

MVFF EDUCATION

Frybread Face and Me



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 9-12

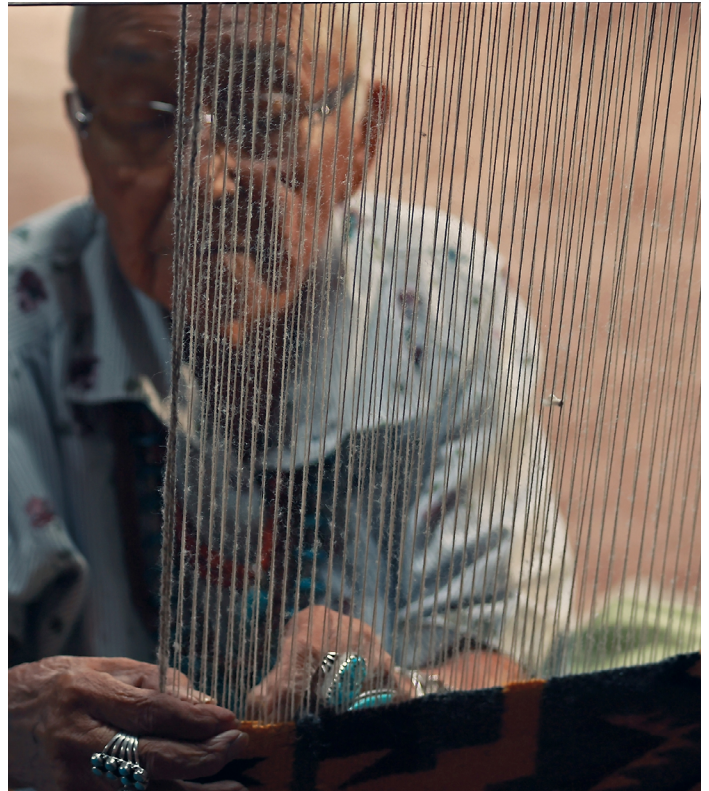
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Dear Educators,

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

This year, our MVFF Education film selections 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. Did the film move you emotionally? How did it make you feel? What did the film make you think about?
2. What is the film's central theme? How is the theme developed and emphasized throughout the story? Is the theme expressed in a fresh, unique way?
3. What values does the film communicate? How do you know?
4. In what ways does the film comment or reflect on aspects of humanity and society?
5. Describe a moment or a scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What about the scene was especially compelling for you?
6. Did anything that happened in this movie remind you of something that has occurred in your own life or that you have seen occur to others?
7. Consider the film's title. After viewing, does the title take on any new significance based on the story, themes, and/or aspects of humanity and society?
8. How would different people view this film differently, dependent on gender, age, ethnic background, and/or worldview?
9. What is Benny's life like? What conflicts or challenges does he face in his home, family, and social life? What is the source of those conflicts or challenges?
10. What aspects of Benny's experiences in the film are universal and relatable for all young teens, regardless of culture? What about his experiences are unique to his native culture?
11. Thinking back on what you have discussed, what new insights do you have about the film, the world in which it was made, or the process of making films?

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. *Frybread Face and Me* is a coming-of-age story that unfolds over a summer spent on the reservation in which not much happens but everything feels changed afterward. What does the film show about the impact of a time in adolescence when personal identity is called into question and challenged in different ways?
2. *Frybread Face and Me* shares the cultural belief that "In Navajo storytelling symbols mean more than facts and time means nothing at all." What is the meaning of this quote within the Navajo culture and how could it be applied to life outside of the Reservation for people of different cultural backgrounds?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Frybread | Arts & Culture | Smithsonian Magazine

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/frybread-79191/>

More about the seemingly simple food that is a complex symbol in Navajo culture.

The First Laugh Ceremony

<https://navajoindians.wordpress.com/ceremoniestraditions>

When a baby is born they are given a traditional name on the spot and then later an ancestral name is added when the newborn laughs for the first time. This is the beginning of the first laugh ceremony. Laughter represents the first expression of language in a child and is celebrated with a ceremony where all close family members and friends come to celebrate the child.

The Past, Present, and Future of the Navajo Nation

<https://blog.nativehope.org/past-present-future-of-the-navajo-nation>

With a rich history and a unique culture, the Navajo Nation is one of North America's most celebrated and well-known native tribes. They were at the center of many conflicts and events in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Native American Rituals and Ceremonies – Legends of America

<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/na-ceremonies>

An in depth look at how ceremonies and rituals play a vital and essential role in Native American culture.

STANDARDS

Common Core State 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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

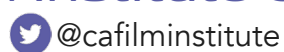
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

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

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: _____

Frybread Face and Me



ABOUT THE FILM

Director Billy Luther's wistfully funny debut spins the tender coming-of-age tale of 11-year-old Benny. Sent from his San Diego home to live with his grandmother on the Navajo reservation in the summer of 1990, he soon bonds with his cousin Dawn, AKA "Frybread Face." Framed as a fond remembrance narrated by the adult Benny, the film depicts an initially rocky relationship that blossoms into friendship in a drama that lives at the inviting crossroads of American pop culture and Navajo tradition. Luther's take on the familiar arc of a city kid uncovering his true heritage—complete with amusingly prickly family dynamics—thrives on low-key warmth. Produced by the visionary Taika Waititi, this genuine charmer and its affectionate insights slyly reminds us how important kin can be in a child's self-discovery.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER BILLY LUTHER



