques and the first to receive widespread release. The film's success can be attributed in part to Disney's willingness to use animation to create a profound dramatic experience. He strove for photographic realism in films such as *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942).

The success of television cartoons led to the virtual disappearance of animated shorts produced for theatrical release. Animated feature-length films, however, flourished, especially after the release of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989), regarded by many as the studio's best animated feature in decades. Other Disney blockbusters followed, including *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994) and *Lilo & Stitch* (2002).

The development of computer animation was another great advancement in the form and resulted in feature films of astounding visual sumptuousness. In 1995, *Toy Story* was the first film to use only computer-generated imagery (CGI). In 2001 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences added a new Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film. The first recipient of the award was *Shrek* (2001). Other major animated features were *Toy Story* (1995) and *Toy Story 2* (1999), *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Finding Nemo* (2003).

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