



Standing Above The Clouds

CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 8-12

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Dear educators,

Thank you for attending the 47th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of *Standing Above the Clouds*. We are excited to return in our 2024 fall season with a combination of both in-person screenings for local schools and online screenings for those of you joining us from afar

As media educators, we support film as the literature of the twenty-first century. This powerful medium sits in a critical part of human culture, at the intersection of art, industry, technology, and politics. It is a universal language that lets us tell stories about our collective hopes and fears and gives us the opportunity to make sense of the world around us and the people in it. 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 the film by the common-core aligned skills of developing an evidence-based interpretation of a text both orally and in writing.

The discussion prompts have been crafted to offer students the opportunity to grapple with questions of ethics and social justice through representations of culture on film. They offer a variety of options for fostering small-group or whole-class dialogue by addressing the film industry in general and this film in particular. 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, or consider the film review format as an alternative. Additionally, student handouts for a variety of thinking routines are provided for before, during, and after viewing the film with a particular emphasis on social-emotional learning. Extension activities offer further creative opportunities for students to consider the cultural impact of the film as both an art form and a political platform. 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! Enjoy the film!

Sincerely,
The CAFILM Education Team

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the central issue 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 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 you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
6. If you could require one person (or one 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 documentary that were not included? How would those voices have changed the film?
8. How does the film address the physical and emotional toll of sustaining a grassroots movement? What are the short and long term effects of standing for a cause?
9. How is the fight for Mauna Kea a broader fight against the injustices of history and colonialism?
10. How is the fight for Mauna Kea a broader fight for respecting and protecting cultural traditions?
11. What is the importance of intergenerational healing? What does it mean in general, and in the context of this film in particular?
12. What is the significance of the film's title, *Standing Above the Clouds*? How does it relate to the film's themes and the film's message?



DISCUSSION NOTECATCHER

Directions:

Use this notecatcher to record what you take away from discussing the questions above.

IDEAS I HEARD DURING DISCUSSION

MIND-POP IDEAS

Ideas that came to my mind during discussion.

ONE IMPORTANT THING I LEARNED DURING DISCUSSION

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. Process documentaries involve several stages, and those that follow Indigenous land protectors are typically endurance tests for filmmakers, not to mention the intergenerational people involved. But the payoff is that these films often resonate strongly with audiences in their ability to take viewers beyond the headlines and frontlines in profound and intimate ways. Write an essay in which you show how *Standing Above the Clouds* manages to conjure an entire history of first nations peoples' struggles against destructive colonialist forces and has a deeply inspiring message for all viewers.
2. As the film progresses, individuals come together not just to protest, but to learn cultural chants, dances, practices, and beliefs. As we watch different individuals go through a healing process, we get a sense that they are recovering an essential part of their cultural identity. Write an essay in which you show how *Standing Above the Clouds* is about the transformation of a community as its members each build a stronger, more resilient, sense of self.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We are Mauna Kea

<https://blessuphawaii.com/track/1538050/we-are-mauna-kea>

Sons of Yeshua From the Recording Artist of My Life.

POV | Standing Above the Clouds

<https://video.kqed.org/video/standing-above-the-clouds-aog3yn/>

Special | 14m 46s | Aired 05/10/21 | Expires 05/09/25 | Rating: NR

Standing Above the Clouds follows Native Hawaiian mother-daughter activists as they stand to protect their sacred mountain Mauna Kea from the building of the world's largest telescope.

Office of Hawaiian Affairs

<https://www.oha.org/aina/mauna-kea/>

Mauna Kea Background and History

Big Island Guide

<https://bigislandguide.com/hawaiian-culture-mauna-kea>

Hawaiian Culture and Connection to Mauna Kea.

Honolulu Magazine

<https://www.honolulumagazine.com/the-sacred-history-of-maunakea/>

The sacred history of Mauna Kea.

Peace is Loud

<https://peaceisloud.org/standing-above-the-clouds/>

Film Impact Resources

TMT International Observatory

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

Astronomy's Next Generation Observatory. Explore the latest news, events and announcements from the TMT International Observatory.

Astronomy

<https://www.astronomy.com/science/path-forward-for-thirty-meter-telescope-and-mauna-kea-begins-to-emerge/>

Path forward for Thirty Meter Telescope and Mauna Kea begins to emerge.

Deroy-Olson about their roles in the film.

