



**DOCLANDS**

**EDUCATION**

**APRIL 30 - MAY 3**



**DOCUMENTARY SHORTS**



**CURRICULUM GUIDE**  
**GRADES: 6-12**

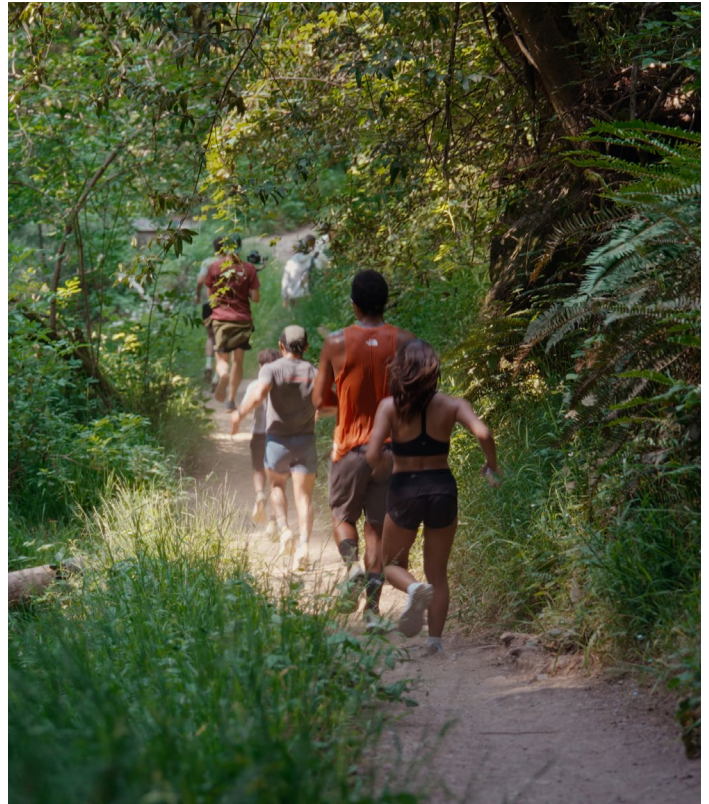
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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 10th Annual DocLands Documentary Film Festival screening of the documentary shorts. 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 the 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 Documentary Shorts Program!

Sincerely,  
The CAFILM Education Team

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### CAFILM Documentary Film Analysis Toolkit

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

### CAFILM Summer Film Camps | Documentary Film Production for Teens

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

### International Documentary Association | The Liberating Limitations of Short Films

<https://www.documentary.org/feature/does-length-matter-liberating-limitations-short-films>

### International Documentary Association | Long Visibility and Virality

<https://www.documentary.org/feature/short-docs-pathway-long-visibility-and-virality-slim-sustainability>

### The Power of Proof: Using Short Films to Showcase Your Vision

<https://www.storystart.net/the-power-of-proof76a3d9a8>

### Video Librarian | The Art of the Short Film: Stories Told in Under 30 Minutes

<https://videolibrarian.com/articles/essays/the-art-of-the-short-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.

### Follow the California Film Institute on social media



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@cafilm



californiafilminstitute

# 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: \_\_\_\_\_



## DOCUMENTARY SHORTS



# ABOUT THE FILMS

At the heart of every impactful documentary lies a carefully chosen topic that resonates with both the filmmaker and the audience. This year's program of documentary shorts features two 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.

Featuring filmmakers offering distinct styles with unflinching directorial voices, these two short films allow us to step into other realities and appreciate the power of storytelling and documentary filmmaking.

## EPIGRAPH (QUOTE FROM FILM TO GUIDE VIEWING & DISCUSSIONS)

"We need to do a better job of telling the real story. We need to do a better job of telling every story."



### ***Boil That Cabbage Down*** Filmmaker: Candace Mae Williamson

**About the Film:** After a Black Banjoist learns about the instrument's forgotten history, it launches her on a lyrical journey to reclaim the joy that was lost along the way.

#### **ABOUT THE FILMMAKER**

Candace Mae Williamson is a director, filmmaker, and self-proclaimed 'cool gal' from Orlando, Florida. She believes that filmmaking is an art that can help individuals find belonging and deep joy. She is a current MFA candidate at the USC School of Cinematic Arts.

