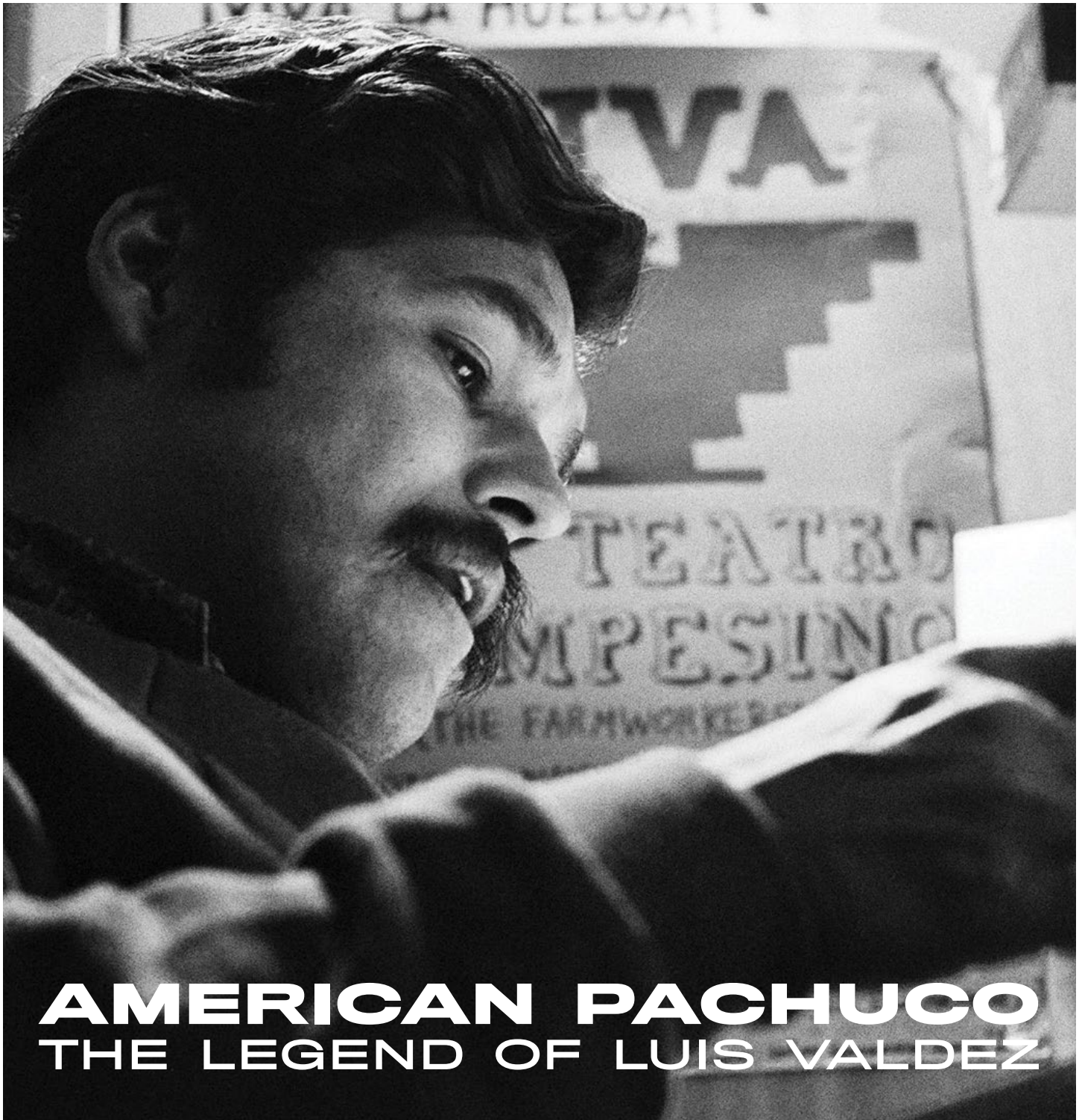




DOCLANDS

EDUCATION

APRIL 30 - MAY 3



AMERICAN PACHUCO
THE LEGEND OF LUIS VALDEZ

CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 9-12

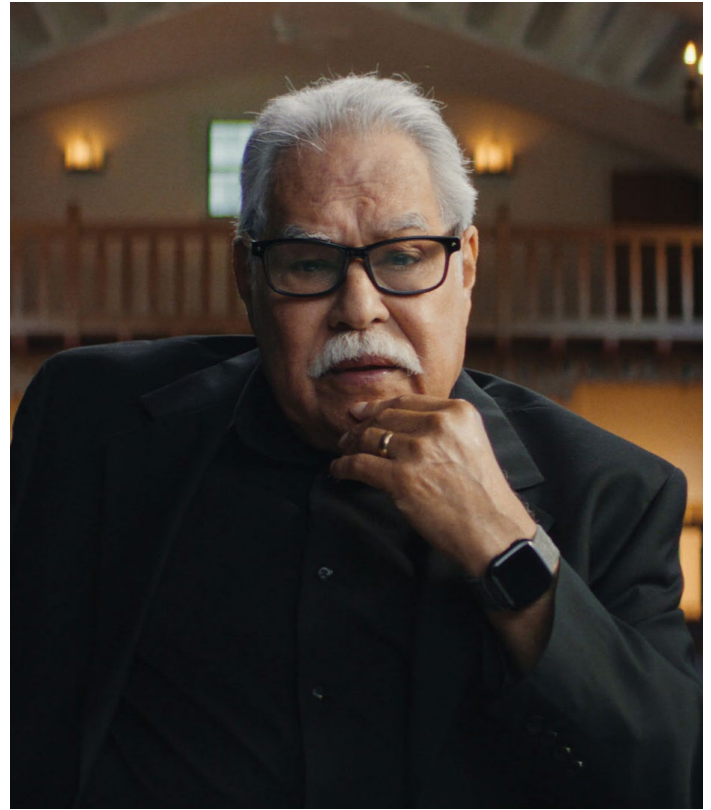
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Instructor Resources

A Letter to Educators	ii
Additional Resources	iii
About CAFILM	iii
Standards	iv

Student Handouts

About the Film	2
About the Filmmaker	2
Before Viewing Activities	4
During the Viewing Guide	6
Discussion Questions	7
Interpretive Essay Prompts	10
Extension Activities	12



Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 10th Annual DocLands Documentary Film Festival screening of the documentary feature film *American Pachuco: The Legend of Luis Valdez*. We are excited to return in our 2026 spring season with a combination of both in-theater 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 in 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

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CAFILM Documentary Film Analysis Toolkit

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/192NExBcx7uXqQX1ilKvAVdxibQaRnZzE61Ow2KrdRIA/edit?tab=t.0>

Time | Who Looks Like They Belong in America | David Alvarado

<https://time.com/7339331/who-looks-like-they-belong-america/>

El Teatro Campesino

<https://elteatrocampesino.com/our-history/>

Center Theater Group | How Zoot Suit Changed Theatre Forever

<https://www.centertheatregroup.org/news-and-blogs/news/2017/january/how-zoot-suit-changed-theatre-forever/>

El Soldado Razo

<https://jm919846758.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/tbpsr.pdf>

La Bamba | Luis Valdez 1987

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093378/>

Arte Americas | Rasquachismo

<https://arteamericas.org/rasquachismo/>

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.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.9-10.3

