

FAMILY SHORTS



CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILM:

The smallest members of your family, the young at heart, and everyone in between will find something to love in this exciting lineup of films. This eclectic collection has the power to connect us with storytellers in far-off destinations, from China and South Africa to our own backyard. Works from emerging filmmakers are placed alongside those by veteran artists, including Oscar-winner Patrick Osborne, Festival alum Julia Pott, and Pixar Animation Studios, here presenting its latest work.

Total runtime 70 minutes.

USING THIS GUIDE:

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of the Family Films program.

Support materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

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.

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SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Which film in this series was your favorite? Why?
2. Which film in this series was your least favorite? Why?
3. Which film in this series do you think was the most challenging to make? Why?
4. The films incorporate a wide range of storytelling styles, from documentary to animation to narrative fiction. Which film's style was the most interesting to you? What techniques did it use that set it apart from other films?
5. Which film made you want to be part of it? Why?
 - Which character would you want to be?
 - How would you change the film to end with your own ending?
6. Which film touched your heart and made you think?
 - What part made you feel connected to it?
 - Do the characters or situation remind you of anything?
7. Which character would you take out of one short and insert into another short?
 - What would they see, do, or say?
 - How would that change the film?
8. What was your least favorite film and why? Be specific: was it too sad, too slow, too ???
 - As a director what would you change?
 - As an editor what would you take out of the film?
 - As a writer what would you write into the film to make it more likeable your opinion?
9. Which character would you want to sit next to in class? Why? What do you think they would bring in their lunchbox for lunch?
10. What words would you use to describe this series as a whole? What common themes can you find? Do you think these films were interesting to watch together? Did any seem out of place?
11. Did you enjoy the Family Films series? What more do you want to know about these films? What questions do you have about how they were made?

WHICH CHARACTER
WOULD YOU WANT
TO SIT NEXT TO IN
CLASS? WHY?



BIG BLOCK SINGING WIZARD

Synopsis

Is it possible to be a wiz at everything, without overlooking some very important wizard details? (Warren Brown, Adam Goddard, Canada, 2017, 2 min)

Discussion Questions

1. What is a wizard? What makes a wizard unique?
2. What are you a whiz at?
3. What is his conflict or problem in the movie? Does he have a plan of action and a solution? What is it?

CRISANTO STREET

Synopsis

Armed with a video camera, eight-year-old Geovany Cesario joyously captures the mood of his family during a pivotal moment in their lives. (Paloma Martinez, USA, 2017, 12 min)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you notice about the setting of the beginning of the film? Why is he sitting under the window? What could you infer from the fact that his family have no lights on in the house?
2. Is there another camera crew as part of the filming of this movie? How do you know? What do they film? Can it be helpful to filmmakers to have more than one camera viewpoint? Why?
3. Why do you think the neighbor in the hat told him to “fight for his life”?

BIRD KARMA

Synopsis

Dazzled by the colors of its sparkling prey, a cunning and dexterous bird makes a fateful decision that alters the cosmos, and results in a swift and fitting conclusion. (William Salazar, USA, 2018, 5 min)

Discussion Questions

1. What does karma mean? How does it relate to the film?
2. What is an ecosystem? What things in the movie were showing up that were not the natural part of the ecosystem plants and animals?
3. What part surprised you the most about the film?

COIN OPERATED

Synopsis

A young explorer dreams of soaring to the heavens, but finds a major obstacle in the form of limited financial resources. Luckily for him, the old-fashioned neighborhood lemonade stand is still around to provide a reliable source of income. (Nicholas Arioli, USA, 2017, 5 min)

Discussion Question

1. How did the movie and characters let you know what they were thinking without talking/dialogue?
2. How do you know what the kid felt when the actual ride didn't meet his expectations?
3. What was the moment of suspense? How did the storyteller create suspense for that moment? Sound? Camera? Character expression?



JESSZILLA

Synopsis

Jesselyn “JessZilla” Silva is passionate about boxing, and at just 10 years old, she trains seriously with dreams of becoming a professional fighter. All the while battling stereotypes of what a girl can and cannot do. (Emily Sheskin, USA, 2017, 7 min)

Discussion Question

1. Has anyone ever told you that you cannot do something physical because of your age/gender/size before?
2. Can you be brave in one aspect of your life and afraid of other things at the same time?
3. If you were going to give yourself a nickname for the “brave you”, what would it be and why?

LATE AFTERNOON

Synopsis

Supported by the love of family, an elderly woman drifts back through her memories, existing in a delicate balance between her past and the present. (Louise Bagnall, Ireland, 2017, 10 min)

Discussion Question

1. What is the beginning of the story setting? Where do you think she is?
2. What is the story line of the film? Who are all of the characters?
3. Does this film help you understand memory loss that can happen in a more visual way? Why or why not?

PIG THE DAM KEEPER, CHAPTER 4

Synopsis

A delightful hand-drawn interlude, overflowing with charm from SFFILM favorites Tonko House, finds Pig overwhelmed by a picnic gone astray. (Erick Oh, USA, 2017, 5 min)

Discussion Question

1. What happens to the Pig? Summarize the story.
2. What do you think of the characters in this film? How are they familiar to you and how are they unfamiliar to you?
3. What do you think of the animation style used in this film? Do you like it?

