



# Deaf President Now!

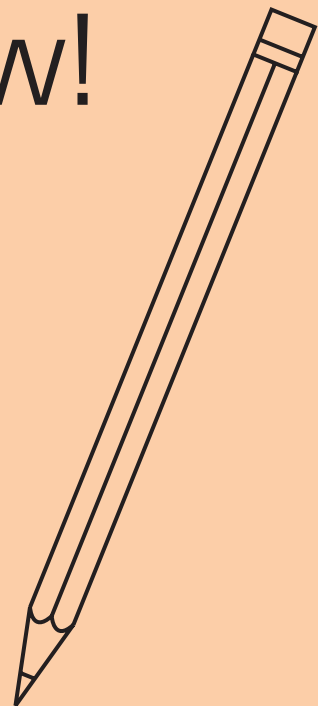
## STUDY GUIDE

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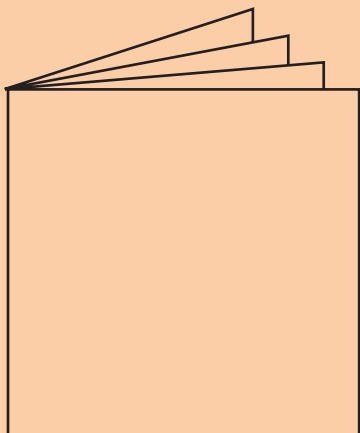






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# About the Film

For eight days in March 1988, students of Washington D.C.'s Gallaudet University protested the appointment of a hearing president. Demanding truly representative leadership, the students broke the cycle of pity and condescension that defined their experience at the world's first university for deaf and hard of hearing students. Actor **Nyle DiMarco**, a Gallaudet graduate, makes his directorial debut with this documentary that memorializes a watershed moment not only in American disability rights activism but also in the history of US student movements. Key players in the protest lead the audience through the events of those heady days and relate how they overcame sexism, ableism, and paternalism to ensure an equitable future for the generations of Gallaudet students that followed. Narrated through American Sign Language and voiceovers, **Deaf President Now!** relates the involving story of an under-reported triumph.

## DIRECTOR

**Nyle DiMarco, Davis Guggenheim**

## PRODUCERS

**Nyle DiMarco, Davis Guggenheim, Amanda Rohlke, Jonathan King, Michael Harte**

(USA 2024)

American Sign Language  
100 min

**Recommended Grades:** 7–12

**Program Note:** This film contains mild profanity.

# Subject Areas

- **Activism**
- **American Sign Language**
- **Disability Studies**
- **Journalism**
- **Peer/Youth Issues**
- **Political Science**
- **U.S History**





# Teaching the Film

The story dawns at Gallaudet University in Washington DC, the only truly Deaf university in the world, 1988, with a group of four intensely spirited, passionate young people: Bridgetta, a fearless adventurer with a clear moral compass, Greg, a reflective communicator who takes things in stride, Tim, an outspoken activist with a knack for challenging authority, and Jerry, an intense young man who feeds off of holding conversations with large crowds. Together, this team forged forward to fight for justice, challenge authority, and launch what is now known as the *Deaf President Now!* movement.

The film **Deaf President Now!**'s unique news-and-silence-flashback cinematic style launches viewers into a certain aspect of what some people have described their experience of deafness to be: an acutely ultra-focused perspective due to the removal of sound. The film deeply leverages world-building, intensive close-ups, and archival footage to paint a picture of a glimpse of certain Deaf people's worlds as the fertile grounds to telling this unique tale in the seething teeth of the merry-go-round of oppression. People using their eyes to hear. A Deaf professor locked in a car. A board president and a school president who cannot sign nor communicate with their own students. For one hundred and twenty-four years, Gallaudet School for the Deaf did not have a Deaf president. When two immensely capable Deaf candidates finally run, a hearing candidate is chosen once more, by a board who doesn't visit the campus but three times a year. Impassioned, the students rally together for a change. However, they soon find there are a great many obstacles to transcend and unearth, immersed and hidden underneath thick layers of bureaucratic divisions. To take on this daunting task as students of the college, the four aforementioned movement leaders were required to delve deep into self-reflection, their own past oppressions, and the kind of courage that doesn't leave. This situation gave each of them an opportunity to get their fiercely individual and equally strong voices heard. It was an opportunity to create order out of chaos, as an ongoing lesson repeatedly communicated in the film is that life is all about managing all five of your senses.

