

MVFF EDUCATION



FARMING WHILE BLACK

The story of a Rising Generation of Black Farmers
Featuring Leah Penniman, author of "Farming While Black".

A Kontent Films Production, Directed by Mark Decena



CURRICULUM GUIDE GRADES: 5-12

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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 46th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of *Farming While Black*. We are excited to return in our 2023 fall season with a combination of both in-person screenings for local school and online screenings for those of you joining us from afar.

This year, our film selections for school screenings continue to focus on increasingly relevant issues of global empathy and active citizenship, and we believe this film will be a powerful and engaging text to use in your classroom. 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 prompts for a short writing piece. Additionally, individual handouts for before and after viewing are provided as stand-alone activities to be used individually or in sequence, with a particular emphasis on social-emotional learning. We have also included a handout that provides some context for the film festival experience, which may help to introduce your screening experience.

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 new insight did you gain from the beginning to the end of the film?
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. Describe a moment or a scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about the scene that was especially compelling for you?
5. What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
6. If you could require one person (or group) to view this film, who would it be? What would you hope their main takeaway would be?
7. Were there any perspectives relevant to the central issues of the film that were not included? How would those voices have changed the film?
8. What are the connections between the historic struggle of the Black farmer and the current state of food injustice?
9. What are the challenges of farming in a capitalist system and creating an alternative existence off the land?
10. What is food apartheid, and how does it perpetuate historic racism and systemic injustice?
11. What does it mean to truly and equitably farm for the people?

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. Today there is a growing movement of Black folks reclaiming their agricultural heritage and their lost connection to land. How are the three farmers spotlighted in the film finding and celebrating that connection on their respective farms?
2. Why is land cultivation such a significant part of the fight for freedom for Black people? How does learning skills for sustainable agriculture lead to food sovereignty?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TEDx Talks | Farming While Black | Leah Penniman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QYDXtMiV80>

Soul Fire Farm: An Afro-Indigenous Centered Community Farm

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

More about the farm's vision, mission and commitment to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system.

Soul Fire Farm: BIPOC Trainings

<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/programs/bipoc-trainings/>

More about the Workshop Series and Immersion Programs offered by Soul Fire Farm.

Soul Fire Farm: Braiding Seeds Fellowship

<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/braiding-seeds-fellowship/>

The Braiding Seeds Fellowship, a project of Soul Fire Farm Institute in collaboration with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, carries on the legacy of the braided seeds by providing beginning farmers with resources, professional development, and mentorship to support their livelihood on land.

Podcast Soil: The Dirty Climate Solution | How to Save a Planet

<https://gimletmedia.com/shows/howtosaveaplanet/39h6wn7>

In this podcast episode you will meet two farmers: One is a first-generation farmer in upstate New York raising fruits and vegetables for the local community. The other is a third generation farmer in Minnesota who sells commodity crops to big industrial processors. What they have in common is bucking modern conventions on how to farm.

Writing the Land: Hunger Poems by Naima Penniman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vC9LeTzcMpE>

Poetry for Wildseed Community Farm and Healing Village, Northeast Farmers of Color

The Truth Behind 40 Acres and a Mule | African American History Blog

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/the-truth-behind-40-acres-and-a-mule/>

The story of the "40 acres and a mule" promise to former slaves.

Black-Owned California Farms to Support

<https://www.ediblela.com/news/a-list-of-black-owned-california-farms-to-support-right-now/>

Farms Together

<https://caff.org/farmstogether/>

Farms Together coordinates collaboratives of small and mid-scale family and BIPOC farmers to provide healthy, fresh, and local food to California families in need while opening up access to new and emergent marketplaces for local food.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards ELA-Literacy

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cites 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.RI.9-10.2

Determine a central idea of a text and analyze 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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3

Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Next Generation Science Standards

HS-LS2-7 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics.

Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.

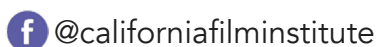
HS-ESS2-7 Earth and Human Activity

Analyze geoscience data and the results from global climate models to make an evidence-based forecast of the current rate of global or regional climate change and associated future impacts on Earth systems.

ABOUT CAFILM

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.

Follow the California Film Institute on social media



Name: _____



FARMING WHILE BLACK

The story of a Rising Generation of Black Farmers

Featuring Leah Penniman, author of "Farming While Black".

