



# Breakwater Studios Stories

## STUDY GUIDE

Content written by **Ankoor Patel**.

Designed by **Camille Gwise, Soph Schultz Rocha, and Keith Zwölfer**.

All SFFILM Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFILM Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.



More info at [sffilm.org/education](https://sffilm.org/education)

**SFFILM**





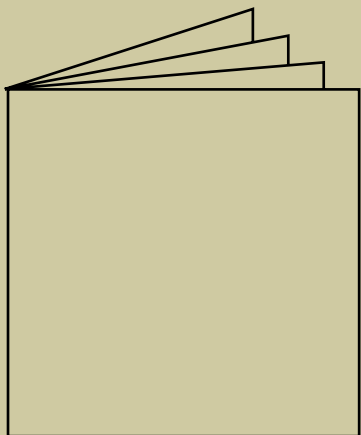
SFILM





# Index

02	About the Films
03	Presenter Bio
04	Discussion Questions
05	Activities
07	Media Literary Resources
08	Common Core Standards
09	Documentary Guide





# About the Films

Breakwater Studios, founded in 2012 by Academy Award® winning Nova Scotian filmmaker **Ben Proudfoot**, celebrates their 10th anniversary in documentary filmmaking. Beginning with early USC student projects, Proudfoot has led Breakwater to become a creative force in the short-documentary space with films that have screened at over 130 film festivals, including the Sundance Film Festival. Their distinct style of cinematic humanist storytelling continues to bring the studio award recognition and critical acclaim.

**Suggested Subjects:** Activism, African American Studies, Arts/Media, Asian American Studies, English Language Arts, History, Journalism, Music, Political Science, Social Studies, Women and Gender Studies

**Recommended Grades:** 4 – 12

## The Best Chef in the World

**Ben Proudfoot**, USA 2022, 21 min

The French Laundry, currently run by legendary chef **Thomas Keller**, has often been recognized as the best in the world. But few know the story of its founder, **Sally Schmitt**. In an emotional final interview before her passing in March 2022, Sally tells her own story as a pioneering chef of California cuisine and sets the table for another way to look at life: where balance, rather than recognition, is the ultimate prize.

## MINK!

**Ben Proudfoot**, USA 2022, 20 min

Told by her daughter Wendy, **MINK!** chronicles the remarkable **Patsy Takemoto Mink**, a Japanese American from Hawaii who became the first woman of color elected to the U.S. Congress, on her harrowing mission to co-author and defend Title IX, the law that transformed athletics for generations in America for girls and women.

## A Concerto is a Conversation

**Ben Proudfoot**, USA 2021, 13 min

A virtuoso jazz pianist and film composer tracks his family's lineage through his 91-year old grandfather from Jim Crow Florida to the Walt Disney Concert Hall.

## TEACHING THE FILMS

Over the course of these three shorts, Director Ben Proudfoot focuses intently on the remarkable and ingenious sides of his subjects without losing sight of their humanity. This meditative and patient practice in film portraiture creates engaging pieces that also touch on turning points in American History and how they relate to our lives now.

A screening of this film will complement a curriculum in Language Arts and History subjects, specifically delving into American History, Government, and English Language & Composition. Central themes also include civil rights, perseverance, and storytelling.

## PRE-VIEWING TOPICS

Throughout Breakwater Studio's various documentaries, portraiture, archival materials, and oral storytelling are all essential elements. To prepare a class for the screening of this shorts program, consider how students can define these storytelling methods and include them. What does it mean to look closely? Why is looking closely important in school? Why is it important in life outside of school?

Imagine someone you would want to make a portrait or profile of (it can be themselves!): What archival materials would you want to use from their life? What could you use? What is okay and not okay to use? How does a storyteller determine what is okay to look closely at? How is portraiture vulnerable? Why is trust in portraiture important?

# Presenter Bio



An Academy Award® winning short-documentary director and entrepreneur, **Ben Proudfoot** is the creative force behind Breakwater Studios. The studio's work has been recognized by the Academy Awards®, The Emmys, The Peabody Awards, Critics Choice Documentary Awards, The James Beard Awards, the Sundance Film Festival, Telluride, and the Tribeca Film Festival among others. Proudfoot was named one of Forbes "30 Under 30" for his leadership and innovation in the brand-funded documentary space. He hails from Halifax, Nova Scotia, and is a graduate of the University of Southern California. Proudfoot is an accomplished sleight-of-hand magician and has performed at The Magic Castle in Los Angeles.





# Discussion Questions

## The Best Chef In the World

1. What does Sally mean when she refers to balance? Why does the filmmaker choose to begin the film with this out-of-sequence event?
2. Why does the filmmaker include outdoor sounds including bird calls and other ambient sounds? What do these sounds represent?
3. Listen to the music in each section. Why does the filmmaker use these songs and what feelings do they evoke?
4. What motivated and inspired Sally Schmitt to own the French Laundry?
5. When describing her process at the French Laundry, Sally names the final ingredient in her process is to “pile high with good conversation”. What is she piling onto? How does conversation improve the food and restaurant?
6. Is Sally Schmitt the best chef in the world? What does it mean to be the best chef in the world?

