

MVFF EDUCATION



DOCUMENTARY SHORTS



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 10-12

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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 48th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of Documentary Shorts: Wildflowers. We are excited to return in our 2025 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

Movie Moments that Moved Me

- Which short film in this program had the biggest emotional impact on you, and why?
- Was there a particular scene or moment that resonated with you?
- What issues or questions does this collection of films raise about the world we live in?
- Did anything in the films connect with your own life or perspective?

Nonfiction Filmmaking

- Where should a filmmaker draw the line between presenting facts and creating emotional impact?
- Did you sense bias, advocacy, or neutrality in any of the films showcased in the program?
- What responsibilities do filmmakers have when they are telling someone else's story?
- In what ways can a documentary influence people's thinking differently than traditional journalism or textbooks?

Subject & Style

- What makes a short film memorable or powerful, even without the time of a full-length feature?
- How did the filmmakers use interviews, archival materials, or narration to shape perspective and influence emotions?
- Can a film still be truthful if it uses artistic techniques to shape a story? Why or why not?

Cultural Awareness & Social Empathy

- How can short films help us understand people or cultures that are different from our own?
- Did you feel more empathy for someone after seeing their story on screen? What about the film made that happen?
- What's the value of hearing a story directly from a person through film instead of learning it secondhand?
- How can watching documentary shorts shape the way we see our own communities?



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**

COMPARE | INTERPRET | WRITE

Interpretive Analysis & Evaluation: Evaluate how a documentary short balances truth and storytelling. Does it aim more to inform or persuade? Support your interpretive analysis with examples from one or more films featured in the program.

Comparative Option: Compare two of the documentaries featured in this program. How do their approaches to truth and storytelling differ? Which was more effective in moving you, and why?

Opinion Editorial: Write an op-ed about one of the documentary shorts featured in this program that addresses the question: What is this documentary really about and why does it matter?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CAFILM | Summer Film | Cinema Arts Workshops for Ages 11-18

<https://www.cafilmedu.org/summerfilm/>

International Documentary Association | Where the Truth Lies or Not

<https://www.documentary.org/feature/where-truth-lies%E2%80%94or-not>

International Documentary Association | Creators Resources

<https://www.documentary.org/creators/resources>

Senses of Cinema | Documentary Film in the 21st Century

<https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2018/book-reviews/subjectivity-spectatorship-and-social-change-the-act-of-documenting-documentary-film-in-the-21st-century-by-brian-winston-gail-vanstone-and-wang-chi/>

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



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STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards ELA-Literacy

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1

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.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Name: _____



DOCUMENTARY SHORTS



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Backyards, farmlands, and coastlines meet in this documentary shorts program, where territory and daily life reveal both the healing bonds of community and the realities we must tend to outside our homes.

FILMS FEATURED IN THIS PROGRAM



MY NEIGHBOR'S YARD

Director: Kara Grace Millier | US 2025

In a divided town in Pennsylvania's Capital Region, neighbors turn their yards into opposing campaign endorsements leading up to the 2024 presidential election.

LEAVING THE POINT

Director: Michael Fearon | US 2024

In English and Spanish with English subtitles.

With ranch closures looming in Point Reyes National Seashore, a tight-knit community faces significant changes and a vanishing way of life.



LAS JIBARAS

Director: Adnelly Marichal | US 2024

In English and Spanish with English subtitles.

An intimate portrait of two generations of Puerto Rican women reclaiming their connection to the land and one another through traditional farming practices and community building.

PINE CONES ON DIVISADERO

Director: Sylvie Lee | US 2024

A filmmaker returns to her neighborhood in San Francisco to solve a mystery: What's the deal with all these pine cones on Divisadero?



THE LONG LABOR

Directors: Brenda Avila-Hanna, Consuelo Alba | US 2025

In English and Spanish with English subtitles.

After losing her mother in childbirth, a Mexican immigrant grows up to become a certified midwife and nurse practitioner who joins forces with local women to offer dignified care and revive ancestral healing traditions for indigenous farm-worker communities in Watsonville, CA.

BEFORE VIEWING

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Introduction:

An anticipation guide for a film program is a pre-viewing activity for you to think about some important themes before viewing and then revisit your responses after viewing to see how your perspectives have changed based on new information and critical thinking.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Read each statement carefully. Mark whether you agree or disagree. Be prepared to dig a little deeper into one topic or theme in a previewing extension and a post-viewing reflection.

Agree	Statement	Disagree
	A short film can be just as powerful and memorable as a feature-length film.	
	Documentaries are always more truthful than scripted films.	
	The way a story is told is just as important as what the story is about.	
	Films reflect culture, but they also shape culture.	
	Everyone has a story worth sharing, even if it's only a few minutes long.	
	Documentary films can change the way people think or act more than news reports.	
	It is possible to appreciate a film's message even if you disagree with the filmmaker's perspective.	