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.

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STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards ELA-Literacy

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.RI.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.9-10.3

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 the 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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.



Name: _____



ABOUT THE FILM

Up above the clouds, on the highest mountain from the seafloor, a group of women fight to defend the sacred mountain of Mauna Kea from the world's largest telescope. Filmmaker Jalena Keane-Lee focuses on native Hawaiian families' efforts to block the installment of the giant instrument on hallowed land in a captivating documentary that interweaves breathtaking images of stunning locations with intimate portraits of colorful people. The fascinating story combines complex courtroom events with intimate moments that capture the ongoing tension between technological progress and historical identity. Despite rollercoaster political encounters, including arrests, the small but mighty community pursues an inspirational grassroots effort to protect culture and tradition. In the face of challenges and tragedy, the mountain gifts each woman with hope and strength and the understanding that victory is in standing for unity in sacred places and that healing occurs through the sisterhood they have created along the way. *Standing Above the Clouds*, the winner of the 2022 DocPitch Industry Award and Hot Docs' Bill Nemlin Award for Best Social Impact Documentary, illuminates the ongoing struggles of indigenous people battling to save ancestral lands and preserve an irreplaceable culture. In English and Hawaiian with English subtitles.

TRIGGER WARNING

This film contains themes of trauma, arrest, and self-harm which may be triggering to some viewers. Great care has been taken to present this material with sensitivity.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

JALENA KEANE-LEE

Jalena Keane-Lee (Director, Cinematographer, Producer) is a filmmaker who explores intergenerational trauma and healing through an intersectional lens. She was named a 2023 Adobe x Sundance Woman to Watch, and is the recipient of the Gotham Documentary Fellowship, Creative Culture woman filmmaker fellowship, Wyncote Fellowship and NeXt Doc Fellowship. Keane-Lee is the winner of Tribeca Through Her Lens 2020 and DocPitch 2022. Her short films have streamed on POV and Criterion Collection, played at over 50 film festivals, and won best short at the LA Asian Film Festival in 2020 and the Jury Award at Sundance in 2023. Keane-Lee co-founded Breaktide Productions, an all-women-of-color production company that has won two Cannes Lion awards for branded content. Jalena is currently working on her first feature-length documentary which participated in the 2022 Sundance Edit and Story Lab.



THE GENESIS OF THE STORY

Standing Above the Clouds was created through a collaborative process with our film protagonists. Through making this film, our team aimed to re-imagine the documentary form to be a healing process that returned agency to the community featured in our film through a trauma informed practice of affirmative consent. We worked closely with our onscreen collaborators at every step of the process and have taken great care to mitigate any legal, emotional, or cultural harm that releasing a film might cause. It is our team's great privilege and honor to have been invited into the Mauna Kea protector community and into the lives and homes of the families you see in our film.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

For me, documentary is a practice of patience and love. Of witnessing, growing, and holding space for tenderness and vulnerability. Of creating an archive and leaving intimate messages of love and wisdom to guide generations to come.

My mom taught me that the personal is political and that there is nothing more political than how you raise your children. As the daughter of an activist mother and descendant of a lineage of activists, I'm drawn to tell stories about intergenerational trauma and healing that complicate and give depth to women leaders. As a daughter, I know first hand both how beautiful and how incredibly challenging it can be to share your life's work with your mother.

As a filmmaker, I'm interested in exploring the unseen – both through interior emotional worlds, sacred sisterhoods, and the people, spirits, and deities who protect and watch over us from different realms of being. I'm interested in exploring diaspora, ancestral wisdom, and radical imagination. This film has informed not only my film practice but the way I see the world. Balance and sustainability continue to be challenges as I work to create a career path for myself as a director. The lessons that working on this film have taught me about the importance of sisterhood, vulnerability, and interdependence are invaluable and will stay with me forever.



BEFORE VIEWING

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions:

The film you are about to watch shows the ways people are connected to sacred places and how important it is to respect and honor those places and pass along cultural traditions. Before watching the film, respond to the statements in this anticipation guide to consider some of the themes in the film. Read each statement below. If you agree with the statement, explain why in the left box under the Agree column. If you disagree, explain why in the box on the right under the Disagree column.