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.9-10.6

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

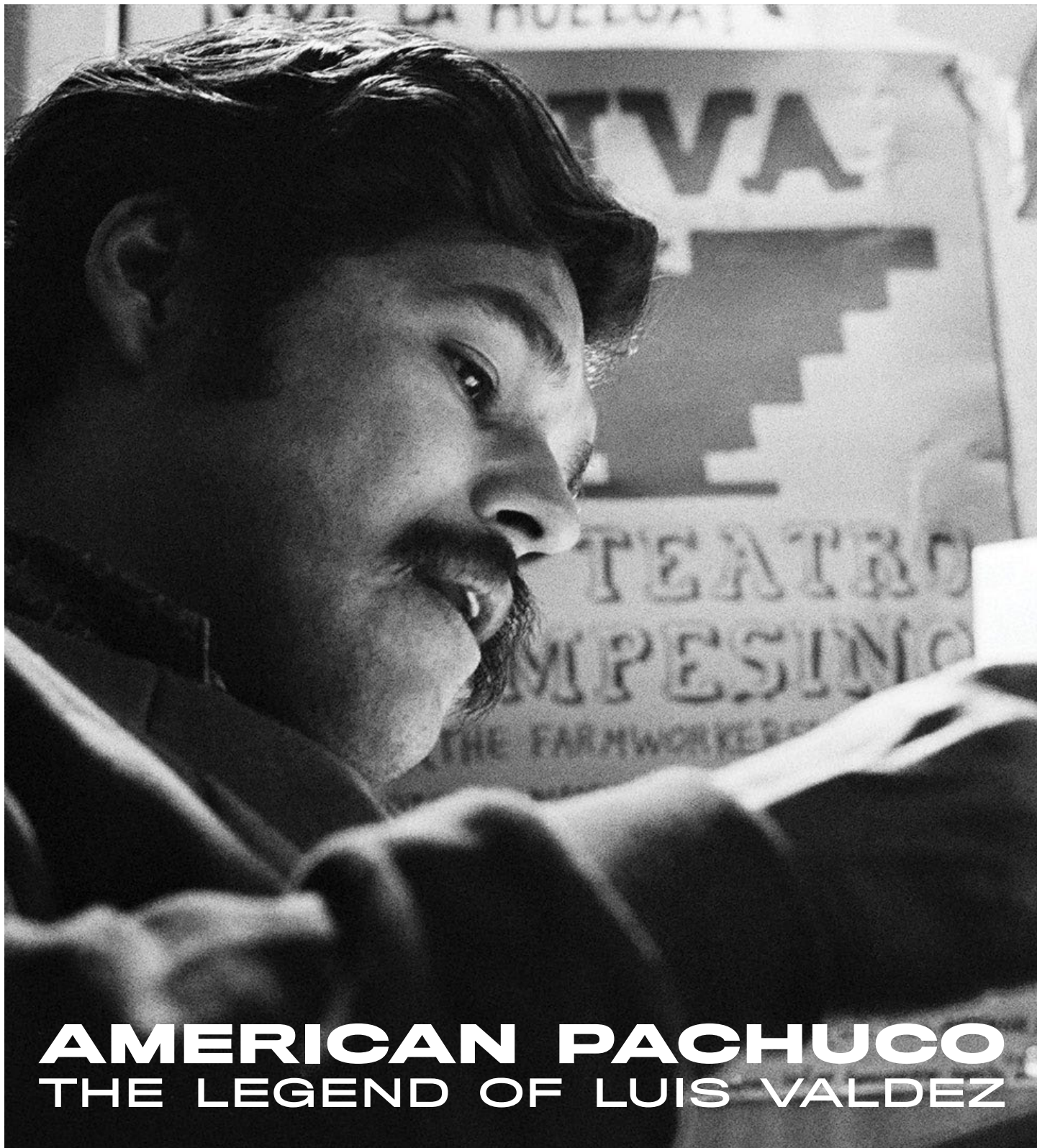
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.



Name: _____



AMERICAN PACHUCO

THE LEGEND OF LUIS VALDEZ

LOGLINE

Against political resistance and industry skepticism, Luis Valdez pushes Chicano storytelling from the fields to the screen with *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*. By creating iconic works that challenge, celebrate, and expand America's story, Valdez redefines what it means to be Mexican-American and American at the same time.

ABOUT THE FILM

An auteur emerges from America's underclass: from migrant farmworker to revolutionary artist, Luis Valdez changed American culture. In the 1960s, his *El Teatro Campesino* performed on flatbed trucks and helped mobilize workers to win the first farmworker union contract. His *Zoot Suit* was the first Chicano play on Broadway. Despite critical rejection that killed the show, he persevered, creating *La Bamba*—a breakout blockbuster that authentically depicted Mexican-American life to the world. Now in its 60th year, *El Teatro* continues to be a beacon for Latino/a creators. This is the story of an artist who gave voice to the overlooked and opened pathways for generations.

EPIGRAPH

(QUOTE FROM FILM TO GUIDE VIEWING & DISCUSSIONS)

"My works speak for themselves. They just happen to speak for an awful lot of other people."

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER DAVID ALVARADO

David Alvarado is an award-winning documentary filmmaker who brings to life stories of trailblazers in science, the arts, and human rights. His journey began as a high school dropout interning at Dallas PBS affiliate KERA, where he climbed from marketing to production, discovering his calling behind the camera. He co-founded Structure Films in New York City with Jason Sussberg.

His work as Director/Producer/Cinematographer includes four feature documentaries: *The Immortalists* (2014), *Bill Nye: Science Guy* (2017), *Blood Sugar Rising* (2020), and *We Are As Gods* (2022). He has directed and produced for PBS's NOVA series with *Who's in Control* (2023) and *Secrets in Your Data* (2024) and produced Independent Lens' three-part series *Matter of Mind* (2023-2025). He also hosted and produced an eight-part Audible Original podcast on environmental technologist Stewart Brand.