BEFORE VIEWING

ANTICIPATION GUIDE | EXTENSION

Critical Lens

Which statement from the anticipation guide do you want to use as a lens for watching the documentary shorts, and why?

Perspective Challenge

Did any statement make you rethink how you usually view real-life stories or documentaries? Explain.

Prediction & Connection

Which statement feels most relevant to your experience or interests, and what do you predict you might notice in the films through this lens?

AFTER VIEWING

ANTICIPATION GUIDE | REVISIT & REFLECT

Critical Lens

Did your chosen lens help you notice anything new or surprising?

Perspective Challenge

Did the films challenge or confirm your predictions?

Prediction & Connection

What story, character, or theme stood out the most to you and why?

BEFORE VIEWING

PERSONAL CONNECTION | THINK LIKE A FILMMAKER

Introduction:

At the heart of every impactful documentary, lies a carefully chosen topic that resonates with both the filmmaker and the audience. This collection of documentary shorts showcases a cohort of storytellers whose passion and creativity compelled them to explore unique topics and share them with the world. Each film has broader societal relevance that demands attention and will spark meaningful conversations and resonate deeply with the viewer.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

Respond to the prompt using a journal entry style of writing. Feel free to add doodle notes or images to support your words.

- If you were going to make an impactful documentary short film, what story would you be compelled to tell and why? What creative filmmaking ideas do you envision for telling this story?

Journal Entry

Doodle Notes

DURING VIEWING

SUBJECT | STORY | STYLE | VOICE | CONNECTION

Introduction: Documentaries use facts, evidence, and first hand accounts to tell compelling stories. The style of the documentary, whether observational or participatory, affects how the story is presented. Objectivity and credibility are crucial, as are accuracy and transparency. Visuals, audio, and storytelling techniques create a personal and emotional connection with the audience, allowing viewers to empathize with the subject or issue presented. The films in this program carry unique perspectives that challenge, inspire, and open new ways of seeing the world.

How to use this Thinking Routine: As you watch, pay close attention to what the film is about, but also how it's made and why it matters. Use the notecatcher to track your observations about subject, story, style, relevance, and impact.

SIGNPOSTS | WHAT TO NOTICE | WHAT TO NOTE

Subject What issue or experience is being documented?	Story Whose perspective is centered? Were any voices missing?	Style How did the filmmaker's choices - narration, actuality footage, archival material, interviews - shape your understanding?
Relevance Why is this film relevant now? How does this short connect to your community, culture, or world events?	Impact What action, question, or conversation does this short spark for you?	

MY NEIGHBOR'S YARD

Subject	Story	Style
Relevance	Impact	

DURING VIEWING

SUBJECT | STORY | STYLE | VOICE | CONNECTION

LEAVING THE POINT

Subject

Story

Style

Relevance

Impact

LAS JIBARAS

Subject

Story

Style

Relevance

Impact

PINE CONES ON DIVISADERO

Subject

Story

Style

Relevance

Impact

DURING VIEWING

SUBJECT | STORY | STYLE | VOICE | CONNECTION

THE LONG LABOR

Subject

Story

Style

Relevance

Impact



AFTER VIEWING

WHAT STUCK | WHAT STIRRED | WHAT SHIFTED

Introduction:

Short films are more than stories on a screen. They can spark new thoughts, stir strong emotions, and even shift the way we see the world.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

To help you engage thoughtfully after screening the youth produced films in the program, recall and reflect on emotional, intellectual, and social impact moments.

Film	What Stuck? Memorable Moment or Image, A line of dialogue, a shot, a transition, a sound, or a specific moment that stays with you.	What Stirred? Emotional Reaction A feeling that arose: discomfort, joy, sadness, tension, excitement, curiosity.	What Shifted? Thought, Belief, or Perspective Something you now see differently, a new question you're asking, or a bias you noticed in yourself.
MY NEIGHBOR'S YARD			
LEAVING THE POINT			
LAS JIBARAS			
PINE CONES ON DIVISADERO			
THE LONG LABOR			

AFTER VIEWING

SHORT FILM | LASTING IMPACT | BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

1. Of the documentary shorts featured in this collection, which film did you find the most original, unique, or inspiring? Why?

2. How did these documentary shorts give you access to important information about social, cultural, political, or even global issues you might not otherwise be exposed to?

3. What universal themes or bigger ideas connect each of the films in this collection of documentary shorts?

4. Which story did you most connect with? How or why?

5. Which story has the broadest social or cultural relevance? Which story has the most cultural influence or impact? How or why?

6. Which film had the most unique or interesting visual style? What was unique about it? How did the style impact the subject and the story?

AFTER VIEWING

ONE SENTENCE SUMMARY | SIX WORD REVIEW

Introduction:

Short films pack a full story into a small frame of time. Each one is its own world - sometimes sharp, sometimes subtle, always purposeful. Because they are so concise, they challenge us as viewers to notice details, pick up on themes quickly, and reflect on meaning long after the screen goes dark.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

After viewing each short film write a one-sentence summary and a six-word review.