#### **FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT**

At the tender age of 22, the Banjo found its way into my life, weaving its melodies into the fabric of my being. My love for its sound was undeniable, yet I was told by my parents, by popular folk music, by its iconography that it is and was a "white" instrument.

It was when I began to search for a teacher that I found an article that was a revelation. The Banjo was an instrument that was constructed and played by Black people. It was used for spiritual practices and community gatherings. The instrument was forged from the memory of slaves using western materials.

My deep resonance with the banjo seemed inexplicable. This documentary, to me, embodies the essence of belonging. As Black individuals, navigating spaces where we often feel like outsiders, we frequently find ourselves crafting our own sanctuaries. Boil That Cabbage Down is a poignant representation of reclaiming not just an instrument but a piece of our collective identity that may have been lost by the unforgiving passage of time.



### ***Dipsea Generations*** Filmmaker: Paddy O'Leary

**About the Film:** The journey of five young runners from across the Bay Area as they take on the iconic Dipsea race.

#### **ABOUT THE FILMMAKER**

Paddy O'Leary is an Irish-born trail runner, storyteller, and community builder based in San Francisco. A professional athlete with The North Face, Paddy uses film to explore the people and places that have shaped his journey, from the rugged hills of Ireland to the steep single track of Northern California. He tells stories that highlight the individuals and communities working to make the outdoors more welcoming to all

#### **FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT**

The Dipsea has been a part of my imagination since I first moved to the Bay Area. As a trail runner, I was drawn to the race's grit and history, but what truly moved me was the community behind it – generations of families, local legends, and newcomers all finding common ground on the trails. This film grew out of my love for that community and my belief that the outdoors should be a space where everyone feels they belong.

With Dipsea Generations, I wanted to capture not just the race, but the larger story of access, inclusion, and identity in trail running. I hope this documentary helps reframe who we picture when we think of a trail runner and celebrates the people and programs helping make that future more inclusive.

# BEFORE VIEWING ANTICIPATION GUIDE

**Directions:**

The two documentary shorts featured in this program are powerful, purpose-driven stories of personal journeys that connect to a bigger conversation. For each statement, decide whether you Agree or Disagree, then write a one or two sentence explanation for your opinion.

STATEMENT	AGREE/DISAGREE	EXPLANATION
Short films can be just as impactful as full-length feature films.		
When you tell a true story with care, people listen.		
One person's voice can influence a larger community.		
When short films are created with a clear purpose, they don't just entertain, they leave their mark.		
Short films can spark empathy, awareness, and even action.		
Learning about others' experiences can change how I see the world.		
In a world where the media competes for every second of our attention, short films are the most powerful tools for impactful storytelling.		
The way a story is told is just as important as what the story is about.		

# BEFORE VIEWING

## QUICK WRITE | SHORT FILM, LASTING IMPACT

**Directions:**

Both the films showcased in this festival program prove that powerful storytelling doesn't require a long runtime. Reflect on the following questions and respond in 2-3 sentences.

1. How can a short film change the way we think about a real-world issue?

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2. What makes a short film persuasive in ways that are different from feature-length films?

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3. If you had three minutes to document something in your world, what would you choose and why?

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# DURING VIEWING

## MESSAGE IN MOTION (For Online/In-Class Viewing)

### Introduction:

Sometimes the shortest films tell the most powerful true personal stories that point to larger social, cultural, or political issues.

### How to Use this Thinking Routine:

In this documentary shorts program, your task is to watch like a film critic, storyteller, and citizen, looking for moments when a small film makes a big impact with its message. Use the notecatcher to track the message in motion for both of the films featured.

