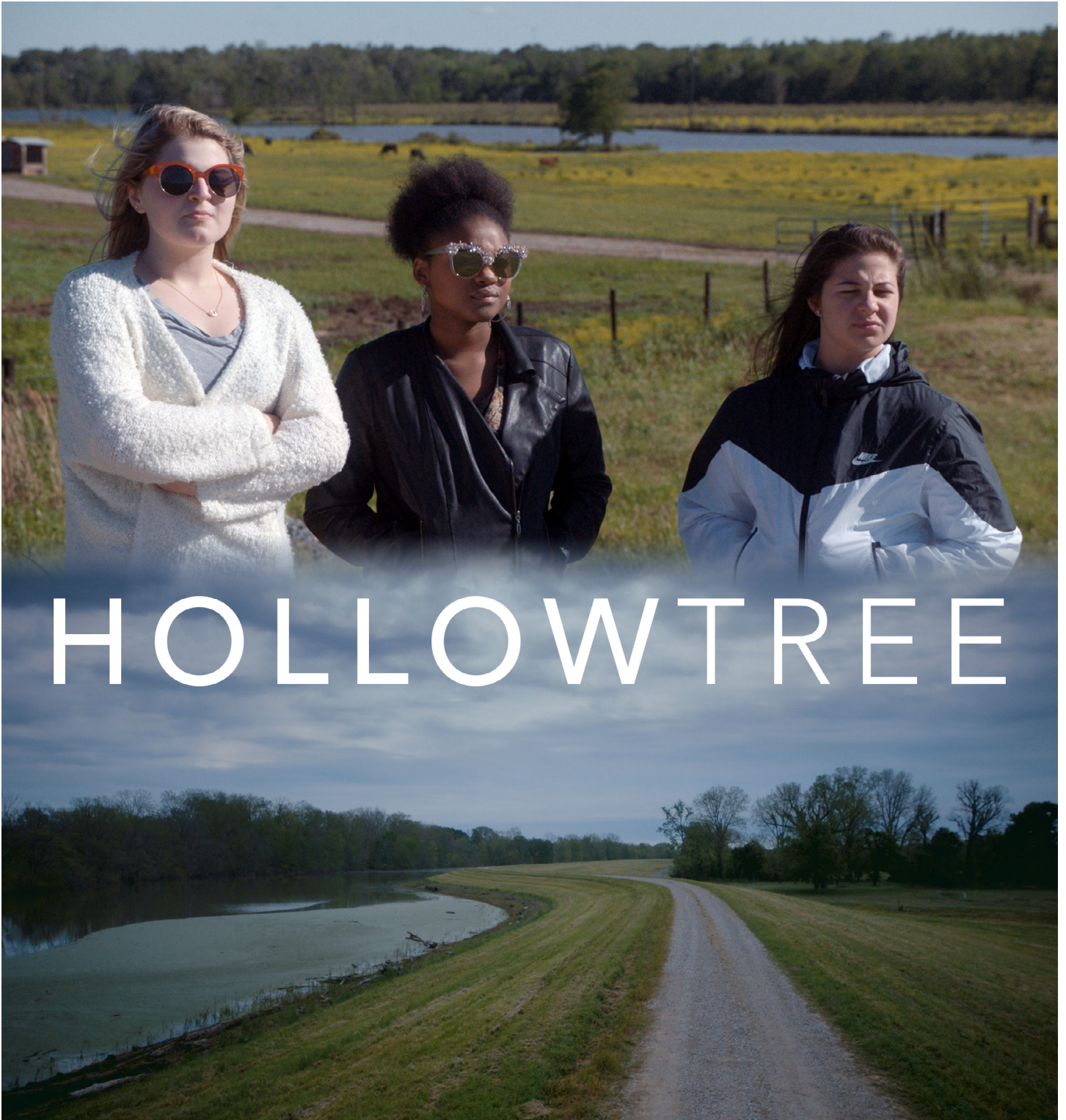




ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH FORUM



HOLLOWTREE

CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 9-12

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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the California Film Institute's Environmental Youth Forum screening of *Hollow Tree*.

We believe this film will be a powerful and engaging text to use in your classroom, and these curricular materials are designed to get students to engage deeply with film by the common-core aligned skills of developing an evidence-based interpretation of a text.