Back then (and sadly, still to this day), a great many judgmental assumptions were crafted up about Deaf community, such as the moment in the film when a news reporter outrageously states, "their protests, like their world, was one of eerie silence." When a young Tim attended elementary school, he was required to participate in strict speech classes every single day, learning the specific mouth movements of the rainbow of words and inflections he could not hear. It was intensely forbidden for Deaf people to utilize sign language, and, if found signing, they were tragically punished for it. Meanwhile, a little Bridgetta was a prized poster child for an experimental deaf "healing" technique with shockingly amplified headphones. One poster read, "*Bridgetta can't hear...but she is learning to speak.*" As young people, all of them had authority figures in their lives who forced them to act and to think like a hearing person. A vast amount of the hearing world viewed Deaf people as something bad: a defect, an error to be corrected, as exclusively hearing *impaired*.

Gallaudet deeply normalized the life experience that much of the world made feel alien. Students from all over the world, all different backgrounds, all races, and of all kinds of walks of life came to Gallaudet to simply find each other. And because there was only one Deaf college like this in the world, it was therefore far more than just a college—it was a deep treasure of authenticity to be profoundly protected. It was just about the only place where Deaf people can be deaf. Therefore, this movement wasn't just simply about getting a Deaf president, this was about prolifically protecting a whole world - that is, a little deaf world in a hearing world. This was a place where they could truly feel comfortable and safe. Therefore, they simply could not accept a leader who could not understand their world. However, to save it meant, in some ways, going to the very brink of destroying it.





# Teaching the Film

When someone is deaf, in terms of what is in front of you in your immediate surroundings, one only focuses on what's in your field of vision - a sound can't distract them or take your attention away. This film's story is told immensely by the serious, determined looks on students' faces that told stories of real, honest truth, foreboding hope, and painful clarity. Told from four vibrant perspectives, this is a complex and nuanced story of acceptance, of being accepted, and of the acceptance of self. Interviewed thirty-five years later, the four movement leaders approach the topic with a deeply thoughtful, emotionally sensitive, and intuitively transformative vigour. The root causes of deep societal bias is objectively analyzed in a technical fashion by revisiting popular figures in history and unveiling their original intent, or explaining that President Zinser was unfit for her position due to her nursing background, where being unable to hear was considered a problem to be fixed.

As the film advances, the four leaders forge an unlikely partnership with the news, which transforms into a voice for the deaf.

The results are nothing short of remarkable. From camping out in protest, writing on blackboards and locking all the gates, to making plans on blocking a helicopter from landing as a student barricade, the four young students show that there are lots of other ways to speak than just words. When they see they could contribute something, each person in the leadership team takes over as leader when needed. The leaders' true demonstration of bravery challenges the previously-held beliefs of everyone involved, and stokes the fires of passion as it gets down to the very thing it takes to make a change: force. But not just simply force. This is one person's story and everyone's story: the struggle to have your voice heard. This took excessive tenacity, an unfathomable amount of force far bigger than the current one they were personally facing. Bridgetta, Jerry, Greg, and Tim had to all overpower and overwork the negative, oppressive force that had existed decades before they did.

In a way, this force, this very oppression, bent and embodied into its own character form in the film. However, it can be argued that this just may be a story where the true main character becomes the movement itself.

Topics debated include an examination of transparency versus the lack thereof, the surprisingly detailed process of breaking through oppression, and the construction and deconstruction of artificial class divisions. The film delves deep into the topic of when people in authority abuse their own power through an analysis of bureaucracy, bringing about the contemplation: who is really hearing, the Deaf students or the non-deaf administration? In lieu of this, the film forces the question, what does it actually mean to hear? It also does a thorough breakdown of the differences between hearing versus listening. As one news anchor aptly put it, "The Gallaudet School for the Deaf's administration refuses to listen." Through all of these elements, this film is populated by the major overarching lesson in the power of rapidly saying "NO." The film includes an exciting portrayal of an influential woman, Bridgetta, smashing apart popular female stereotypes and busting open limiting societal expectations while choosing what to listen to and what to ignore. This important film reports and logs all of these moments in effortless storytelling, stretching the limits of the documentary medium to its most truthful. **Deaf President Now!** dissects the methodology behind organized advocacy and organized group action, and illustrates the steps to achieving effective public speaking.

*"The students and their leaders, Tim, Bridgetta, Greg, Jerry, you have found unity, built strength and purpose, shown courage, and discovered power to affect your own future." - Board President Spilman*

## Themes:

- Authority Figure Analysis
- Movement as Speech
- Hearing versus Listening
- Stepping into the perceptions of a Deaf World
- Evaluating the roles that sound has in our lives
- Transparency in Leadership and the responsibilities of a leader
- The experience of being deaf in a hearing world
- Stigmas and their ripple effect





# Pre-Viewing Topics

## **Movement As Language**

Pre-viewing questions: What is speech? What does it mean to speak? What are other actions that a person can take to communicate other than using words? Do you see Deaf people being represented in television advertisements? How about as characters on major networks? How about when you go to the movies?

## **Term: “Red Tape”**

The term “red tape” is usually used to describe when there is a situation with more processes or formalities than what is necessary or efficient. This technique is often used by leaders who want to give others a sense of control while really holding on to it for themselves. Another definition for it is “excessive bureaucracy”, bureaucracy meaning “a body of nonelective government officials”.

## **What is silence?**

Silence is the space between your tasks, the space between your thoughts, the space between the sounds you hear. It can be auditory, visual, time-relevant and more. Silence comes in many, many different forms and serves many different purposes. When there is silence, there is more room to think and do other things. Everyone needs silence. Because silence isn't just silence - when utilized efficiently, it's a tool for increased confidence, focus, and creativity.

## **Filmmaking Exploration**

In documentary film, you take many interviews, archival footage, and additional footage and turn it into one piece. Here are a couple of filmmaking methods used in this film:

- 1. Silence as a Filmmaking Technique** - In this film, silence is leveraged to match the Deaf people's experiences cinematically - with spaces of audio and video silence. Silence in film is a multifaceted tool that has a wide breadth of uses. It can create suspense or focus a viewer. It can take away distraction, or cause the feeling of restlessness. It can be a space for a character to reflect, or a time to process feelings. Without silence, film is just a bunch of moments without emotion.
- 2. Collective Characters** - In film, a character doesn't just have to be one person, it can be a group of people who represent a set of actions or beliefs.
- 3. Worldbuilding** - A filmmaking technique used to immerse you into a world. Can be visual, auditory, etc.
- 4. Reenactments in Documentaries** - These recreate historical events by filming new footage to help tell a story they can no longer visually capture in real-time, filling in the visual gaps of the film.





## Presenter Bios



### Nyle DiMarco

Director

**Nyle DiMarco**, a fourth-generation Deaf advocate, actor, and NYT bestselling author, has appeared in **Queer as Folk** and **Station 19**. He produced **Deaf U** and Oscar-nominated **Audible**, and is co-directing his debut documentary for Apple+. DiMarco develops projects championing Deaf and disability narratives, promoting inclusivity in storytelling.



### Davis Guggenheim

Director

**Davis Guggenheim** is an Academy Award-winning director of critically-acclaimed documentaries including **An Inconvenient Truth**, **Waiting for 'Superman,'** and **It Might Get Loud**, as well as several films for President Obama. He executive produced **Summer of Soul**, **Boys State**, and **Time** and is the Founder & CCO of Nonfiction at Concordia Studio.