BOIL THAT CABBAGE DOWN   Candace Mae Williamson	
MESSAGE & PURPOSE	VOICE & PERSPECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the core message or idea this short is trying to communicate?</li> <li>• Why do you think the filmmaker chose this subject now?</li> <li>• Who is the intended audience?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whose story is being told?</li> <li>• How does the filmmaker use perspective to shape your understanding?</li> <li>• Are there any voices missing, or perspectives you wish were included?</li> </ul>
EMOTIONAL & INTELLECTUAL IMPACT	CALL TO ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did this story make you feel and why?</li> <li>• Did the film challenge your assumptions or teach you something new?</li> <li>• Which moments stayed with you after watching and why?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the filmmaker want you to think, feel, or act? How?</li> <li>• How could you or others respond to the issues or ideas presented in the film?</li> <li>• Do you think the short could inspire action in your community? How?</li> </ul>

# DURING VIEWING

## MESSAGE IN MOTION (For Online/In-Class Viewing)

### DIPSEA GENERATIONS | Paddy O’Leary

MESSAGE & PURPOSE	VOICE & PERSPECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the core message or idea this short is trying to communicate?</li><li>• Why do you think the filmmaker chose this subject now?</li><li>• Who is the intended audience?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whose story is being told?</li><li>• How does the filmmaker use perspective to shape your understanding?</li><li>• Are there any voices missing, or perspectives you wish were included?</li></ul>
EMOTIONAL & INTELLECTUAL IMPACT	CALL TO ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did this story make you feel and why?</li><li>• Did the film challenge your assumptions or teach you something new?</li><li>• Which moments stayed with you after watching and why?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the filmmaker want you to think, feel, or act? How?</li><li>• How could you or others respond to the issues or ideas presented in the film?</li><li>• Do you think the short could inspire action in your community? How?</li></ul>

### THE MESSAGE THAT MATTERS | TWO FILMS, ONE CONVERSATION

How do the two shorts featured together in this program shape a bigger conversation about storytelling, society, culture, or youth experience?

# AFTER VIEWING

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS | TWO FILMS, ONE 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.

### Part 1: Content & Understanding - What is the Story?

Objective: To identify the film's subject, key ideas, and central message.

- What is the main issue or topic of the film?
- Who is at the center of the story?
- What problem, challenge, or question is being explored?
- What moments stood out as especially important?

### Part 2: Youth Empowerment & Agency

Objective: To reflect on how young people are represented and reflect on their potential to make a difference.

- How are young people represented in this film?
- What voices are highlighted? Whose voices are missing?
- How do individuals express their perspectives or identities?
- What risks, challenges, or barriers do they face?
- Where do you see moments of empowerment or agency?

### Part 3: Filmmaking Choices - How is the Story Told?

Objective: To evaluate how filmmaking techniques shape meaning and influence the viewer's experience.

- What film techniques stood out?
- How do these choices shape your understanding of the story?
- How does the film make you feel at specific moments? Why?

### Part 4: The Power of Short Film

Objective: To examine how short films communicate ideas effectively within a limited timeframe.

- What does this film do well in a short amount of time?
- What feels missing or left unexplored?
- What questions do you still have after watching?
- Why might the filmmaker have chosen to keep this story short?

### Part 5: Meaning & Impact

Objective: To interpret the film's deeper meaning and assess its emotional and social impact.

- What message or takeaway is the film communicating?
- Did the film challenge or change any of your thinking?
- What connections can you make to real-world issues or your own experiences?
- Does the film inspire action? If so, what kind?

# 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

## SMALL STORY, BIG WORLD

### How to Use this Thinking Routine:

A documentary short often focuses on one person or place, but points to larger social, cultural, or global issues. Use the framework below to analyze how each of these short films broadens its message.

Film	Small Story	Bigger Issue
<b>BOIL THAT CABBAGE DOWN</b> Candace Mae Williamson	Who is the film about?	What larger issue does their story represent?
		
	What specific experience do we see?	What broader pattern does it reveal?
<b>DIPSEA GENERATIONS</b> Paddy O'Leary	Who is the film about?	What larger issue does their story represent?
		
	What specific experience do we see?	What broader pattern does it reveal?

# AFTER VIEWING

## SPARK, FLAME, FIRE

### Introduction:

Documentary short films are powerful tools for storytelling, awareness, and change. Unlike longer films, they must quickly capture attention and communicate a message that lingers beyond the screen. These films are often designed not just to inform, but to spark conversation, evoke emotion, and inspire action.

