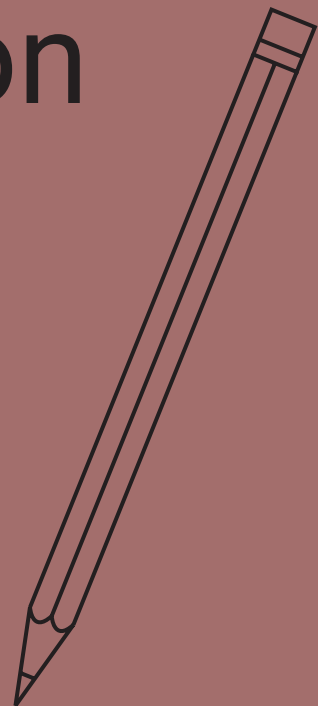# From Fact to Fiction

STUDY GUIDE

Content written by Ankoor Patel.
Designed by **Ankoor Patel**, **Camille Gwise**, **Keith Zwolfer** and **Qilu Zhou**

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.
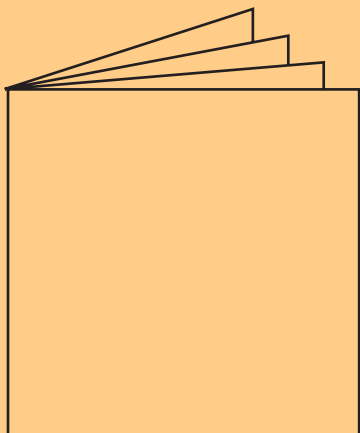
More info at sffilm.org/

SFILM
education

Index

SFILM
education

About the Series

Collected from around the world, this compilation of short films explores such topics as the cultural traditions of African American beauty salons, personal exploration of identity, challenging family dynamics, and finding ways to connect to the natural world around us. It features narrative, documentary, and animated films using traditional hand-drawn stop-motion and CG techniques to bring their characters to life. This collection gives students the perfect smorgasbord of all the SFFILM Festival has to offer. Class screenings of the From Fact to Fiction Program compliments language arts, social studies, and media studies curricula.

Subject Areas

- **African American Studies**
- **Arts/Media**
- **Environmental Science**
- **Middle Eastern Studies**
- **Native American & Indigenous Studies**
- **Peer/Youth Issues**
- **Social Studies**
- **Women/Gender Studies**

Teaching the Film

This shorts program offers a wide exploration of storytelling, filmmaking techniques, cinematic attitudes, and ethical investigative nonfiction journalism. Key to many of these shorts is the intrinsic value of community and interdependence as we work to overcome persecution, hardship, or loss.

Recommended for grades 6-12

Presenter Bios

Morgan Mathews
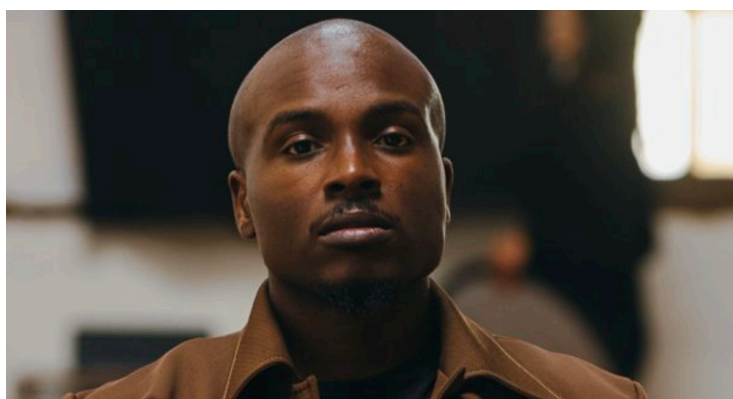
Morgan Mathews is a writer-director born in Atlanta, GA and based in the East Bay, CA. His current works span across narrative and non-fiction filmmaking, while leaving room to bridge the two together. Creating in different genres and formats, Morgan's storytelling approach stems from an obsession with nuance and finding the range of interiority through Black life across family dynamics, classism, and subculture experiences.

