



The Last Repair Shop & A Concerto is a Conversation

STUDY GUIDE

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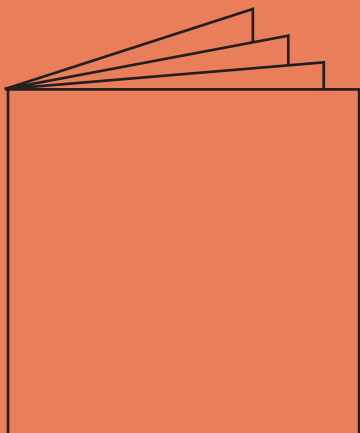






Index

- 02 About the Film
- 03 Pre-Viewing Topics
- 04 Presenter Bios
- 05 Discussion Questions
- 06 Activities
- 07 Documentary Guide
- 08 Media Literary Resources
- 09 Common Core Standards





About the Film

The Last Repair Shop

Los Angeles is the largest and one of the last American cities to provide free and freely repaired musical instruments to its public schoolchildren, a continuous service since 1959. From Academy Award-nominated directing duo **Ben Proudfoot** and **Kris Bowers**, **The Last Repair Shop** grants access to the nondescript, downtown warehouse in which a dwindling handful of devoted craftspeople keep over 80,000 student instruments in good repair. Witness the profound life stories of four staff master craftspeople as well as the students whose lives have been transformed by their instrument. In the students' stories, music has been the continuous thread that has mended their hearts and brought them to where they are now—fixing broken instruments to get them back into the longing hands of Los Angeles' public school youth.

A Concerto is a Conversation

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.

Recommended Grades: 3–12

DIRECTORS
Ben Proudfoot, Kris Bowers

(USA 2023), English
39 mins

(USA 2020) English
13 mins

Teaching the Film

These short films explore how the past can impact the present, and the ways in which people rely on community to overcome obstacles. By placing personal history in the context of greater social change, these films make use of storytelling elements to create rich portraits of interesting subjects.

A screening of this film will complement a curriculum in Language Arts and History subjects, specifically delving into Music, History, Social Studies, and English Language & Composition. Central themes also include creativity, perseverance, and storytelling.

Suggested Subjects

- **African American Studies**
- **Art / Media**
- **Career Path Training**
- **English Language Arts**
- **Journalism**
- **LGBTQ+ Studies**
- **Mental Health**
- **Music**
- **Social Studies**



Pre-Viewing Topics

Before watching the films, ask your class how they would tell their own personal story.

- What moments in history are important to contextualize their lives?
- How would they visually represent those moments?

These films also use music as a metaphor for storytelling. Instruments, when played in harmony with others, work together to tell a story greater than the sum of its parts. As a class, discuss what this means.

- How is music important to culture?
- What can we learn from music?



Presenter Bios



Kris Bowers- Director & Producer

Kris Bowers is an Emmy Award-winning, two-time Grammy-nominated, and Academy Award-nominated filmmaker and composer. A Juilliard-educated pianist, Bowers creates genre-defying music that pays homage to his jazz roots—with inflections of alternative and R&B influences. Composing the original scores for Best Picture **Green Book** and Netflix hit **Queen Charlotte** among many notable credits, Bowers has established himself at the forefront of Hollywood's emerging generation of composers. Up next, he will be heard in the highly anticipated **The Color Purple**, to be released this December and the 2024 biopic for Paramount, **Bob Marley: One Love**. Throughout his career, he has consistently championed an art practice guided by multidisciplinary collaboration.



Ben Proudfoot- Director & Producer

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's School of Cinematic Arts. Proudfoot is an accomplished sleight-of-hand magician and has performed at The Magic Castle in Los Angeles.