Alvarado has pioneered innovative funding methods—from record-breaking Kickstarter and branded funding campaigns with Stripe, Inc. to successful NFT initiatives. A Stanford Documentary Film MFA graduate, he has earned fellowships at WGBH Producers Academy, Sundance's Producers Workshop, and recognition in DOC NYC's "40 Under 40 Filmmakers to Watch."

As a decade-long NALIP member and Chicano filmmaker, Alvarado has dedicated his career to making the world more thoughtful through documentary storytelling—a mission that began eighteen years ago when Luis Valdez showed him what was possible, at an event that ultimately culminated in this film.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

I met Luis Valdez when I was 21 years old. As an aspiring filmmaker and son of an immigrant, his speech at my university gave me an unexpected jolt of confidence. He spoke about creating art in a world that didn't want to hear what he had to say. His final plea that day still resonates with me: he slammed both hands on the lectern and declared, "The only way to begin your career as an artist is to simply do it. Do the thing. Now."

Twenty years later, I'm a documentary filmmaker, and I owe much of that early ambition to Valdez's words. Now I'm telling his story—but this isn't just a film about Mexican-Americans. It's about who gets to be American. For six decades, Valdez has proven that Chicanos aren't marginal to America—they ARE America. From César Chávez's grape strikes to Broadway's first Chicano production to *La Bamba*, his work insists on one truth: When power structures say we don't belong, cinema becomes our most powerful tool to insist that we do.

The attack on our film proves its necessity. Our NEH grant was terminated. Our CPB funding, eliminated. The same forces trying to erase Chicano families from Los Angeles are erasing our ability to tell this story. Yet this film exists because of the power of public media—through *American Masters*, Latino Public Broadcasting, ITVS, and Firelight Media—institutions that champion stories other media outlets won't fund. As public media itself faces unprecedented threats, our project stands as a testament to why these platforms matter: they preserve and amplify voices that would otherwise be silenced. We've rescued 80,000 feet of deteriorating

1970s *Teatro Campesino* celluloid from literal destruction—American history being passively lost, now digitized in 4K for the first time and will be publicly free and available through the Internet Archive.

As ICE raids terrorize the neighborhoods around us, Valdez's assertion that Chicanos are the original inhabitants of this continent transforms from cultural history to urgent resistance. This film asks the question many Chicanos face daily: If we don't belong in America, who does?

In this political moment, *American Pachuco* isn't just preservation—it's reclamation. It's proof that our stories, like our presence, have always been here.

BEFORE VIEWING ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions:

The film you are about to watch showcases the theater and film as social movements that helped redefine cultural identity and representation in American society. For each statement, decide whether you agree or disagree, then write a one or two-sentence explanation for your opinion.

STATEMENT	AGREE/DISAGREE	EXPLANATION
The American story is a national mythology rooted in ideals like liberty, equality, and democracy - not shared ancestry.		
Language has the power to shape how entire groups of people are seen and treated in society.		
Reclaiming harmful or offensive words can turn them into sources of pride and encouragement.		
Theater and film can change how people see an entire culture.		
When a group is misrepresented in the media, artists from that group have a responsibility to respond.		
Art can give voice to people whose stories are often silenced or ignored.		
American identity includes many cultural traditions, not just one dominant story.		
The real story of America is a progressive journey toward a more perfect union and greater freedom.		

BEFORE VIEWING

QUICK WRITE | STORYTELLING & THE POWER OF THE PLATFORM

Directions:

The act of writing helps us think about a topic. This documentary shows how Luis Valdez used theater and film to tell stories often ignored or misrepresented. The film is about the power of the platform and the importance of voice, language, and representation. In anticipation of the topics explored in this film, respond to the following questions.

1. What stories about your identity, culture, or community are often misunderstood, simplified, or invisible?

2. What makes film and theater powerful tools for shaping how people understand a culture or group?

3. How does telling your own story differ from having someone else tell it for you? Why does that distinction matter?

DURING VIEWING

NOTICE & NOTE (For Online/In-Class Viewing)

How to Use this Thinking Routine:

Signposts in film viewing are specific, recurring, or important moments that, when noticed, prompt students to stop, analyze, and document key story, subject, or theme development. Use the notecatcher below to record what you notice in each category while you are viewing the film.