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ABOUT THE FILM

In 1910, 16 million acres of land—14% of all farmland—was owned by Black farmers. Today, 98% of farmland is White-owned. Today there is a growing movement of Black folks reclaiming their agricultural heritage and their lost connection to land. The film you are about to see is the story of three farms finding that sacred connection in upstate New York, Maryland, and the Bronx.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER MARK DECENA

Raised by an immigrant single mother, Mark Decena spent his formative years softening hard adobe clay soil with compost. Besides keeping him in line, it infused Decena with a love of growing things—to date: feature films, television shows, and short film series.

A three time Sundance alumni, Decena's first feature, *Dopamine*, won the Alfred P. Sloan Prize. Decena's documentary work spans across themes of social justice, sustainable design and the environment. He wrote and directed the Redford Center film, *Watershed*, and was a writer and producer on *Stand Up Planet*, a Gates funded project that aired on Participant Media's channel, Pivot and KCET. His latest feature film, *Not Without Us*, premiered as the closing night film at the S. F. Green Film Festival and aired nationally on PBS. Decena's latest short films, *Remothering the Land*, co-produced with Patagonia Films, premiered at the DC Environmental Film Festival, and *Me & My Robot* premiered at COPDOX and aired on PBS. Decena is also the founder of Kontent, a boutique production company based in San Francisco, housing a Kollektive of award winning filmmakers, producers and creatives working on original and branded works.



BEFORE VIEWING ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions:

The film you are about to watch addresses the injustice of our food system and how race and racism are back at the forefront of food injustice and food apartheid. Use this guide to think about your current position on the food system. Read each statement below and place an X on the line below it indicating how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Then, write one or two sentences explaining why you placed the X where you did.

The American food system is built upon stolen and exploited labor.

Strongly Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

Hunger and poverty are perpetuated by undemocratic systems of power.

Strongly Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

Environmental justice leads to food sovereignty.

Strongly Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

DURING VIEWING FARMING WHILE BLACK NOTECATCHER

Directions:

The film examines and celebrates the growing movement of Black folks reclaiming their agricultural heritage and their lost connection to land. Use the note catcher to record details about each of the three farms that are finding that sacred connection.

Farm One: Soul Fire Farm, Upstate New York	
About the Farmer What do you learn about the farmer, their personal history, their beliefs, and their experience farming while Black?	About the Farm What do you learn about the farm, their place in the community, and their connection to the movement?



DURING VIEWING

FARMING WHILE BLACK NOTECATCHER

Farm Two: The Bronx, New York

About the Farmer

What do you learn about the farmer, their personal history, their beliefs, and their experience farming while Black?

About the Farm

What do you learn about the farm, their place in the community, and their connection to the movement?

Farm Three: Brandywine, Maryland

About the Farmer

What do you learn about the farmer, their personal history, their beliefs, and their experience farming while Black?

About the Farm

What do you learn about the farm, their place in the community, and their connection to the movement?

AFTER VIEWING VALUES, IDENTITIES, ACTIONS

Directions:

Take some time to reflect upon the social, political, and cultural aspects of the film by answering the following questions, then digging a little deeper with any of these questions.

VALUES	
<p>What values does this film invite you to think about? These are the kinds of things that people value – e.g., fairness, justice, safety, respect, traditions.</p>	<p>Dig a little deeper with any of these questions. Are they your values? Others' values? Does the film affirm or challenge or raise concerns about these values?</p>

IDENTITIES	
<p>Who is this film speaking about? And who is it trying to speak to? These are not necessarily the same people.</p>	<p>Dig a little deeper with any of these questions. Is anyone left out of the film that should be in it? Do you fit in, or not so much for this film? Why?</p>

ACTIONS	
<p>What actions might this film encourage? These could include doing something concrete, refraining from doing something, or just learning more about the topic.</p>	<p>Dig a little deeper with any of these questions. Whose actions—yours, others, which others? Why?</p>

A Thinking Routine Borrowed from Harvard Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education
<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

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 is the history of land ownership in this country? What is the truth behind the broken promise of “40 Acres and a Mule”?

2. According to the film, what is the root cause of climate change, and how are these farmers and farms confronting it?

3. According to the film, what is the real work of the farmer who is committed to cultivating a relationship with the soil and actively confronting climate change?

