



Homeroom

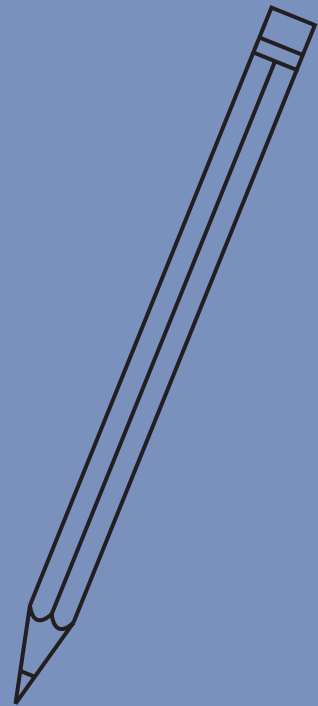
STUDY GUIDE

Content written by **Ankoo Patel**.

Designed by **Ankoo Patel, Camille Gwise** and **Keith Zwolfer**

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



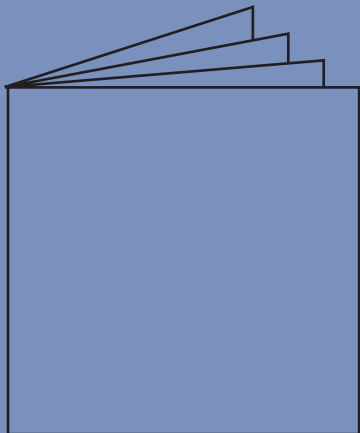
SFFILM
education





Index

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





About the Film

Oakland High School's 2020 senior class faces extraordinary challenges beyond graduation and college applications even before COVID-19 disrupts the school year. Led by an activist student council, the largely African American and Latinx student body demands the school board remove police from campus, a defiant act that eerily foreshadows the protests sparked by George Floyd's death. In shining a light on these courageous youths, *The Waiting Room* and *The Force* director Pete Nicks brings his Oakland trilogy to a riveting close.

DIRECTOR
Peter Nicks

(USA 2021) English,
90 mins

Teaching the Film

Peter Nicks' *Homeroom* is a feature documentary chronicling the 2019-2020 school year of Oakland High School's seniors facing rigid school bureaucracy, white supremacist violence and racism, and the onslaught of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In their effort to rid their schools of punitive practices and law enforcement, these high schoolers' struggle fold into national conversations around place and power as they prepare for life after high school graduation. A screening of this film may complement a curriculum in history or social studies, specifically delving into social justice movements and student activism.

Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will encourage students to think about the importance of social institutions in their everyday life, the struggles of grassroots activism, and the power they have to foster and protect justice, equity, and inclusion in their communities.

Recommended for Grades 8-12

Subject Areas

- **African American Studies**
- **Latin American Studies**
- **Journalism**
- **Social Justice**
- **Social Studies**
- **Student Activism**
- **World/Current Affairs**



Pre-Viewing Topics

Documenting the 2019-2020 school year for Oakland High School seniors in both an observational (also known as 'cinéma vérité') and multimedia style, this film can launch an array of in-class dialogues and discussions around some of its central themes. These range from the pervasive violent racism prevalent in our most trusted public institutions, the personal tolls of surviving the COVID-19 pandemic, and the trauma of growing up Brown and Black in communities rampant issues with over-policing. (It should be noted that these complex issues of police murder, the pandemic, and racism may have impacted someone in your class and should be treated with care.)

To prepare a class for a screening of *Homeroom*, first ask students to consider their own experiences and reflections about the school system they find themselves in. Ask: What is a system of institution? What role do these superstructures play in your communities? How does your school shape the life and/or structure of their neighborhood? What is a school board? What is the responsibility of a school board? What is the advisory structure that undergirds your own education?

Have you seen or participated in any direct action to make change, such as a protest, rally, strike, or boycott, for example? What issue was the direct action in response to? What did it feel like to watch or participate? Did the direct action catalyze meaningful change or healing? What social issues do you care about the most? How would you work with others to correct a social injustice in your community? What is your responsibility to your community, if any?

Also important to this film is the role media plays in the everyday lives of students. Ask your students if they spend time consuming or making social media? What role has video technology played in their life in the past year? What role does video technology play for them in their free time? How do they take care of themselves in times of hardship? What role does technology play in those times? What companies create this technology and do they think about the role these companies

have had in reshaping and pushing people out of Oakland and other bay area communities?

Other conversations surrounding media and the mediation of everyday life and (especially in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic), and the history of law enforcement are all suitable entry points into the main themes of the film.