NOTICE	NOTE
<p>The Artist as Cultural Storyteller What to Track:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moments where personal identity shapes the art.• Examples of culture being celebrated or reclaimed.• Moments where art becomes political or activist.	
<p>Historical Context The Chicano Cultural Movement What to Track:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The historical struggle behind the art.• Mexican American civil rights.• Farmworker Activism.• Cultural pride and self-representation.• The emergence of Chicano Theater.	
<p>The Pachuco Identity What to Track:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clothing and style as symbols of resistance or pride.• Language as resistance or redefinition.	
<p>Theater as a Stage for American Identity What to Track:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excluded or silenced voices.• Included or empowered voices.• Spaces of power, protest, and possibility.	

AFTER VIEWING

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS | LEVELING UP THE CONVERSATION

How to Use this Thinking Routine:

Select an effective class discussion format to encourage active participation and deepen understanding of the film. Varying formats from small groups to structured whole-class approaches ensures all student voices are heard. Use the notecatcher below to record highlights.

Level 1: Immediate Reaction - "Lobby Talk"

Objective: To process reactions and surface emotions or tensions.

- What stood out to you about the Pachuco? What might El Pachuco represent beyond one character? Why might mainstream America have misunderstood or feared the Pachuco identity?
- How does the film feel - celebratory, confrontational, corrective, critical, or nostalgic?
- What images, language, or moments stuck with you most? Why?
- What did you learn, or rethink, about Chicano identity or history?

Level 2: Analytical Discussion - Digging a Little Deeper

Objective: To move from reaction to interpretation.

- How does Luis Valdez use the Pachuco as a cultural symbol?
- In what ways does the Pachuco challenge dominant narratives about Mexican American identity?
- How does style - zoot suits, language, performance - function as resistance?
- What role does art and theater play in shaping cultural memory and history?
- How does the film connect past struggles to present identity?

Level 3: Argument Building - Insight & Analysis

Objective: To push toward arguable ideas.

- Who gets to tell America's Story?
- What makes a story "American?" Who has historically been left out of this story?
- Is the Pachuco best understood as a symbol or resistance, identity, performance, or all three?
- How does reclaiming cultural identity become an act of empowerment or a form of activism?
- What is the relationship between stereotypes and self-representation? What happens when people tell their own stories rather than being defined by others?
- Why does cultural storytelling matter in correcting historical narratives?



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

AFTER VIEWING

RECALL, REFLECT, & RESPOND

How to Use this Thinking Routine:

This framework is a learning strategy used to strengthen memory and deepen understanding by retrieving information, thinking critically about its meaning, and applying or acting on that knowledge.

Directions:

Actos = the foundation. Zoot Suit = cultural identity and representation. La Bamba = media power and mainstream impact. For each of these categories below:

- Recall a moment from the documentary - try to do this without your notes and trust your memory first.
- Reflect on what the moment shows or reveals.
- Respond by connecting it to a bigger idea about storytelling, representation, or performance.

THE BIRTH OF ACTOS THE FOUNDATION		
RECALL What do you remember? Describe a moment where performance, protest, or collective voice stood out to you. What was happening? Who was involved?	REFLECT What does it reveal? What does this moment suggest about why Actos were created? What needs or conditions gave rise to them?	RESPOND Why does it matter? How can performance be used as a tool for activism or community voice? Where do you see this happening today?

ZOOT SUIT CULTURAL IDENTITY & REPRESENTATION		
RECALL What do you remember? Recall a moment focused on style, identity, or how Pachucos were seen or portrayed. What visuals, language, or reactions stood out?	REFLECT What does it reveal? What does this moment reveal about how identity is constructed, or misunderstood, by society?	RESPOND Why does it matter? Why does representation in theater and film matter? What happens when people tell their own stories vs. when others tell them?

LA BAMBA MEDIA POWER & MAINSTREAM IMPACT		
RECALL What do you remember? Recall a moment connected to music, film, or popular storytelling. What story was being told, and how?	REFLECT What does it reveal? Recall a moment connected to music, film, or popular storytelling. What story was being told, and how?	RESPOND Why does it matter? How does the media shape what we believe about people, culture, or history? Who has the power to rewrite narratives?

AFTER VIEWING INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

Directions:

These interpretive essay prompts offer an opportunity to write a personal, yet evidence-based argument about the film's deeper meaning and themes. Review the prompts and choose the one that offers the most compelling angle for your analysis.