4. What is the Justice for Black Farmers Act? What are the details behind its inception, and how is it connected to the Black farming movement?

5. What is the connection between the plantation economy and industrial agriculture?

6. What is the urban agricultural movement, and why is it important for ending food apartheid?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

HUNGER POEMS, PART 1

Poetry Analysis

Farming While Black features Naima Penniman and ends with a spoken word performance of her poem “Black Gold.” Her poetry looks at the historic accounts of hunger, famine, and starvation, and her work is part of Poetry X Hunger. This extension activity encourages you to dig deeper into “Black Gold,” or read and analyze a hunger poem posted on the Poetry X Hunger website in order to examine historical accounts of hunger, famine, and starvation.

Directions:

1. **Watch & Listen Again.** Watch Naima Penniman performing “Black Gold” two or three more times. You will catch something new or different each time:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTq2jrC_KP4
2. **Read.** Read one or more of the poems in the archives on the website Poetry X Hunger.
<https://www.poetryxhunger.com/hunger-poems/poems-by-naima-penniman>.
Read them two or three more times. You will catch something new or different each time.
3. **Go Deeper.** For this extension activity you will go deeper in order to uncover the meaning of a hunger poem.
4. **Poetry Analysis.** The instructions on this worksheet will help you uncover the meaning of a hunger poem.

Analysis Guide

Title: What does the title of the poem mean?

Summarize: Write a brief summary of the poem in your own words.

Meaning: What do you think the poem means? Think about the meaning of the poem beyond the literal words.

Questions to consider before writing your analysis:

1. Who or what is the subject of the poem?
2. What are they talking about?
3. Why do you think the author wrote the poem?
4. When is the poem happening?
5. Where is the poem happening?
6. What is the historical and cultural context of the poem?
7. What is the theme or central idea of the poem?
8. What is the poet’s attitude? What is the poet’s message?

Write: What is the meaning of the poem? Thinking about what you learned from watching the film and digging deeper into “Black Gold,” write an interpretive analysis in which you explain and describe the meaning of the poem and its historical and cultural significance.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

HUNGER POEMS, PART 2

Spoken Word

Spoken Word is a broad designation for poetry intended for performance. Though some spoken word poetry may also be published on the page, the genre has its roots in oral traditions and performance. Spoken word can encompass or contain elements of rap, hip-hop, storytelling, theater, and jazz, rock, blues, and folk music. Characterized by rhyme, repetition, improvisation, and word play, spoken word poems frequently refer to issues of social justice, politics, race, and community.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/spoken-word/>

Poetry X Hunger is bringing a world of poets to the anti-hunger cause.

While you may not have experienced hunger first-hand, you can still speak up about it. Everyone can contribute to the Poetry X Hunger cause by writing a poem about hunger: its causes, its history, or its impacts. Poetry can help raise awareness in the fight against hunger.

<https://www.poetryxhunger.com/hunger-poems/poems-by-naima-penniman>

Directions:

- 1. Create:** Write a poem about hunger—its causes, its history, and/or its impacts.
- 2. Prompts:** <https://www.poetryxhunger.com/prompts-to-help-you-get-started.html>
Begin your poem with one of the following phrases . . .
 - “This is what the hungry say . . . ”
 - “The hunger years were then and are now . . . ”
 - “This is what it will take to end hunger . . . ”or write a poem that incorporates a phrase from an **historical account of hunger** . . .
 - “From the Ancient Mediterranean region . . . ”
 - “From Sudan . . . ”
- 3. Perform:** Share your poem with the class.
- 4. Submit:** Submit to PoetryXHunger@gmail.com.



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

Directions:

After watching the film *Fancy Dance*, write a review of the film.

While a film review is an evaluation of a movie, it is not simply a viewer-response expressing the writer's feelings about the film. Instead, a film review attempts to do three things for the reader:

1. **Summarize** what the film is about (the story)
2. **Interpret** the film/filmmakers' intended meaning (the themes and claims)
3. **Evaluate** whether the film is successful in expressing the intended meaning (its effectiveness in conveying the themes and claims)

A review will support its perspective with evidence from the film, such as descriptions of important moments, characters, and scenes.