SCRAMBLED

Synopsis

A classic toy competes for the attention of a young girl consumed with her flashy smart phone as she waits impatiently for her ride home. (Bastiaan Schravendeel, Netherlands, 2017, 7 min)

Discussion Question

1. How do you feel about the two main characters? Describe them in three sentences.
2. How is solving a puzzle different than a video game?
3. Personification: How does the cube have attributes (behavior/movement) that make you think it’s a living thing? Did that make you emotionally make you feel anything about the cube?



SHERBERT ROZENCRAINTZ, YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL

Synopsis

A shy young girl's world revolves around her beloved pet guinea pig. When her mother unsuccessfully attempts to find her a human friend, it allows her to see things from a whole new perspective.

(Natalie van den Dungen, Australia, 2017, 10 min)

Discussion Question

1. What do you think of her room creations for Sherbert?
2. Why do you think she loves Sherbert so much? How does he make her happy?
3. What does she realize about Sherbert's happiness toward the end of the film? How does she solve that conflict?

UNDISCOVERED

Synopsis

Getting a photo of Sasquatch has always been difficult, but not for the reasons we think.

(Sara Litzenberger, USA, 2017, 3 min)

Discussion Question

1. How does the film creator take away the scary aspect of the creature by making him seem more human and normal? What does he do with the camera?
2. What is the problem that keeps coming up in the film?
3. If you were going to name the creature, what would it be and why?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY

Create Your Own Story

Drawing inspiration from the films, choose a moment in your life or story you have heard, and transform it into a plan for a short film.

- Write a logline -- a brief outline of the plot, meaning, and message of your film (3 sentences)
- Decide on a genre of your film. You may choose to make a narrative fiction, like *Sherbert Rozencrantz You're Beautiful*; animation like *Bird Karma* or *Undiscovered*; or a documentary like *Crisanto Street*. A story can be told in many ways, so think carefully about which format is right for your subject.
- Make a list of the characters who appear in your film. Include a brief description of each character.

As a homework assignment, students might write scripts or create storyboards for their films. If time and interest allows, they may be encouraged to film a short clip from each story idea, using phone cameras or available resources.



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.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM

All Media Is Constructed.

- How is the message delivered and in what format?
- What technologies are used to present the message?
- What visual and auditory elements are used?
- 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?



THE NON-FICTION FILM 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.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

1895 The Lumiere brothers developed the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called "actualities" (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)

1900-1920 Travelogue or "Scenic" films became popular, showcasing exoticised images from around the globe.

1926 John Grierson coined the term "documentary" to describe Robert Flaherty's romantic nonfiction film, *Moana*.

1929 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino-Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With a Movie Camera*.

1935 Leni Reifenstahl released *Triumph of the Will*, the infamous propaganda film that chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.

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 the war.

1960s The cinema vérité movement began in Europe, shortly followed by "direct cinema" in the U.S. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* opened the door to the activist cinema of the 1970s, which used film as a tool to counter capitalist and neo-colonial politics in Latin America.

1988 The US Congress mandated that the US government support the creation of independent non-commercial media, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium vastly more affordable to independent and amateur filmmakers. Video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo allowed amateur filmmakers to broadcast their work.

PRESENT DAY The term "documentary" has come 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.



THE ANIMATED FILM: WHAT IS ANIMATION?

Animation is a process used to create motion pictures through the combination of still images (e.g., digital graphics, photographs of drawings, photographs of objects, etc.) which, when played in sequence, create the illusion of movement. All television cartoons, for example, are animations, and are made up of thousands of still images (drawn by hand or on a computer) that are played sequentially, along with a soundtrack, to tell a story.

Types of Animation

2D Animation Techniques

- Classic animation (e.g. Disney's *The Lion King*, most TV cartoons)
- Rotoscope (e.g., *Star Wars* lightsabers)
- Flip books

3D Animation Techniques

- 3D animation (e.g., Pixar's *Toy Story*, *Wall-E*, *Up*)
- Stereoscopic 3D (e.g., *Avatar*)
- Cut-out / Silhouette animation (e.g., *South Park*)

Stop-Motion Techniques

- Claymation (e.g., Nick Park's *Wallace and Gromit*)
- Puppet animation (e.g., Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Coraline*)

History of Animation

The world's most famous animator, Walt Disney, began making short animated cartoons based on children's stories in 1923. In 1928 he introduced Mickey Mouse in the first animated sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, which became an immediate sensation. Throughout the next decade, Disney would add such elements as carefully synchronized music (*The Skeleton Dance*, 1929).

Technicolor (*Flowers and Trees*, 1932), and the illusion of depth with his multi-plane camera (*The Old Mill*, 1937), a device that allowed for animated cels to be photographed against a three-dimensional background. Although not the first animated feature, Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first to use up-to-the-minute techniques and the first to receive widespread release. The film's success can be attributed in part to Disney's willingness to use animation to create a profound dramatic experience. He strove for photographic realism in films such as *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942).

The success of television cartoons led to the virtual disappearance of animated shorts produced for theatrical release. Animated feature-length films, however, flourished, especially after the release of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989), regarded by many as the studio's best animated feature in decades. Other Disney blockbusters followed, including *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994) and *Lilo & Stitch* (2002).

The development of computer animation was another great advancement in the form and resulted in feature films of astounding visual sumptuousness. In 1995, *Toy Story* was the first film to use only computer-generated imagery (CGI). In 2001 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences added a new Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film. The first recipient of the award was *Shrek* (2001). Other major animated features were *Toy Story* (1995) and *Toy Story 2* (1999), *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Finding Nemo* (2003).

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