Discussion Questions

The Last Repair Shop

Content warning: brief mention of suicide, war and violence

1. What do you know about the different categories of musical instruments? Did you learn about any new instruments in this film?
2. The violin repair person says “the emotional broken things” are more difficult, and can’t be “glued back together.” How does this film use metaphor to tell the story?
3. Why do you think the filmmakers want us to know about the personal histories of the people who work at the repair shop? How do their stories relate to the stories of the instruments they are repairing?
4. What questions would you ask the people who repair the instruments? Were you surprised to learn anything about them?
5. What motivated or inspired the woman repair person to take the test to work at the repair shop? How did getting the job change her life?
6. The kids interviewed in this film describe how learning music has changed their lives. Explain how music and playing instruments helped these students. Do you relate to them? In what ways?
7. Do you play any musical instruments? How has watching this film impacted how you feel about the musical instrument you play? If you don’t play an instrument, has watching this film inspired you to learn? Explain.
8. How does the music you hear in this film impact your understanding of the stories being told?
9. This film uses a lot of close-up camera shots to tell the story. Why do you think the filmmakers decided to look so closely at the subjects of the film?
10. This film also uses archival and historical footage to tell the story. In what ways does seeing the historical pictures and video help to tell this story? Do you like this? Why or why not.

A Concerto is a Conversation

1. Kris, the composer, explains that a musical concerto is just like a conversation. How does this explanation frame how you understand this short film?
2. This film has a quick pace, both visually and in dialogue. How does the pace of this film help you understand the story being told?
3. We learn about the grandfather’s life as a young child growing up in the South. How has his personal history impacted the life of his grandson, Kris?
4. As the grandfather explains his journey hitchhiking as a young man, the filmmaker makes use of a split screen. What did you see in the split screen? Why did the filmmaker tell the story this way?
5. The grandfather says, “people are constantly throwing up things to stop you in life,” but that they could not stop him. How is this important to both his and Kris’s life? How do we learn about how the grandfather’s past impacted Kris’s future?
6. Why do you think Kris’s concerto is called ‘For A Younger Self’?
7. What thoughts or emotions did you notice you experienced watching this film? How did the tone and storytelling impact your experience watching it?

Series

1. What do these two films have in common?
2. What is different about these films?
3. How did watching these films together impact your understanding of each film? In which order do you recommend others should watch these films?
4. Which film in this series was your favorite? Why?



Activities

These activities expand on the themes of personal narrative and portraiture. Both projects explore how taking a closer look can help tell a more interesting story. Please adjust these activities to be made into shorter creative exercises, or turn into longer-term classroom projects.

1. New Perspectives
2. Personal Histories Research

Writing Activity: New Perspectives

The person repairing the wind instruments in *The Last Repair Shop* recounts how she has a “jar of treasures” of items found deep within the instruments she repairs: troll dolls, crayons, batteries, toys.

For this activity, write a short story from the perspective of one of the instruments featured in the film. What is your story? Get creative!

- What ‘treasures’ are buried within that instrument? How did they get there?
- What kind of story would the instrument tell about its life and the kids who have played it?
- How did the instrument get damaged, and how did the experience of being repaired feel?

Research & Reporting Activity: Personal Histories

Many of the adults who work at the music repair shop think about how the instruments they are fixing could end up in the hands of soon-to-be Grammy award winners or great musicians. We also saw that the family of the conductor, Kris, worked very hard to help him succeed at a career in music from a very young age.

For this activity, **research** and **report** on your favorite musician or musical group. Learn about their personal histories, and the ways in which their past influences their present. What were the lives of your favorite musicians like when they were young?

Working with a partner or small group, research a musical group or artist that you admire. Use a variety of sources to understand your research subject: publications, archives, interviews, and video.

After researching, **create** a short comic strip or a poster presentation about your research. Use the films you watched today as inspiration on how to tell their story.

Here are some questions to consider while researching:

- Where did they grow up?
- Did they participate in any musical programs or lessons as a young kid?
- What kinds of hardships or obstacles did they overcome to succeed as a musician?
- How does their past influence their present?
- What historical events were taking place when they were growing up? Does that influence their music?

Then use a visual medium (a comic strip, a poster presentation, a powerpoint, or something else!) to tell their personal history. Use the films you watched today as inspiration on how to tell a personal history through visuals: think about close-ups, historical photos and video clips, and sound tie together to set the tone for understanding someone else’s life.



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 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.



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 language of the medium. 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. Many 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.

MEDIA LITERACY 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

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.