### How to Use this Thinking Routine:

In this activity, you will analyze both documentary shorts using the “Spark-Flame-Fire” framework. This framework will help you examine how each film introduces its message, develops it, and extends its impact to a broader audience.

### BOIL THAT CABBAGE DOWN | Candace Mae Williamson

#### SPARK | The Ignition

- What moment, image, or idea ignites the film’s message?
- What issue or topic is the film raising awareness about?
- What emotions does the film try to spark in the viewer?

#### FLAME | The Build

- How does the filmmaker develop the message over the runtime?
- What storytelling techniques are used?
- How effectively does the film blend interviews, music, visuals, pacing, narration, or archival materials to move the story?
- How does the film keep your attention and deepen your understanding of the subject?

#### FIRE | The Impact

- What larger idea or message spreads beyond the film?
- What does the film ask the audience to think, feel, or do?
- Does the film suggest change or action? If so, how?

#### FILMMAKER’S PURPOSE

- What conversation do you think the filmmaker hopes to start?

# AFTER VIEWING CONT.

## SPARK, FLAME, FIRE

### DIPSEA GENERATIONS | Paddy O'Leary

#### SPARK | The Ignition

- What moment, image, or idea ignites the film's message?
- What issue or topic is the film raising awareness about?
- What emotions does the film try to spark in the viewer?

#### FLAME | The Build

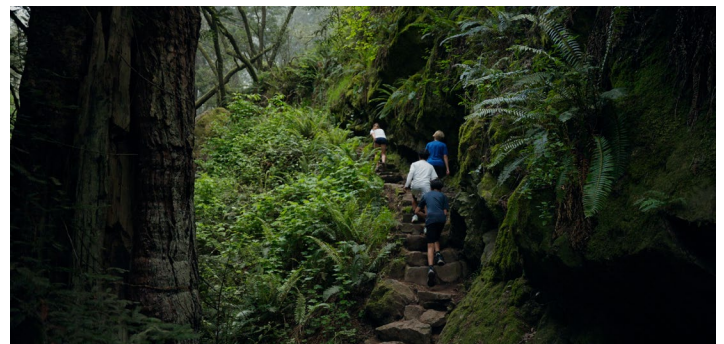
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- What larger idea or message spreads beyond the film?
- What does the film ask the audience to think, feel, or do?
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#### FILMMAKER'S PURPOSE

- What conversation do you think the filmmaker hopes to start?



# AFTER VIEWING

## INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

### Directions:

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

### Small Frame, Big Stakes:

Short films focus on specific stories while pointing to larger issues. How do the filmmakers use individual or localized stories to comment on broader social realities? Write an essay in which you argue how these short films feel bigger than their runtime. Use specific examples from the films to make your thinking visible.

### Platform as Amplifier:

Both films center the voices of young people. In what ways do these films use the documentary platform to amplify youth voices? Write an essay in which you analyze how filmmaking choices - structure, imagery, editing, sound, interviews, or narration - shape whose voices are heard and how audiences are meant to respond. Use specific examples from the films to make your thinking visible.

### Storytelling as Action:

These films don't just tell stories, they engage in real-world conversations. To what extent can short documentary films act as a form of activism? Write an essay in which you evaluate how effective short-form storytelling can be in influencing public awareness, empathy, or change. Use specific examples from the films to make your thinking visible.



# EXIT TICKET

## TWO FILMS, ONE CONVERSATION

### Instructions:

Consider how these two films speak to each other, then respond to one of the questions below.

- How do they deepen a shared conversation by viewing them together?
- If you could continue the conversation, what question would you ask the filmmakers?

ADMIT ONE

ADMIT ONE



# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

## BECOMING THE “FIRESTARTER”

### Introduction:

Now that you’ve analyzed how these two films ignite awareness and action, imagine you are the filmmaker. What issue, story, or voice would you bring to light? As a “firestarter,” your goal is not just to inform, but to spark something in your audience that cannot be ignored. This activity is designed as an opportunity to pitch a film that could actually be made.