## MINK!

1. Why does the interview begin first with the description of the Ford Pinto? How does this decision serve the entire film?
2. What motivated or inspired Patsy? Did she always succeed? How did she respond to hardship? Explain.
3. Wendy Mink shares how her mother taught her that “change might be slow but change is going to happen”. What change do you want to see in the world and what can you do to begin the process to make that change a reality? Brainstorm.
4. Why do you think the film is titled MINK! and why do you think it is styled with an exclamation mark?
5. At 19:00, Patsy Takemoto Mink shares a conversation she had, stating: “I couldn’t find a job. And [they] say, wish we had never heard of Patsy Mink. I say, well, it’s because of your attitudes that drove me to politics, if you had given me a job when I came home from law school, I would’ve been very happy.” Why does the film end with this footage and what do you think it means?

## A Concerto is a Conversation

1. Why does the filmmaker overlap the audio between Kris and his grandfather, Horace Bowers Sr.?
2. What instruments can you hear?
3. Why do you think the composer wants to know more about his grandfather’s life? What question would you ask Mr. Bowers?
4. Why is being a black composer important? Why was music important to his grandfather?
5. When Kris’s grandfather reflects on being denied a bank loan in-person and approved via mail, he states “In the South they tell you, in LA they show you.” What does this mean? How is this relevant to Kris and his story? Explain.
6. How would you describe the film’s tone? Why does the filmmaker evoke this tone?
7. Why do you think the concerto piece is called A Younger Self?

## Series Reflection

1. What was your favorite short? Why?
2. Did you notice any reaction you had from a short that surprised you? Why was it surprising?
3. What similarities did you notice between the films?
4. What are some differences that stood out to you between the three films?
5. The filmmakers use shallow focus for their interview scene, casting the background in contrast with the highly defined foreground of the speaking subject. What does this effect have on each short?



# Activities

## Conducting Breakwater Interviews

Each short in the Breakwater Studios series showcases their signature interview style that is sensitive to the stories and silences of their subjects.

For this activity, draft and conduct an interview with a consenting subject to listen to a story they have to share.

- Brainstorm a list of people you could conduct an interview with, who have a story they would like to share. After deciding on 5 people, see who is interested.
- Draft 10 interview questions with the intention of finding the answers to the following guiding questions:
  - ◇ What motivates or inspires this person?
  - ◇ What actions did they take in their life?
  - ◇ What challenges did they overcome?
  - ◇ How do those challenges make them feel?

NOTE: These questions may not be directly applicable to your interview; rather, use these guiding questions as a springboard to ask more specific and guided questions.

- Interview them, leaving space to affirm your subject, making the interview more of a conversation.
- After the interview, reflect on what you learned about your subject and yourself after hearing their story.

# Activities (Cont.)

## Civil Rights Act of 1964 Gallery Walk

Throughout these shorts, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 looms over the personal stories of the subjects and their entire families. These films are excellent examples of what was at stake for Americans with the passage of the groundbreaking Civil Rights Act and its crucial protections to the American people in the face of injustice and discrimination. Additionally, this activity is an opportunity to learn more about the Legislative Branch of the U.S. government.

Each title of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 contributes to a different social site wherein discrimination takes place. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act directly influences Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

To set up this activity, set up stations throughout the classroom where the images and videos linked below are posted on the walls.

Now, encourage students to take their time to inspect each primary source and its relationship to the specific title within the Civil Rights Act. During their gallery walk, be sure to have them take note of their reactions both in their notes and, if they choose to, on the wall next to the primary source with a post-it note.

*Title I - Voting Rights:* [African Americans, waiting to register to vote, form a long line outside the Dallas Courthouse in Selma, Alabama, February 1965.](#) New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Collection, [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress

*Title II - Injunctive Relief Against Discrimination in Places of Public Accommodation:* Rosa Parks' notes concerning the early days of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, [1955]. Autograph notes. [Page 2 - Page 3.](#) Rosa Parks Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (277.00.00, 277.00.01) Courtesy of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development

*Title III - Desegregation of Public Facilities:* Tony Auth. [Next!](#) 2004. [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress

*Title IV - Desegregation of Public Education:* Warren K. Leffler. [African American and white school children on a school bus, riding from suburbs to an inner city school in Charlotte, North Carolina,](#) 1973. U.S. News and World Report Collection, [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress

*Title V - Commission on Civil Rights:* Patsy T. Mink's handwritten notes for speech given in support of the civil rights plank at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. Envelope, July 12, 1960. [Page 2.](#) Patsy T. Mink Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (114.00.00) Used with permission of Gwendolyn Mink.