The Power of Platform and Cultural Storytelling:

American Pachuco: The Legend of Luis Valdez demonstrates the power of storytelling as a platform for cultural expression and resistance. Write an essay in which you analyze how Luis Valdez uses theater and film to amplify Chicano voices and challenge dominant narratives about American identity. Use specific examples from the film to discuss the importance of representation and authorship in shaping the "American story" and cultural history.

Art as Activism and Social Change:

According to the documentary, art can be a form of activism. Write an essay in which you evaluate how effective Luis Valdez's work has been in creating social or political change. Use specific examples from the film to show how art can reshape public understanding of marginalized communities.



EXIT TICKET

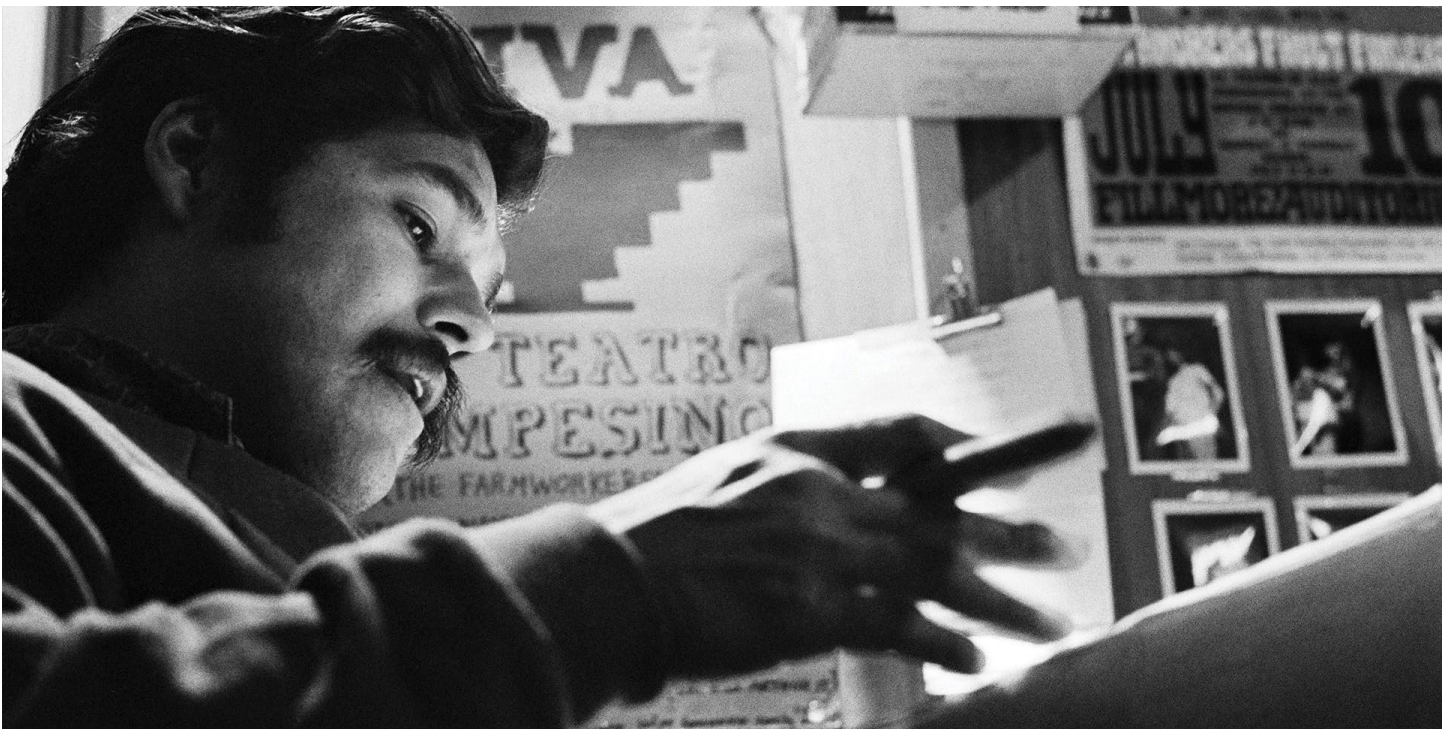
Instructions:

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.

- Why does it matter who gets to tell the American story?

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

PLATFORM PITCH | CREATE YOUR OWN CULTURAL STAGE

Introduction:

How can art repair or reclaim cultural identity? If you had a platform to tell a story about your identity, community, or culture, what story would you tell and why?