While working at a tech company in 2019, Morgan co-wrote and directed a half-hour dramedy series concept, "Bit.", which was inspired by the lived experiences of his partners at Chocolate Chip Media and is currently in a development agreement. Over the past two years, Morgan has been an artist-in-residence at SFFILM's FilmHouse for his feature length film inspired by "Half-Day" as well as the documentary "Black Butterflies" that explores the subculture of durags and its implication as a self-care practice for Black men across the world.

Patricia Lee

Patricia has always had a hard time writing bios, which was part of her inspiration for writing Hannah's Biography. After over a decade working in architecture and energy engineering, she made the intrepid leap to sitting alone in a room thinking up stories in front of a blank computer screen. She had the opportunity to bring one of these stories to life in the short film Hannah's Biography with the support of the SFFILM's Filmhouse Residency and hopes to have many more opportunities to do so

Presenter Bios

Shireen Alihaji

Shireen Alihaji is a Latinx, Iranian, Muslim, Disabled filmmaker born and raised in LA. Her revolving identities inspire her to create space through film technologies for intersections to exist and expand.

She co-authored Flipping The Gaze: Restorative Filmmaking Techniques and Technologies with Kausar Mohammed, which builds from the work of Philip Butler to unpack: What happens when we take technology such as the camera, which was historically used to oppress communities through surveillance to the harmful tropes of mainstream media, and flip the gaze to reclaim historical perspective that would otherwise be erased? What does a Muslim Future look like when we are the ones holding the camera?

She serves as a story consultant for independent films and Artist Support for the Islamic Scholarship Fund where she co-created Muslim-Centered film programming; an evolving framework that supports Muslim filmmakers to restore, center and define their narratives. In her free time, she has volunteered as videographer for the Women's Mosque of America and mentors filmmakers.

Discussion Questions

Series Discussion Guide

1. Which film in this series was your favorite? Why?

2. Which film do you think was the most challenging? Why?

3. Which film subjects/characters did you find inspiring? What methods did these characters use to empower themselves?

4. Many of these films are stories of the relationship between a person and their place. Did any of these stories remind you of communities that you know? Did you identify with any of these characters? Do you relate to the strong sense of community that these people share?

   a. Describe the relationship Nigel from *The Trails Before Us* has to the land he h
   b.

Space Race
(**Shane Dioneda**, USA, 6 min)
Aspirations of glory on the surface of the moon are spoiled by a worthy competitor out for the same prize.

1. What are the characters' motivations? What are they competing for?

2. How does the film's soundtrack contribute to the story?

3. Why does one astronaut help their competitor? How does the moment reframe the story?

Babybangz
(**Juliana Kasumu**, USA, 11 min)
In a New Orleans salon, Anastasia cultivates freedom for Black women and their hair.

1. How has Anastasia designed her salon in service of her community?

2. How do the scenes of Anastasia and other black people in nature contribute to the narrative and messages of the short?

3. Why does the filmmaker use the long take?

4. In her training for other hair stylists, Anastasia assigns history, ethnic studies, and psychology readings in the program? Given the role of hair stylists as healers and the role of the salon in her community, what does Anastasia mean when she says these readings are intended to "deprogram" those she is training?

Blue Veil
(**Shireen Alihaji**, USA, 5 min)
Amina asserts her Muslim American identity as she reflects on post-9/11 Islamophobia and her parents' migration story.

1. What is this film's tone? How does the filmmaker invoke this tone?

2. What role does technology play in the film? How does it impact the relationship Amina has to family, grief, and the past?

3. How does the film and Amina use multiple perspectives within the film including first, second, and third person? What significance does this decision have each time the perspective shifts?

Half-Day
(**Morgan Matthews**, USA, 5 min)
A boy learns about his estranged father through a visit to his stepbrother's home.

1. What are the motivations of Dom? Why does he decide to leave in the end?

2. What does the Yu-Gi-Oh card represent to the protagonist, his half-brother, and his father?

3. What does the TV static signify in the short?

Discussion Questions

Hannah's Biography
(**Patricia Lee**, USA, 12 min)
A spunky recently divorced grandmother takes a stab at stand up comedy.

1. In the introduction, Hannah states that this is the first time she has been asked to write about herself. In light of this admission, what is the significance of Hannah trying stand up comedy?

2. How does Hannah deploy her sense of humor throughout the short?

3. How does voiceover contribute to the storytelling technique of the film? Does it lend or take away from the film's verisimilitude? (Verisimilitude: appearance of being true or real)

Intervals
(**Mitchelle Tamariz**, France, 3 min)
In French with English subtitles
Scornful looks from coworkers are not enough to squash the joy a baker achieves from baking a cake.

1. How does the protagonist deal with mistakes or surprises in her life?

2. In the short, the protagonist states that she "adorns" her life. What does this statement and sentiment mean?

3. How does the animation style contribute to the film's tone and message?

My Duduś
(**Tom Krawczyk**, USA, 8 min)
A Polish mother quells her empty nest syndrome by caring for an abandoned baby squirrel.

1. How would you describe Duduś when we first see him? How does the filmmaker capture Duduś's vulnerability?

2. As Duduś matures and must contend with a return to the wild, what worries does Czesława Krawczyk-Miczejko have about her Duduś?

3. When Czesława speaks of the 4 men in her life, we see her son Tom Krawczyk who has been holding the camera? How does this decision to show the camera change how you think of the short film? Why did Tom decide to show us the camera in the final moments of the short?

The Trails Before Us
(**Fritz Bitsoie**, USA, 13 min)
In English and Navajo with English subtitles
By revitalizing trails on his grandparents' land, a young Diné mountain biker and a new generation of riders honor the connection to their land, community, and culture.

1. What does stewardship mean?

2. How does mountain biking enhance the community building of the Diné people in the area?

3. In a New Yorker article with text by Philip Gourevitch, Gourevitch writes about the history of Canyon de Chelly. With the trauma on the land as present as it is, what role can community building play in combating historic social injustice?

Canyon de Chelly cuts through the heart of the Rez—spectacular to behold and heavy with history. The Navajo made their last stand against the U.S. Army there, in 1864, before they were driven out on a three-hundred-mile forced march known as the Long Walk. Many died along the way and on the return trek, after Navajo leaders signed the treaty that established the reservation. Even so, "This is not our land," Vincent Salabye, another cyclist on the Rez, said. The treaty only gave the Navajo the right to live on the surface, while Washington kept the soil and the riches that lay beneath. And, for more than a century, reservation children, including Salabye, were taken from their families and sent to boarding schools to be Anglicized, Christianized, and otherwise deracinated—perhaps above all by being forbidden to speak their language. This was the original trauma of the modern Navajo experience, and a century and a half later it haunts collective memory on the Rez, where existence is defined as much by the stark and stony magnificence of the landscape as by the struggle to overcome the contradictions of being both a sovereign and a subjugated people. Taken from Philip Gourevitch's The Extreme Cyclists of the Navajo Nation published in the New Yorker (https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-extreme-cyclists-of-the-navajo-nation)

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

Activities

Make Your Own Short Film
Drawing inspiration from the short 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) [A logline is a brief one sentence summary that succinctly communicates the central conflict and essential context of the project.]
- With your 3 sentence description, write a paragraph where you **expand** the logline into a treatment, a short summary of what happens in your film (one paragraph).
- Write a screenplay for a three-minute film. It should be three to four pages long and include at least one character. Focus your screenplay around a single climatic event, with rising conflict. *You could also create a shot list, a document of every camera shot desired in the video production.*
- Using your phone or a handheld camera, go and shoot your film. Bring a friend to work in a small team.
- Use video editing software like Pixorial or WeVideo to cut your footage into a film. Add music and titles if you want.
- Congratulations! You just made a movie!

Read, Discuss, and Respond

The Shape of Home
With a combination of shorts in the From Fact to Fiction program as your foundation, implement Learning For Justice's lesson entitled "The Shape of Home." (https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/the-shape-of-home)

- Begin a discussion about home, connecting to the film, and outlining essential questions:

  How do ideas of family shape the meaning of home for you? What do these short films communicate about home and family? Are they connected? Does home require loved ones to invoke belonging?