As a pre-viewing activity, ask your students to work in groups to brainstorm how they would initiate school reform with their school board through an itemized and chronological plan that ends in a list of tangible action items beneficial for the students and workers of their school/education.



Discussion Questions

Characters and Story

1. The film depicts the 2019-2020 year for Oakland High School 12th grade students through intimate portraits of everyday life.
 - What are the students learning about in this year of school?
 - How do the students describe this year of school?
 - How does the film make you feel? Describe your embodied reaction to the film.
 - How does the film feel when students quarantine in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic? How does it differ from the beginning of the film? How is it the same?
2. Of the ensemble of students the film follows, the most prominent is Denilson Garibo.
 - Why does the film focus on Denilson Garibo's story? What does Garibo's experience and position on the school board show us about Oakland High School?
 - How does Garibo help his community and how is it different from other students? How do the other students speak up and reach out to their communities?
3. Throughout the year, the film focuses on interactions between students and figures of authority.
 - How do these authority figures help the students?
 - How did authority figures address discrimination (especially racism) in the community? How did it differ between these figures? How did students address these same issues?

Style and Message

1. What are your opinions on the film?
 - What issues did this film address?
 - Which parts of the film were most interesting to you?
 - Does this film have a message? What do you think it is?
2. The film tells the story of these students through an observational cinema style, popularized by the 'cinéma vérité' French filmmakers, is an approach to documentaries keen on depicting a semblance of reality.
 - What methods does Nicks deploy to make the film feel real? How do these methods differ from other documentaries you have seen? How are they similar?
 - Was this approach effective in conveying the themes/ issues of the film? Why or why not?
 - What role did the social media clips play in the story? What was their purpose?
 - Did the film impact your perception of the school system or the Bay Area?
 - How would you feel about a documentary film crew recording your experience of an entire school year?
 - What impact do you think this process had on the students in the film?



Discussion Questions

Themes and Context

1. Talk about organizational values most important to a successful school.
 - What are the responsibilities a school has to its students?
 - On the Oakland Unified School Board, two students were representing thousands of people enrolled in the school district. How does this system benefit the community? How could the system be more equitable?
2. The film centers on the ways in which students express themselves and speak up even under difficult circumstances and insidious institutionalized racism. For many of these students, fear of police and hostility toward them is to be expected?
 - How do unsafe conditions harm student's performance and success in school?
 - What should be the norm in public/community spaces like schools?
 - How does the student group work together to talk about issues like racism?
 - How do these students communicate with each other?
3. Among the many pressures these students are under, this film documents the way Oakland is changing under ongoing gentrification due to job growth in tech corporations.
 - What role do tech corporations like Apple or Facebook play in the film? Where do you notice these companies?
 - How do the students feel and describe the ways their neighborhood is changing?
 - How does the school change and not change by the end of the film and school year?
4. How has your impression of the education system changed after watching this film?
 - What stood out to you and why?
 - How did this film make you feel about your own school/experience in the education system?



Activities

Essay Prompts

1. How do the filmmakers convey authenticity in the narrative of the 2019-2020 school year it tells? What role does the inclusion of social media material and news footage play in this sense of authenticity?
2. Are social institutions like schools capable of correcting or reforming their issues? Use the film Homeroom as evidence for your argument.
3. For many, if not all of these high schoolers, Oakland is not just the namesake of their school but their home. What is their relationship to Oakland? How are these students able to make the place of Oakland their home? How would you define a home and are these students successful in place-making Oakland for themselves?

Reimagine Schooling

Work in small groups and **brainstorm** the most important school reform action items that can **promote the success of students** at your place of learning.

Research your school and consult a number of teachers to understand what action items could best benefit student success. With your research, draft a group proposal appropriate to present to a school board.



California Media Literacy Standards

Analysis and Evaluation of Oral and Media Communications

- Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare's *Henry V* with Kenneth Branagh's 1990 film version).
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.14 Analyze the techniques used in media messages for a particular audience and evaluate their effectiveness (e.g., Orson Welles' radio broadcast "War of the Worlds").

Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication

- Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.7 Use props, visual aids, graphs, and electronic media to enhance the appeal and accuracy of presentations.
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.10 Evaluate when to use different kinds of effects (e.g., visual, music, sound, graphics) to create effective productions.

Comprehension

- Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.2 Analyze the impact of the media on the democratic process (e.g., exerting influence on elections, creating images of leaders, shaping attitudes) at the local, state, and national levels; Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).



Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of 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.RI.9-10.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

For more information about Common Core standards, see www.corestandards.org



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?



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 reels, 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. The term 'documentary' comes to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema.