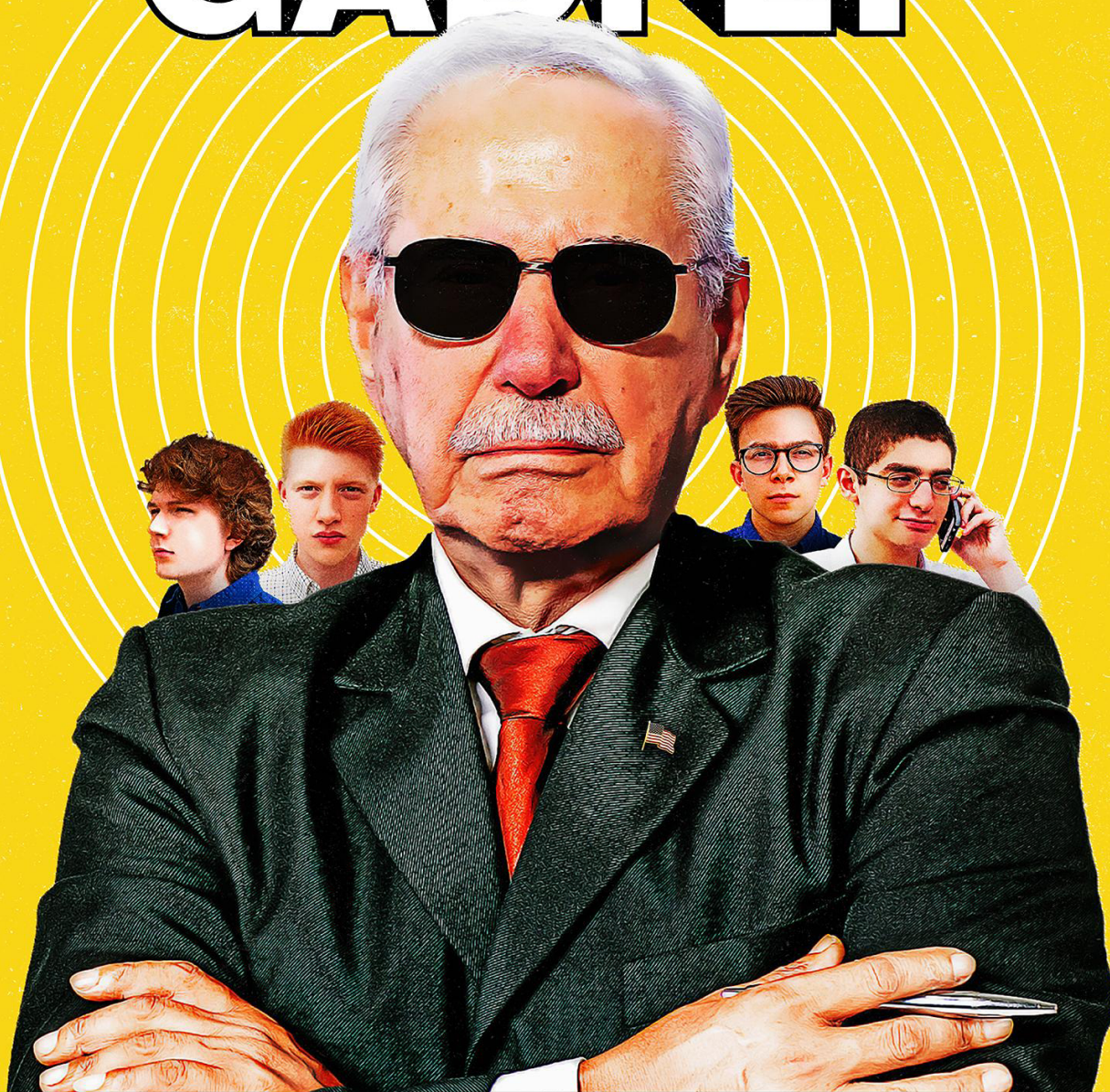


SUNPUNKS PRODUCTIONS AND WISCONATION PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

AMERICAN GADFLY



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 6-12

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Dear educators,

Thank you for attending the 44th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's virtual screening of *American Gadfly*. 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.

We know that this year is likely one of the most challenging of your professional career, and we hope that this film and study guide can support the incredible work you're already doing. 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 one of the suggested essay prompts 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. We have also included a handout that provides some context for the film festival experience, which may help to introduce your in-class screening.

Thank you so much for your tireless work!

Sincerely,

The CFI Education Team



CFI EDUCATION

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. What was the filmmaker's relationship with the subject? How were they personally connected? How do you think this relationship impacted the style or message of the film?
9. What factors were most helpful to the teens running the campaign?
10. The events in the film unfold chronologically. Would your experience of the film have been different if you had known the outcome in advance?
11. The teens used humor and internetspeak to connect with the electorate on Twitter. Do you think this is an appropriate campaign style? Why or why not?

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. Was the Gravel presidential campaign a success?
2. Does the presidential campaign process allow for independent perspectives and voices to enter the national conversation?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Gravel Institute

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

The Gravel Institute YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/c/TheGravelInstitute>

Ballotpedia: Mike Gravel 2020 Presidential Campaign

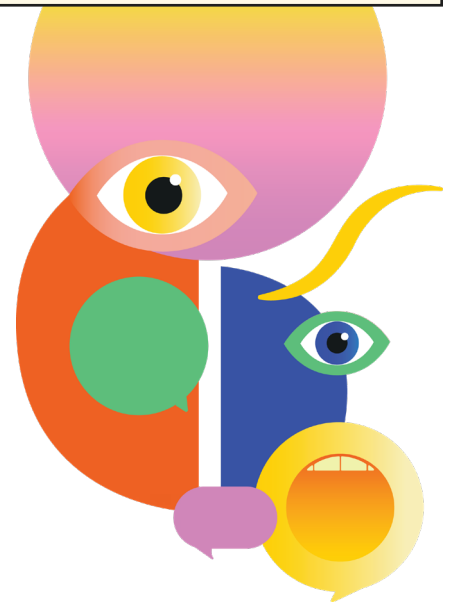
https://ballotpedia.org/Mike_Gravel_presidential_campaign,_2020

The Presidential Election Process

<https://www.usa.gov/election>

Pentagon Papers

<https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers>



STANDARDS

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.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3

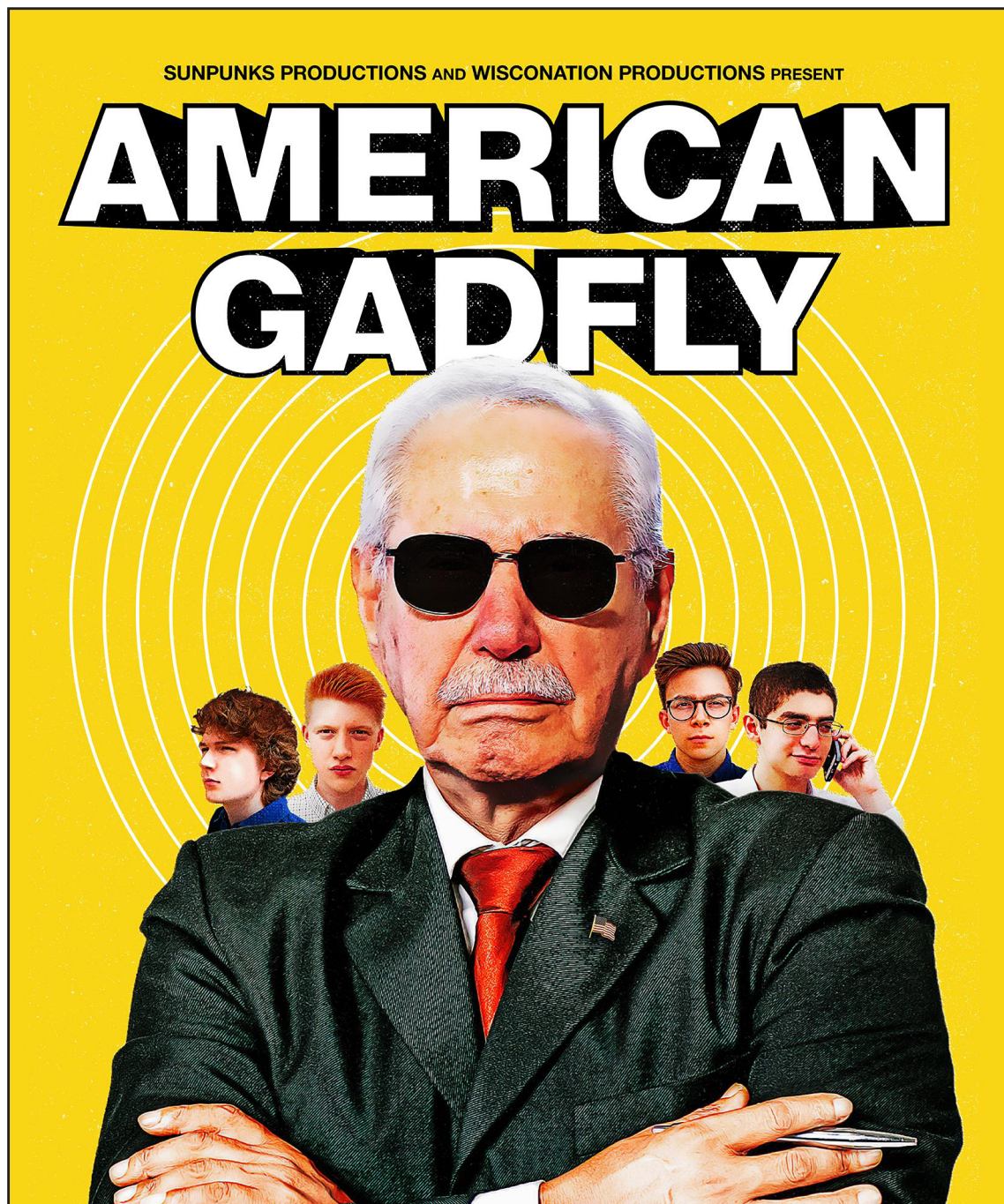
Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

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 CFI Education programs.

Follow the Mill Valley Film Festival on social media

 @millvalleyfilmfest  @MillValleyFilmFestival
 @mvfilmfest  californiafilminstitute #MVFF44



ABOUT THE FILM

In 1971, Alaskan US Senator Mike Gravel famously made public the “Pentagon Papers,” exposing the worst of our government’s secret policies during the Vietnam War. Nearly a half-century later, having retired after decades as a progressive public servant, he ran for POTUS—at age 89. Why? Because some New York teenagers asked him to. Skye Wallin’s documentary offers a humorous, inspiring look at whip-smart, social-media-savvy high schoolers running a national presidential campaign. Their goal is not to “win,” but simply to pressure the Democratic Party establishment into addressing the issues important to their generation, many of which Gravel championed long before they were born. While learning some bitter truths about real politics, they also succeed beyond their wildest imaginations. *American Gadfly* is a stirring rebuke to cynicism and disengagement, proving that the ordinary citizen without special connections or great wealth can rattle the halls of power, to democracy’s benefit.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR: SKYE WALLIN

For over a decade, Wallin has been deeply immersed in the worlds of documentary, journalism, and activism. While receiving his BA from Denison University, Wallin spent a semester abroad studying film at the prestigious film academy FAMU in Prague and later received his MFA in Screenwriting at Spalding University.

He spent several years filming with scientists and activists at more than 20 water-related disasters across the United States — including the tar sands oil spill in Mayflower, Arkansas; the coal ash spill in North Carolina's Dan River; and the Flint, Michigan water crisis. Wallin worked closely with Mark Ruffalo on this project, leading video and short documentary production for his organization Water Defense for 3 years. Wallin's work helped to expose multiple water pollution scandals that had been covered up, including EXXON's poisoning of Lake Conway in Arkansas and millions of organic crops being watered with oil-contaminated water sold to farmers by Chevron, the latter of which resulted in front page coverage in the *Los Angeles Times*.



BACKGROUND: THE 2020 PRIMARY RACE

Presidential elections in the United States take place once every four years, but the run-up to the election starts over a year before the general election date. The first major campaign for a candidate running in one of the two major parties is when they seek to gain the support of their party over other candidates from that same party. During this election phase, candidates travel the country making speeches, meeting with voters, and participating in debates. Hopeful candidates must meet certain eligibility requirements through either fundraising or petition signatures to qualify to appear in debates and on state primary ballots.

The candidate for the general election is the one who earns the support of the most delegates - people chosen to represent voters in the nomination process. Each state holds either a primary election or a caucus to determine which candidate that state's delegates will nominate. Once a candidate has been nominated, that candidate enters the race for the general election, competing against members of opposing parties.

In the 2020 election, the Democratic party was looking to unseat Donald Trump, the Republican incumbent. Unlike in some previous presidential campaigns, there was not a clear leader for the Democratic ticket, and a big question loomed over whether the party would favor a centrist candidate or somebody with views further to the left. *American Gadfly* takes place during the early primaries, when many candidates entered the race, with Joe Biden eventually winning the nomination, and later the general election.

KEY VOCABULARY

constituent: a person represented by an elected official

direct democracy: a system of governance in which policies and laws are enacted directly by the electorate, without representatives (such as Congress) acting as an intermediary

electorate: all the people entitled to vote in an election

the Pentagon Papers: a report from the Department of Defense chronicling the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, including military actions initially kept secret from the American public

platform: the list of actions and policy positions that a political party or candidate intends to enact

BEFORE VIEWING: YOUR IDEAL CANDIDATE

Directions:

The film you are about to watch follows the presidential campaign of an unlikely candidate: a long-serving Senator from Alaska.

Imagine what your ideal presidential candidate might be like. Fill out this empathy chart to capture an image of the qualities you'd like to see in a candidate.

THINKS

What does this person believe? What are their core values and guiding principles?

SAYS

What does this person say when campaigning? What would their campaign slogan be?

FEELS

What emotions do they feel? What gives them hope? What issues worry them?

DOES

What are their actions? How do they run their campaign?

DURING VIEWING: PLATFORM NOTECATCHER

Directions:

As you watch the film, take notes to help you follow the Gravel campaign.

CAMPAIGN PLATFORM

Keep track of where Mike Gravel and his teen staffers stand on key issues. Make a list of issues that they support in the FOR box and make a list of issues they oppose in the AGAINST box.

FOR

AGAINST



DURING VIEWING: VIRAL MOMENTS NOTECATCHER

VIRAL MOMENTS IN THE GRAVEL CAMPAIGN

Keep track of the “viral moments” in the Gravel campaign: important events, humorous situations, and major milestones. These can include accomplishments, fundraising goals, or interesting experiences for the campaign team. Describe the event briefly in either a hashtag or tweet-length sentence. If the exact date is unclear, just estimate generally when it occurs in the overall timeline of events.



AFTER VIEWING: RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Directions:

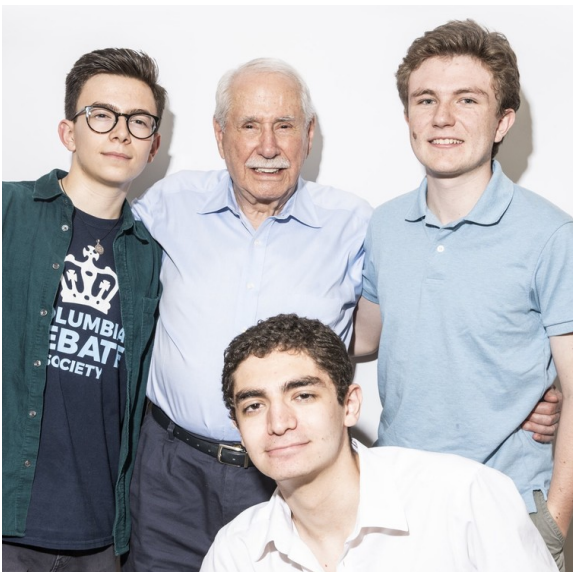
Respond to each question, referring to specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your interpretation.

1. Would you consider the campaign successful? Why or why not?

2. How did campaign managers David Oks and Henry Williams use their age as an advantage in the Gravel campaign? How did their age create obstacles for them, and what did they do to overcome these obstacles?

3. Does the film suggest that the American election system is a system of opportunity? Why or why not?

4. If you were to run a campaign for an elected office (whether national, state, local, or in your school), what strategies would you take from the Gravel campaign? What would you do differently?



ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

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/>.