  For people in the films you had watched, what role did home have during moments of hardship?

  What example of home or belonging do you most relate to or identify with across the short films?

- Read "Connection to Everything" and repurpose the Handout Activity to contextualize multiple films' depictions of home and belonging.
- Perform the Activity Extension from the Lesson to transform the classroom into a more comprehensive place of belonging:

Activities

Extension Activity

Do Something

Explore as a class how you can make your school more welcoming to someone who has recently lost his/her home (i.e., by a fire)—or suffered the loss of something important to them. Tell students to think of something they can do today (e.g., creating a class rule against name-calling, putting multilingual signs on the class walls, and so on) to create an environment that helps the classroom feel like home. NOTE: Remain sensitive to the reality that students in your classroom might currently be experiencing loss.

For older grades, have students work with a partner to develop a two-page guide to help ease the transition when people move. Consider different reasons for people leaving their homes. Be sure to consider voluntary and involuntary reasons, too. Choose one issue (e.g., local issues, such as economic change or poverty, or a global issue, such as war) for the focus of your guide. A successful guide will include accurate information, show an awareness of the conditions that created the need to move and be reader-friendly. Post the guides on walls outside the classroom or other places where other students can read them, such as the library.

(*Taken from Learning For Justice: https://www. learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/the- shape-of-home*)

Writing Prompts

- Research Bill Nichols six models of documentary: poetic, expository, reflexive, observational, performative, and participatory. Using this framework, classify the documentary film shorts as one of these documentary genres and defend your argument.
- Compare and contrast the treatment of one of these themes across <u>two of the short films</u>, **belonging, technology, familial conflict, or personal agency.**

Common Core 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).

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
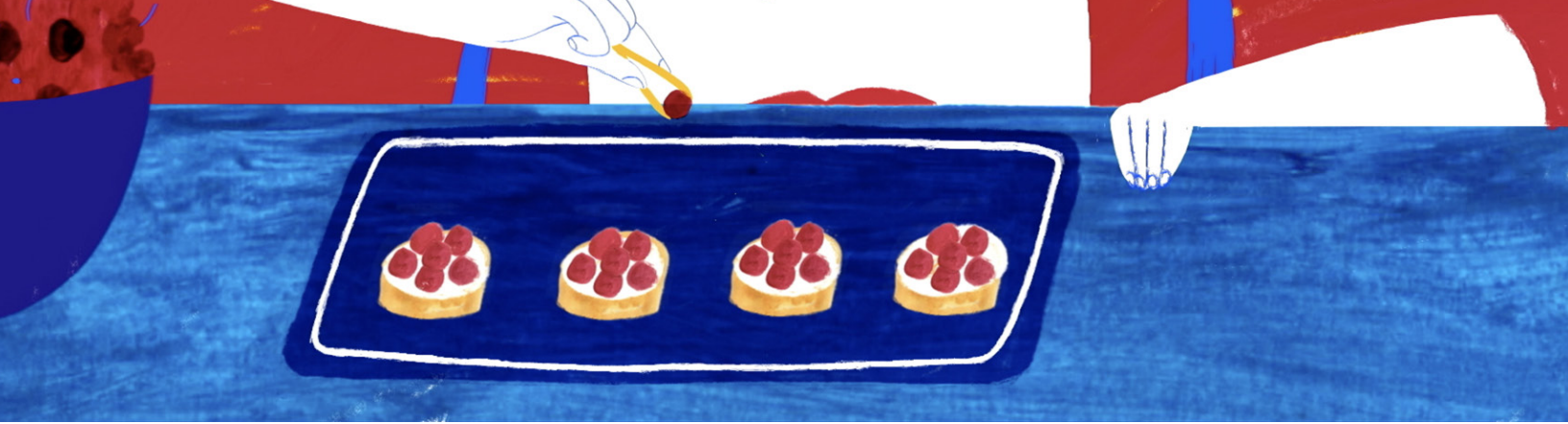
Media Literacy Resources: Screening with Meaning

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 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?