Agree	Statement	Disagree
	Culture influences our thoughts, behaviors, and how we see the world.	
	Individual cultural values play a role in how we respond to situations or scenarios.	
	A person's beliefs, values, and practices should be understood based on that person's own culture, rather than be judged against the criteria of another.	
	Colonialism denies indigenous people an essential part of their identity.	
	It is important to safeguard cultural traditions for generations to come.	
	The human spirit can't be broken as long as individuals band together.	

BEFORE VIEWING

JOURNAL PROMPT

Directions:

The act of writing helps us think about a topic. The film you are about to watch is a story about what it means to safeguard cultural traditions. Write about a cultural tradition that is important to you, and one you would fight to preserve and protect against discriminating forces.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DURING VIEWING

ISSUES, INDIVIDUALS, IMPACTS

Directions:

The film you are about to see explores intergenerational healing and the impacts of safeguarding cultural traditions, through the lens of mothers and daughters in three Native Hawaiian families.

1. Identify the central issue in the film and explain it in detail in the designated box.
2. Follow the three Native Hawaiian families who have a connection to the issue.
3. Identify three ways the issue impacts each family, or ways the family impacts the issue.

THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF THE FILM

THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF THE FILM		
MOTHER-DAUGHTER FAMILY ONE	MOTHER-DAUGHTER FAMILY TWO	MOTHER-DAUGHTER FAMILY THREE
Impact 1:	Impact 1:	Impact 1:
Impact 2:	Impact 2:	Impact 2:
Impact 3:	Impact 3:	Impact 3:

A Thinking Routine Borrowed from Harvard Project Zero's Think Routine Toolbox:

<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

DURING VIEWING

ELEMENTS OF DOCUMENTARY NOTECATCHER

Directions:

The elements of documentary are the different types of sound and image used to explore the subject of the film. There are six basic elements that can be found in all documentaries, though a film might not use all of them. While viewing, use the chart below to record impactful moments and scenes from the film in the appropriate box based on what element of documentary filmmaking is used. Then, after viewing, briefly analyze which of the elements were used most effectively in this film.

Narration Narration is the spoken word heard throughout a film. Sometimes the narrator is a person in the film, and sometimes it is a disconnected observer.	Actuality Footage Actuality footage refers to the unscripted footage recorded in the making of the documentary.	Archival Materials Archival materials are the pieces of film, video, photographs, documents, and sound recordings that were created for other uses prior to the documentary.
On-Screen Text Text is often used throughout a documentary to provide important facts, identify people, and present additional information.	Interviews Interviews are the recorded conversations with a person who has some connection to or knowledge about the subject of the film.	Animations/Reenactments Documentaries will sometimes use animation or staged recreations of situations and events in order to tell a story.

Which of the elements of documentary filmmaking were used most effectively in this film?

Explain Your Reasoning.

From CAFILM Education Resources: Documentary Film Analysis Toolkit
<https://www.cafilmedu.org/curriculum-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. What is Mauna Kea and what does it mean to the people of Hawaii? How is it connected to culture, tradition, and spiritual belief?

2. Who, or what, is threatening Mauna Kea? Is there any credible justification for the proposed project?

3. Why do the indigenous people of Hawaii oppose the Thirty Meter Telescope? What does it really threaten?

4. What is it like on the frontlines of the protest against the TMT? What conditions must the protectors endure and what consequences do they face?

5. What does the song "We are Mauna Kea" mean?

AFTER VIEWING RESPONSE QUESTIONS

6. What are some of the other cultural practices and traditions the Hawaiian people share in order to find strength, demonstrate commitment to their cause, and try to heal as a community?

7. What are some of the headlines that confirm the whole world, not just Hawaii, is watching? What does this mean for this grassroots movement?

8. What is the state of the movement at the end of the film? Has the issue been resolved? If so, how? If not, what's next for the community and the protectors?



AFTER VIEWING

VALUES, IDENTITIES, ACTIONS

Directions:

This thinking routine is for digging a little deeper into the rich, civic aspects of documentary film. Take some time to reflect more deeply on *Standing Above the Clouds*. Use the chart below to record your responses, citing evidence and examples from the film.