The discussion questions on the following page offer a variety of options for fostering small-group or whole-class dialogue. If your students are already familiar with a process of writing evidence-based interpretive essays, consider using the suggested essay prompt for a short writing piece. Additionally, individual handouts for before, during, and after viewing are provided as stand-alone activities to be used individually or in sequence.

Thank you so much for your tireless work!

Sincerely,

The CAFILM Education Team

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the central issues addressed in this documentary? What has changed between the start and the end?
2. What are some surprising facts you learned from this film? How do these facts shape your understanding of the central issue of the film?
3. Does this documentary feel objective and/or balanced in its presentation of the issues? Why or why not?
4. What did you see in this film that reminds you of other stories from your life or other stories you know?
5. Were there any perspectives relevant to the central issues of the documentary that were not included? How would those voices have changed the film?
6. What are some background details you noticed in this film? How do these details provide information about the time or place in which this film was made?
7. Consider other films you've seen. What makes this film unique or important? What are some connections between this film and other films?
8. How did the girls' different backgrounds and identities influence their perspectives on climate change and environmental issues?
9. How did the girls' understanding of Louisiana's history change throughout the film, and what did they learn about Indigenous dispossession, colonization, and slavery?
10. In describing the film, director Kira Akerman says the "idea was to use filmmaking as a classroom." What do you think she means by this? What are some advantages and disadvantages to using filmmaking to learn about a subject?

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. *Hollow Tree* shows three girls' journey in understanding climate change in Louisiana. Which do you think is more effective in motivating others to take action on climate issues: Personal stories, such as the story of the teens who we follow in the film, or historic data and scientific evidence, like what was shared by the adults they encountered?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NowThis News: The Fight to Restore Louisiana's Coastline

<https://youtu.be/uE1Vpb7p2o0>

A 10-minute web documentary on coastal erosion in Louisiana, and current efforts to reverse climate change impacts in the region..

The Whitney Plantation

<https://www.whitneyplantation.org/>

The Whitney Plantation, a museum memorializing the struggle of enslaved people in Louisiana, is one of the sites visited by the teens in the film. Their website includes additional learning materials on the history of slavery in America.

The Nature Conservancy: Louisiana

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/louisiana/>

The Nature Conservancy is a global environmental nonprofit working to create a world where people and nature can thrive. This website hosts several articles explaining their conservation efforts in Louisiana and the Gulf of Mexico.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

NGSS.MS-ESS3-4 Earth and Human Activity

Construct an argument supported by evidence for how increases in human population and per-capita consumption of natural resources impact Earth's systems.

NGSS.MS-LS2-4 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics

Construct an argument supported by empirical evidence that changes to physical or biological components of an ecosystem affect populations.

ABOUT CFI

The nonprofit California Film Institute celebrates and promotes film as art and education through year-round programming at the independent Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, presentation of the acclaimed Mill Valley Film Festival and DocLands Documentary Film Festival, as well as cultivation of the next generation of filmmakers and audiences through CAFILM Education programs.

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HOLLOWTREE

ABOUT THE FILM

Hollow Tree follows three teenagers coming of age in their sinking homeland of Louisiana. For the first time, they notice the Mississippi River's engineering, stumps of cypress trees, and billowing smokestacks. Their different perspectives — as Indigenous, white, and Angolan young women — shape their story of the climate crisis.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR: KIRA AKERMAN

Kira Akerman lives in New Orleans, Louisiana, and works as an educator and documentary filmmaker, with a focus on environmental justice. *Hollow Tree* is her debut feature film. It was selected for the Sundance Institute's 2019 Talent Forum. Previously, she directed and produced the short *Station 15* (PBS, 2017), winner of the Best Audience Award at the New Orleans Film Festival and the Reel South Award at Indie Grits. Screenings included a Smithsonian exhibit, Sheffield Doc/Fest, The Climate Museum, the UN Global Climate Summit, and DOCNYC. Akerman directed and produced the short *The Arrest* (*The Atlantic*, 2018). Screenings included The Camden International Film Festival, MOMA, and the Ford Foundation Gallery. Prior to directing, Akerman worked on art departments, including a visual effects unit mentored by Doug Trumbull (*2001: A Space Odyssey*), and as a producer for commercials and shorts, including *In the Wake* (dir. Cauleen Smith). Akerman currently works in partnership with the educational nonprofit Ripple Effect, which is pioneering water literacy in K-12 education, and consults for the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South at Tulane University.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This film invites three young women, who did not previously know each other, to learn with me and my filmmaking team, and their respective communities. They travel to different sites along the Mississippi River, where they engage in dialogue with engineers, activists, and Indigenous leaders. The idea was to use filmmaking as a classroom, and to develop a documentary practice for the climate crisis. As I encourage the young people in my film to notice their surroundings, they begin to imagine Louisiana's past — its history of slavery, Indigenous dispossession, and colonization — and, by extension, Louisiana's future. The one that they will experience and help to shape.