Billy Luther (Navajo, Hopi and Laguna Pueblo) is the director/producer of the award-winning documentary *Miss Navajo*, which premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival and aired nationally on PBS' Independent Lens that same year. His second documentary feature, *Grab*, premiered at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival and aired nationally on Public Television. His short documentary film, *Red Lake*, had its world premiere at the 2016 LA Film Festival and was nominated for Best Documentary Short at the 2016 International Documentary Association Awards. In 2018, he launched his web series alter-NATIVE for PBS' IndieLens StoryCast. He is a writer and director for the AMC series *Dark Winds*.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

I grew up off the reservation in various towns along Route 66. My Navajo, Hopi, and Laguna Pueblo family would haul our TV set through each move. That TV was everything to me: The four channels and our VCR. The characters on screen became my family: *The Golden Girls*, *The Last Picture Show*, and *On Golden Pond*. But I never saw contemporary Indians on TV or in film. I've worked in documentaries for almost fifteen years. I love exploring the lives of my indigenous subjects— whether fashion designers, hip-hop artists, gay politicians, or chefs. The images that young people see of themselves and of their communities have great impact on them. This is why I tell stories of strong, resilient modern Native Americans: Because I didn't see these people on screen growing up.

ABOUT THE NAVAJO PEOPLE

Navajo, also spelled Navaho, is the second most populous of all Native American peoples in the United States, with some 300,000 individuals in the early 21st century, most of them living in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah.

In the early 21st century many Navajo continued to live a predominantly traditional lifestyle, speaking the Navajo language, practicing the religion, and organizing through traditional forms of social structure. Navajo men and women also continued the tradition of volunteering for the armed services at a high rate, perhaps as an expression of a cultural ethic that emphasizes both personal competence and community. In maintaining these disparate traditions, the Navajo have been cultural innovators.

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Navajo-people>



DURING VIEWING STORY MAP

Directions:

As you watch the film, use the story map to identify the elements of narrative film. Identify the film's characters, plot, setting, problem, and solution as well as important symbols and themes.

PROBLEM

What is the main conflict of the film?

OUTCOME

How is the conflict resolved in the film?

CHARACTERS

Who are the main characters in the film and what is their relationship to each other?

ACTION

What actions do the characters take during the film? How do these actions develop the story?

SETTING

What is the significance of where the story takes place?

SYMBOLS

Are there any important symbolic props used in the film? If so, what are they and how are they significant to the story?

SETTING

What are the main themes of the film? These are broader points about society at large.

AFTER VIEWING

SAME, DIFFERENT, CONNECT, ENGAGE

Directions:

Same, different, connect, engage is a thinking routine to nurture empathetic perspective taking and cultural bridge building. After watching *Frybread Face and Me* think about your relationship to the main character by responding to each of the following prompts.

SAME

In what ways are you similar to Benny or Dawn ?

DIFFERENT

In what ways are you different from Benny or Dawn?

CONNECT

In what ways are you connected to Benny and Dawn as human beings?

ENGAGE

What would you like to ask, say, or do with Benny or Dawn if you had the chance?

A Thinking Routine Borrowed from Harvard Project Zero's Think Routine Toolbox:
<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources>

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. How is life different for Benny at the Sheep Ranch on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona than his life as a Native American boy growing up in San Diego? What similarities can you recognize or relate to? What differences surprised you?

2. The film begins and ends with the weaver's loom and a symbolic story about the weaver's path out. What does it mean and how does it connect to your understanding of what life is like for Benny and Dawn?

3. What is the first laugh celebration and why is it important?

4. What does Benny learn about Navajo language and tradition during his summer with Dawn?

5. Did the film succeed in helping you to understand the cultural beliefs or practices of another group in its own cultural context? How?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

MY CULTURE PROJECT

Directions:

Frybread Face and Me is a coming-of-age film that focuses on the importance of being rooted in cultural traditions and a vibrant past.

First, think about your own cultural values, beliefs, and practices. What is unique to you and your culture when it comes to language and communication, family structure, social relationships, food, clothing and body decoration, religion and holidays, traditions and customs, and recreation and relaxation?

Then, talk with family members about your cultural history. Ask immediate or extended family members to share stories that will help you better understand your own culture.

Once you have considered all of the characteristics and incorporated what you learned, put together an **artifact** that depicts how you are connected to your own cultural traditions and vibrant past. This could be in the form of a poster, a Google Slide Presentation, Powerpoint, or Prezi, a digital movie, a scrapbook, or a written report with illustrations or pictures.

Share your artifact with your class in order to celebrate the cultural diversity represented in your academic learning community.



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

Directions:

After watching the film *Frybread Face and Me*, 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.

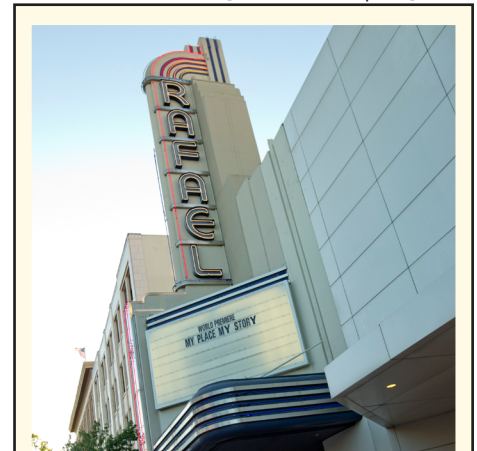
History of the Mill Valley Film Festival

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/>.