VALUES	
<p>What values does this film invite you to think about?</p> <p>Values are a person's principles, standards of behavior, or one's judgment of what is important in life (e.g. culture, tradition, fairness, justice, safety, respect, a nation or group a person belongs to, creativity, anything like that).</p>	
IDENTITIES	
<p>Who is this film speaking about? Who is this film trying to speak to? These are not necessarily the same people?</p> <p>Dig a little deeper with these questions. Is anyone left out of the story that should be in it? Do you fit into this story, or not so much? How or why?</p>	
ACTIONS	
<p>What actions does this film encourage?</p> <p>Actions could include doing something concrete or refraining from doing something, and just learning more about the issue. Dig a little deeper with these questions. Whose actions are already involved or could be: yours, others, what others? How or why?</p>	

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

MY CULTURE PROJECT

Directions:

Standing Above the Clouds shows the ways people are connected to sacred places and how important it is to respect and honor those places and pass along cultural traditions.

My Culture

1. Think about your own cultural values, beliefs, and practices. What is unique to you and your culture? What cultural traditions are important to respect, honor, and pass along from generation to generation?
2. 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.
3. 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. This could be in the form of a Canva poster, a Google Slide Presentation, Powerpoint, a digital movie, a podcast, a scrapbook, or a written report with illustrations or pictures.
4. Share your artifact with your class in order to acknowledge and celebrate the cultural diversity represented in your academic learning community.



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

CULTURAL ICEBERG

What is the cultural iceberg?

When we see an iceberg, the portion that is visible above water is, in reality, only a small piece of a much larger whole. Similarly, people often think of culture as the numerous observable characteristics of a group that we can “see” with our eyes, be it their food, dances, music, arts, greeting rituals. The reality, however, is that these are merely an external manifestation of the deeper and broader components of culture – the complex ideas and deeply held preferences and priorities known as attitudes and values.

Directions:

1. **Artifact.** Have students bring an object or picture that represents their culture.
2. **Share.** Have each student explain how this artifact represents their culture.
3. **Iceberg.** Draw the image of an iceberg on a flipchart and place it on a table. Add all the objects or pictures on the tip above the water.
4. **Explain.** Explain the iceberg model of culture. What is easily visible only represents 10% of the culture. The following link provides a visual aid.
https://adeaconsmusing.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/151015.ucc_culture.iceberg.pdf
5. **List.** Generate a list of different features of culture. For each feature of culture, think of one common to people in the United States, or in the country where students were born. The following link provides a student handout for a list of cultural features.
<https://files.peacecorps.gov/uploads/wws/lesson-plans/files/bridges.features.a.pdf>
6. **Relocate.** Ask students to relocate the different features of culture either above or below the waterline. Remember that what is above and visible is considered observable behavior (10%), while beneath the line are the invisible beliefs, values, and taboos that are transmitted through culture (90%).
7. **Discussion.** Facilitate a discussion on the relationship between the visible and invisible aspects of culture. Determine how the objects brought represent the values and beliefs that are not visible (the 90% part of the iceberg), and write them in the iceberg below the water. Discuss the behaviors that might be caused by the same values. Likewise, think of similar behaviors that might be caused by different or opposing values.
8. **Conclusion.** When encountering another culture, we tend to interpret the behavior observed based on our own iceberg, our own set of values and beliefs, which may be the cause for culture shock. It is important to keep in mind that the behavior demonstrated is rooted in values that are not always clearly visible.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

CULTURAL ICEBERG

Directions:

Standing Above the Clouds reminds us of the importance of being involved in a cultural movement.

Task: Develop and deliver a two-minute speech about an issue you feel passionately about. It's an opportunity for you to explore the issues impacting your own community, and make your voice heard about the change you would like to see.

Prompt: What is the most important issue facing your community?

Step One: Answer the following questions to explore an issue you are passionate about.

1. What are you most proud of in your community? This could be your school, city, society, or country.
2. What would you change in your community, if you could? List as many things as you can think of.
3. Now, choose the one you feel the most strongly about. Write it here and explain why you are so passionate about it.
4. Who is impacted by this issue?
5. Why should people care about addressing this issue?
6. What would it look like if this issue were addressed?

Step Two: Write your speech using persuasive appeals.

Step Three: Present your speech to the class.

Step Four: Consider continuing your social justice and youth empowerment by turning it into a podcast or a longer article and submitting it to a news organization in your community.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

Directions:

After watching the documentary feature *Standing Above the Clouds*, 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.



From CAFILM Education Resources: Narrative Film Analysis Toolkit
<https://www.cafilmedu.org/curriculum-resources/>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

My Film Review

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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/>.