BEFORE VIEWING: ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions:

Read each statement below. If you agree with the statement, explain why in the left-hand box under the Agree column. If you disagree, explain why in the box under the Disagree column. If you can see both sides of the issue, then explain your rationale for each side in the appropriate box.

AGREE

STATEMENT

DISAGREE

Climate change is a global issue that affects everyone equally.

Understanding the historical and social context of climate change is crucial for effective action today and in the future.

The purpose of a documentary film should be to tell objective, factual information.

DURING VIEWING: NOTE-CATCHER

Directions:

The film you are about to watch follows three teens as they engage with different locations and people related to climate change in Louisiana. Use this handout to record key information and your reactions to at least three of the adults they encounter throughout the film.

Name of speaker/person on screen:

Key point or message conveyed:

Your reaction or a question you have about the information they shared:

Name of speaker/person on screen:

Key point or message conveyed:

Your reaction or a question you have about the information they shared:

Name of speaker/person on screen:

Key point or message conveyed:

Your reaction or a question you have about the information they shared:

Name of speaker/person on screen:

Key point or message conveyed:

Your reaction or a question you have about the information they shared:

AFTER VIEWING: RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Directions:

Respond to each question, referring to specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your interpretation.

1. What did you learn about the way the Mississippi River was engineered, and how are those projects impacting the environment and people today?

2. Do you think the focus on Louisiana’s history of slavery, Indigenous dispossession, and colonization was necessary for the film’s message about the climate crisis? Why or why not?

3. Mekenzie is Indigenous and members of her community are concerned about environmental destruction caused by industry. Tanielma, from Angola, has lived in two communities with ties to the oil and gas industry. Do you think there is a way to balance economic development and environmental protection, or do you think one must always come at the expense of the other?

4. Throughout the film, the three girls share aspects of their background and personal lives. What was something one of the girls shared that you found relatable, important, or impactful? Why do you think the film-makers chose to include this in telling the story?

5. This film takes place in New Orleans and the surrounding regions, which informs the backgrounds of the people involved and the issues at stake. If you were to make a similar film in your own community, what populations/perspectives would you include and what environmental issues would you document?

AFTER VIEWING: FOUR C'S

Directions:

Respond to each prompt in complete sentences, citing specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your response.

CONNECTIONS

What connections do you draw between the film and your own life or your other learning?

CHALLENGE

What ideas, positions, or assumptions do you want to challenge or debate in the film?

CONCEPTS

What key concepts or ideas do you think are important and worth holding on to from the film?

CHANGES

What changes in attitudes, thinking, or action are suggested by the film, either for you or others?

Adapted from Harvard Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox:

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/the-4-cs>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: ORAL INTERVIEW EXPERIENCE

Directions:

This film shows three teens exploring climate issues in their community by speaking with a variety of people with different relationships to climate issues. For this activity, embark on a similar encounter and record either an audio or video interview with someone in your community who can speak on climate issues.

1. Research people in your community who may have some sort of connection to a climate issue, either through their professional work, through cultural history, or some other way.
2. Once you have identified someone to work with, prepare questions for an oral interview that will explore this person's perspective on a local climate issue, including the environmental, social, and economic impacts. The questions should also focus on ways to mitigate or adapt to these impacts.
3. Using either an audio or video recording device, conduct the interview with your subject, either in person or remotely. Capture the conversation in its entirety and take notes as you record.
4. Once the interview is complete, review your recordings and analyze the interview, looking for key themes and ideas that emerged from the conversation.
5. Use video or audio editing software to edit your interview down to the most relevant parts. Free software is available online, such as WeVideo (www.wevideo.com) for video or Audacity (www.audacityteam.org) for audio.
6. Consider including "b-roll": other footage related to the interview, such as imagery of the environment where you recorded it or photographs related to the issues discussed.
7. Share the edited interview with your classmates as well as the original interview subject.