- One-Sentence Summary - Capture the essence of the film in a single, complete sentence. Focus on the central idea, conflict, or emotional impact.
- Six-Word Review - Distill your reaction into exactly six words. This can be reflective, evaluative, or even playful.

MY NEIGHBOR'S YARD

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

LEAVING THE POINT

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

LAS JIBARAS

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

AFTER VIEWING

ONE SENTENCE SUMMARY | SIX WORD REVIEW

PINE CONES ON DIVISADERO

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review

THE LONG LABOR

One-Sentence Summary

Six-Word Review



AFTER VIEWING

LENSES FOR DIALOGUE

Introduction:

When we watch films, we often experience them first through our own personal lens, shaped by our background, values, and experiences. But the world is made up of many perspectives, and learning to shift our lens allows us to better understand voices different from our own. By looking at an issue, a person, or a story from multiple angles, we open the door to deeper dialogue, empathy, and connection.

How to use this Thinking Routine:

This thinking routine asks you to consider what happens when you view the films - and the world - not just through your own eyes, but also through the lenses of others. Respond to each of the prompts by recording your thoughts and ideas in the notecatcher. Then, share your ideas with a table partner or in small groups.

SEE Reflect more deeply on each of the films in this collection of documentary shorts. What did you notice? Make a list of observations that set the films apart from each other, or connect them on some level.	
CHOOSE A LENS Think about how you see the world through your own lenses. These could be related to your role in your family or community, your age, your culture, your social location, your race or ethnicity, your gender or sexuality, or anything else about your identity. Choose one lens and write about how you might see or think about the world through that lens.	
PROBE After watching the films featured in the program, ask some questions that might help you to better understand another person's lens and perspectives. This could be the lens of one of the filmmakers or any one of the people involved in the stories.	
REFLECT Think again about the subject and stories of each of the films in this collection of documentary shorts. Do you have any new observations, ideas, or questions? What issues or themes did your lenses invite you to think more deeply about?	
SHARE With a table partner or in small groups, exchange perspectives and look through other lenses. Record highlights of your conversation here.	

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

AFTER VIEWING

EXIT TICKET | WILDFLOWERS

Instructions:

As a check for understanding and feedback on the film, respond to the following question and write your response (2-3 sentences) in the space provided.

- How can documentary shorts help us see issues or communities differently than news or social media?

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM FESTIVAL CAPSTONE

Instructions:

Watching a collection of short films is witnessing the creativity, courage, and vision of filmmakers who bring their stories to life on screen. The fact that these films spark ideas, emotions, and conversations is a testament to their power. By going beyond the act of viewing, you celebrate not only their inspiration, but also your own ability to respond as an engaged audience member and creative thinker.

Directions:

Review the list of extension activity choices and select one activity that resonates most with you. Complete the activity thoughtfully and submit your work as your festival artifact.

1. Story Remix

- Choose one documentary short and imagine it told from a different perspective.
 - Examples: another person in the story, a bystander, or even an opposing viewpoint.
 - Draft an interview with thoughtful, relevant questions for another person in the story.
 - Storyboard and script one scene.

2. Impact Campaign Pitch

- Imagine one of the documentary shorts featured in the program is the centerpiece of a social impact campaign.
 - What hashtag, poster, or social media strategy could amplify its message?
 - Work up the campaign on Canva.
 - Share it with your class or school wide.

3. Mini-Documentary Challenge | The Pitch

- In groups, brainstorm a 2-3 minute documentary idea on an issue in your school or community. Each small group creates a 1-minute pitch for a short documentary they'd make. Present these pitches verbally, sketch a quick movie poster, or record a 30-second trailer.
 - Title & Logline.
 - Subject: What it's about.
 - Story: How it would be told.
 - Style: Actuality Footage, Archival Material, Interviews, Reenactments, etc.
 - Impact: What feeling or change you want to spark in the audience.



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

MY PLACE | MY STORY | PERSONAL ESSAY FILM

Introductions:

Personal essay films are a great entry point to filmmaking because of the low barriers. You don't need a big crew. You don't need sets, props, or actors. All you need is a basic camera, simple editing software, and the courage to share your own story. And even the camera is not necessary if opting for a found-footage approach. With these few ingredients, the personal essay film becomes a powerful tool for communicating your unique perspective to the world.

Directions:

In this extension activity, you will learn a basic production approach for creating a 3-minute personal essay film, combining scripted narration with symbolic video imagery to tell a story from your own life.

MY PLACE | MY STORY

Foundations of Filmmaking and The Personal Essay Film online course.

<https://www.cafilmeducationonline.org/courses/foundations-personal-essay>

CAFILM Education's virtual course curriculum for making a personal essay film.



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