Suggested Structure

Introduction

- Introduce the film: title, director, and any relevant credentials (award wins for the film, other films by the director, origins for the film's story, etc.).
- Summarize what the film is about - briefly, and without any "spoilers" that give away plot twists and surprises.

Body

- Offer an interpretation of what the film/director is trying to say through this story. In other words, what is the film's theme, message, or primary claim?

Conclusion

- Evaluate whether the film is successful or not in conveying its intended message.
- Identify who the intended audience is and how effective the film is in meeting their needs. Is the film for a particular age group or social group?

Final Tip: Make sure to include some critical appraisal of the film in the first and last sentence, but try to weave it throughout the review as well.



ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

©Tommy Lau

What is a film festival?

A film festival is an event in which multiple movies are presented over the course of one or several days. Depending on the size of the festival, all of the screenings may take place in a single theater or may involve multiple venues throughout a city. Festivals also include special events like panel discussions with filmmakers and actors. Typically, filmmakers submit their works to a festival, where a team of curators selects the best entries for inclusion in the festival. For independent and international filmmakers, festivals are often an important way to raise awareness of a film, generate an audience, and/or attract a studio to purchase the rights to distribute a film in a wider release. Acceptance into a major festival can add significant prestige to a film, with some festival awards (such as the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or) considered among the highest honors a film can receive.

There are many film festivals through-

out the world, with some focusing on particular themes, such as highlighting LGBTQ films/filmmakers, specific cultural groups, or particular genres. While some of the more famous festivals may be in distant locations, there are hundreds of small festivals spread through every corner of the world and, increasingly, festivals are using streaming access to make it easier for the public to view their curated programs.

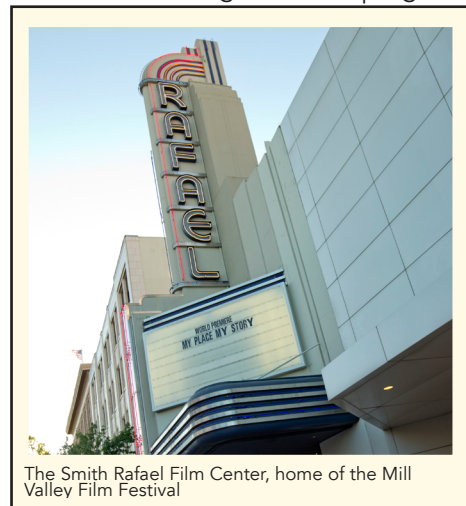
History of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Since founding the Mill Valley Film Festival in 1977, Executive Director Mark Fishkin has shepherded this once small, three-day showcase into an eleven-day, internationally acclaimed cinema event presenting a wide variety of new films from around the world in an engaged, community setting.

The festival has an impressive track record of launching new films and new filmmakers, and has earned a reputation as a filmmakers' festival

by celebrating the best in American independent and foreign films, alongside high-profile and prestigious award contenders. The relaxed and non-competitive atmosphere surrounding MVFF, gives filmmakers and audiences alike the opportunity to share their work and experiences in a collaborative and convivial setting.

Each year the festival welcomes more than 200 filmmakers, representing more than 50 countries. Screening sections include world cinema, US cinema, documentaries, family films, and shorts programs. Annual festival initiatives include Active Cinema, a forum for films that aim to engage audiences and transform ideas into action; Mind the Gap, a platform for inclusion and equity; and ¡Viva el Cine!, a showcase of Latin American and Spanish-language films.. Festival guests also enjoy an exciting selection of Tributes, Spotlights and Galas throughout the program.



The Smith Rafael Film Center, home of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the purpose of a film festival? What are the benefits for filmmakers? For the audience? For the community?
2. How might the films at a festival differ from the films available to watch at your local movie theater?
3. What qualities do you think festival curators might look for in a film? If you are watching a festival film with a class/school group, what aspects of the film do you think made it appealing to the curators?

Get Involved!

Many film festivals, including the Mill Valley Film Festival, have student film categories. If you are a filmmaker, explore FilmFreeway (www.filmfreeway.com) for a database of worldwide film festivals where you can submit your film. The call for entries for MVFF opens in late February and closes in June. Youth filmmakers do not have to pay an entry fee. MVFF also offers many opportunities for volunteering. Find out more at <https://www.cafilm.org/volunteer/>.