Student Task:

Select one of the following platforms to tell a story about your identity, culture, or community today.

Option A: Personal Reflection

Create your own cultural stage by writing a short monologue that represents one of the following:

- An overlooked cultural story.
- A family tradition.
- A community experience.

Option B: Documentary, Play, or Performance Piece Pitch

Imagine making your own short documentary, a scene from a film, a play, or a performance piece. Write a short pitch in one paragraph or present a one-minute verbal pitch to the class. Address each of the following:

- What story would you tell (story)?
- Platform Choice: Film, theater, or hybrid - and why (style)?
- What message would you want audiences to leave with (substance)?
- Audience: Who needs to see this?
- Impact Goal: What do you want people to think, feel, or do after experiencing it?

Option C: Identity Snapshot

Create a one-page identity snapshot that visually includes examples of what shapes who you are. Use Canva, still photography, or another digital format. This creative artifact could include a combination of:

- Symbols and Abstract Imagery
- External Influences
- Family Relationships
- Cultural Traditions
- Personal Experiences



EXTENSION VIEWING

MINI ACTOS | THEATER FOR THE PEOPLE

Note to Educators:

For optimal results, this extension activity is designed to span up to two class periods. Providing students with ample time for planning, performances, discussion, and reflection will deepen engagement and support more thoughtful, meaningful outcomes. Adjust pacing as needed to fit your classroom context and instructional goals.

Introduction:

Luis Valdez is the founder of modern Chicano theater and El Teatro Campesino, initiating the “acto” - a short, comedic, bilingual political sketch designed to highlight social issues and educate and empower farmworkers. If you were to create a short performance about identity today, what story would you want the audience to understand?

Student Task:

Actos are short (2-5 minutes). They use bold characters or stereotypes. They expose injustice or misunderstanding by mixing humor and truth and they speak directly to the audience. Create a mini-Acto to perform for an audience.

Step 1: Choose an Issue

In small groups, students pick a topic connected to identity, culture, or controversy or fairness in representation.

Possible topics to consider:

- Being stereotyped because of how you look or speak.
- Cultural traditions being misunderstood.
- The pressure to “fit in” or assimilate.
- Representation in movies, TV, or social media.
- Generational differences in identity.

Step 2: Create Characters

Groups invent 3-4 exaggerated characters.

Examples:

- The “Gatekeeper” who decides who counts as American.
- The Influencer Historian” who spreads misinformation.
- The “Ancestor Voice” who reminds people of history.
- The “Truth Teller” who challenges stereotypes.

EXTENSION VIEWING CONT.

MINI ACTOS | THEATER FOR THE PEOPLE

Step 3: Structure the Acto

Groups outline a very simple story structure. Remember, “if you don’t tell your story, someone else will.”

Acto Arc:

- Problem appears.
- Characters clash or misunderstand each other.
- Truth is revealed or challenged.
- Ending message for the audience.

Step 4: Perform

Performances should be short and energetic. Your Acto should be performable anywhere - the classroom, sidewalk, or cafeteria.

Stage Directions:

- Use exaggerated gestures.
- Embrace humor or satire.
- Incorporate simple props if available.
- Speak directly to the audience.

Step 5: Reflection Questions

Audience Reviews:

- What issue was each group trying to highlight?
- How did humor or exaggeration help communicate the message?
- Why might short performances be powerful tools for activism?
- How did this activity help you understand the kind of theater that artists like Luis Valdez created?
- If your Acto went viral or became a film, what parts of your message would you fight to keep the same?



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 throughout 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 DocLands Documentary Film Festival

Presented by the California Film Institute, DocLands is a vibrant celebration of nonfiction storytelling held annually in Marin County, California. Expanding upon the exchange of ideas and inspiration through captivating screenings, networking, and engaging conversations, DocLands strives to foster dialogue, inspire connections, and build an inclusive community around the art of documentary filmmaking. DocLands aims to illuminate filmmakers' diverse perspectives and ignite a passion

for exploring real-world issues by showcasing compelling stories and the thought-provoking insights behind them. Join us as we embark on a journey to discover, connect, and celebrate the power of documentary cinema.



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

Questions to Consider:

What is the purpose of a film festival? What are the benefits for filmmakers? For the audience? For the community? How might the films at a festival differ from the films available to watch at your local movie theater? 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 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.