"Addressed procedures for the Civil Rights Commission, broadened its duties, and extended its life through January 1968. Its duties included investigating allegations that citizens were deprived of their right to vote or to have their vote properly counted. It also studied legal developments related to a denial of equal protection of the law, particularly in the domains of voting, education, housing, employment, public accommodations, transportation, and the administration of justice."

*Title VI - Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs:* Warren K. Leffler. [Governor George Wallace attempting to block integration of the University of Alabama.](#) Photograph, June 11, 1963. U.S. News and World Report Magazine Photograph Collection, [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (139.00.00)

*Title VII - Equal Employment Opportunity Discrimination Because of Race, Color, Religion, Sex, or National Origin:* [Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division.](#) Courtesy of NBC News

*Title VIII - Registration & Voting Statistics:* Warren K. Leffler. [Demonstrators with signs outside the White House, protesting police brutality against civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Alabama,](#) 1965. U.S. News and World Report Collection, [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress

After every student discussion and progress during the Gallery Walk, use this [Learning for Justice Worksheet](#) to revisit the act with additional context, and have the students work together to summarize the different titles and what they mean. signature interview style that is sensitive to the stories and silences of their subjects.

For this activity, draft and conduct an interview with a consenting subject to listen to a story they have to share.

## Continue Your Research

What do you wish to see changed in the world? Brainstorm a list of 5 different social issues and problems you would like to change in your immediate community.

Next, using local news sources including newspapers like the SF Chronicle or radio journalism like KQED's The Bay or databases like the [San Francisco Bay Area Progressive Directory](#), research the current leaders working to solve the same issues you are concerned about.

Consider writing a letter or reaching out to the person or organization to show your support and see if there are other ways to get involved.

## Write An Essay

Research Bill Nichols's six modes of documentary—poetic, expository, reflexive, observational, performative, and participatory. In which mode would you classify this documentary? Does it occupy space in more than one mode? What traits from the film helped you classify its mode?

What is one quote from one of the three shorts that stood out to you? How does the quote inform the speaker's mentality when they face hardship?





# Media Literacy Resources: Screening with Meaning

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive. Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

1. **Medium:** the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
2. **Author:** the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
3. **Content:** the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
4. **Audience:** the target audience to whom it is delivered
5. **Purpose:** the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

### MEDIUM

#### All Media Is Constructed.

- What is the message, how is it delivered and in what format?
- What technologies are used to present the message?
- What visual and auditory elements comprise the media content?
- What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?

### AUTHOR

#### All Media Is Constructed by Someone.

- Who is delivering the message?
- Who originally constructed the message?
- What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?

### CONTENT

#### Media Is A Language For Information.

- What is the subject of the media message?
- What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content?
- What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response?
- To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?

### AUDIENCE

#### All Media Messages Reach an Audience.

- Who receives the message?
- For whom is the message intended?
- What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message?
- What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message?
- How might others perceive this message differently? Why?

### PURPOSE

#### All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.

- Why was the message constructed?
- Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How?
- To what extent does the message achieve its purpose?
- What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?



# Common Core Standards

## English-Language Arts Content Standards:

Grade 5: Standard 1.8 Analyze media as sources for information, entertainment, persuasion, interpretation of events, and transmission of culture.

Grade 6: Standard 1.6 Support opinions with detailed evidence and with visual or media displays that use appropriate technology.

Grade 6: Standard 1.9 Identify persuasive and propaganda techniques used in television and identify false and misleading information.

Grade 6: Standard 2.8 Note instances of unsupported inferences, fallacious reasoning, persuasion, and propaganda in text.

Grade 7: Standard 1.8 Analyze the effect on the viewer of images, text, and sound in electronic journalism; identify the techniques used to achieve the effects in each instance studied.

Grade 7: Standard 2.6 Assess the adequacy, accuracy, and appropriateness of the author's evidence to support claims and assertions, noting instances of bias and stereotyping.

Grade 8: Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.

**This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts Standards for Reading Informational Texts in grades 5–8. Additional specific standard applications are below:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.



# Documentary Guide

## What is a documentary?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker **John Grierson** coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker **Robert Flaherty's** romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like **Dziga Vertov** in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. **Leni Reifenstahl's** propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth.

The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

## A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

1895

The Lumiere brothers develop the first motion picture film reel, capturing brief unedited clips of life around them called 'actualities.'

1900-1920

Travelogue or 'scenic' films become popular showcasing exoticized images from around the globe.

1926

**Dziga Vertov**, with the Soviet Kino Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, **Man With A Movie Camera**.

1939

**John Grierson** collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in the support of war.

1960s

The 'cinema vérité' movement began in Europe, followed by the 'direct cinema' in the US. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968

The Argentine film, **La Hora de los Hornos**, opened the door to activist cinema of the 1970s, using film as a tool to counter capitalist politics in Latin America.

1988

Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s

The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium more affordable to independent filmmakers.

Present Day The term 'documentary' comes to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of truth in film and to explore new avenues and applications for the medium.