### Consider:

- What topic or injustice feels urgent or personal to you?
- What would be at the center of your story, and why does that perspective matter?
- What emotions do you want your audience to feel and what action do you hope they’ll take?
- What specific film techniques (interviews, visuals, music, narration, pacing) would you use to build your message?

### Directions:

In a brief proposal (written, visual, or spoken) outline your short documentary idea. Focus on how you would **ignite**, **build**, and **leave a lasting impact** - just like the films featured in this program.

### Short Documentary Film Pitch Outline

#### 1. Working Title

- A compelling, memorable title that captures the essence of your film.

#### 2. Logline (1-2 sentences)

- A logline is a concise summary of your documentary that captures the essence of your film. Look back at the examples from the films in this program.

#### 3. Central Topic | Issue

- What real world issue, question, or story is at the heart of your film?
- Why does it matter now?

#### Point of View | Purpose

- What is your perspective as the filmmaker?
- What do you want your audience to understand, feel, or question?
- What conversation do you hope to start?

#### 4. Main Subject(s)

- Who is at the center of your documentary?
- Why are they the right person or people to tell this story?

# EXTENSION ACTIVITY CONT.

## BECOMING THE “FIRESTARTER”

### 5. Story Arc | Spark - Flame - Fire

- Spark - The Ignition: How does the film hook the audience? What “ignites” the story?
- Flame - The Build: What key moments, conflicts, or revelations develop the message?
- Fire - The Impact: How does the film resolve or leave the audience thinking or feeling?

### 6. Visual & Audio Style

- What visuals will you need: Interviews? Observational footage? Archival materials?
- What music or sound design will you use to support your visuals?
- Where and when will you use voiceover narration to tell the story?

### 7. Key Scenes or Moments (2-3 examples)

- Briefly describe specific moments you imagine in the film.

### 8. Intentional Impact | Call to Action

- What do you want your audience to do after watching?
- How does your film act as a “firestarter”?

### 9. Target Audience

- Who needs to see this film, and why?

### That’s a Wrap:

Wrap it up by turning the classroom into a mini “pitch” festival. Have each student deliver their pitch to the class as if they’re presenting it to producers. They should hit the essentials of topic, purpose, style, and why it matters now. Encourage students to “sell” their idea by sparking interest and enthusiasm.

### Critic’s Choices

As classmates listen, they can provide quick feedback or vote on categories like:

- Most Compelling Story
- Most Visually Creative
- Most Urgent Topic
- Most Likely to Start a Conversation

### Brief Reflection

- Which pitches sparked the most attention, and why?
- What made these films feel like “firestarters” even before they’re made?

# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

## MY PLACE, MY STORY | THE PERSONAL ESSAY FILM

### Note to Educators:

For optimal results, this extension activity is designed to span up to two weeks. Providing students with ample time for pre-production, production, post-production, and a classroom festival-style screening of student films will deepen engagement and support more thoughtful, meaningful outcomes. Adjust pacing as needed to fit your classroom context and instructional goals.

### MY PLACE, MY STORY

#### Introduction:

Documentary filmmakers don't just record reality, they influence how we understand it. A personal essay film is your chance to enter that conversation. It's your turn - not just to tell a story, but to decide why it matters. This activity isn't about being dramatic or cinematic - it's about being intentional: choosing a moment, idea, or question from your life and shaping it into something others can experience.

#### If you had three minutes to document something in your world, what would you choose and why?

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 isn't 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.

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.

#### The Framing Questions:

- What story do you carry with you that the world doesn't see yet, and how could telling it change something?
- Who gets to tell the stories that shape how we see the world, and what happens when you tell yours?
- If you don't tell your story, what gets misunderstood, or lost?
- How do you translate something personal into something universal?

#### Directions:

Download CAFILM's activity guide for step-by-step instructions and resources for students to tell their story in a 3-minute personal essay film. This guide includes pre-production, production, and post-production materials.

#### MY PLACE, MY STORY Activity Guide

<https://www.cafilmedu.org/my-place-my-story/>

**That's a Wrap:** Wrap it up by turning the classroom into a mini film festival. Have each student share their story on a bigger screen with a wider audience.

# 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](http://www.filmfreeway.com)) for a database of worldwide film festivals where you can submit your film.