# Discussion Questions

## Set 1: Exploring Power Dynamics

1. How does silence play a role in this film?
2. Do you think the students in a school should or shouldn't know what the administrators are meeting about? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the board members didn't want to speak directly with the students, as a group?
4. What is your personal experience like, with various administrations? What do you think it means to have equality in an administration? Do you think the administrators portrayed in this movie were acting primarily out of security or fear? Why?
5. In what way do you think an administrator should treat a student in their school to help make them feel important?
6. What are everyday ways you can make the people around you feel important?
7. How can we help to promote transparent leadership in today's businesses, advertisements, and organizations?
8. When was a time you experienced leadership that wasn't transparent? How can you create transparent leadership when you lead?
9. What did the students in the film do to ensure their campaigning kept being heard? What did they make sure not to do?
10. Why do you think they had group leaders talk in the student protests? What were these speakers trying to do?
11. What are ways you can help instill courage in others?
12. When was a time you felt that someone in a position of authority wasn't listening to you the way they should have? (*answers to this question are optional*)
13. Do you think being a leader may come with specific pressures or responsibilities? What kind? Who does a leader go to when they need guidance? Why?
14. During group meetings between the Deaf community, only one person at a time could sign, and they had a discussion moderator that chose the next person to sign so that everyone would know where to look next in order to be able to see them. What impact do you think this made on the campaign meetings? How did this help with teamwork and patience?
15. In one part of the film, a news anchor says, *"At Gallaudet School for the Deaf, their school administration refuses to listen."* What is the difference between hearing and listening?
16. Did the board ever ask the students their criteria for a president, or any questions in general, throughout this whole movie?





# Discussion Questions (Cont.)

## Set 2: Filmmaking Choices

1. In what ways do you feel this film had effective storytelling? Stylistically, what would you have added or done differently?
2. Who do you think is the main character in this film? Why?
3. How did the older footage and pictures bring this film to life? Why did the filmmakers use both pictures and videos of some of the same events?
4. Why do you think they used a black backdrop behind the movement leaders in the interviews? What do you think was the creative choice behind that?
5. What happens in a story when you get multiple perspectives on the same situation?
6. How do you think it helped move the story forward by sticking strictly to the same four main narrators? What do you think would have happened if they added more? What about fewer? How did it affect the story/story structure when they added a fifth narrator in it, I. King Jordan?
7. When the film was made, there were four separate interviews conducted with the leaders. What techniques and choices do you think the editor used to combine the stories together? How did he find the patterns? For that matter, how do you tell one story from four points of view? How do you think the editor decided what to keep in and what to keep out?
8. Why do you think the filmmakers used so much news footage? How do you think that is supposed to affect the feeling of the movie? How does it make you feel?
9. Collective Characters - As discussed in this guide's Pre-Viewing Topics section, in a film, a character doesn't just have to be one person, it can also be a group of people who represent a set of shared actions or beliefs. In this context, do you think the news, the movement leaders, the campus as a whole, and the Deaf community were each collective characters? What set of actions or beliefs do you think each group represented?
10. What techniques do the filmmakers use to develop relationships throughout the movie? How did the technique of asking the cast to describe one another help with developing relationships? And how does this technique contribute to the story's character development?
11. World-building was briefly mentioned in the Pre-Viewing Topics section. How did this film utilize world-building techniques to help viewers enter into a deaf person's world?
12. In one part of the film, the leaders each sign one of the four demands - how did this filmmaking style communicate unspoken teamwork through the technique of editing? What emotion did this filmmaking technique create?
13. Who showed transformation at the end of this movie/ shared story? In what way?





# Discussion Questions (Cont.)

## Set 3: Media Comprehension

1. What do you think made Jerry a powerful public speaker?
2. When telling the story, why do you think the four narrators kept using the words “our” and “us”? What effect do you feel that had on the story? Who was “us” in the film?
3. What was the ultimate purpose of the students’ protests?
4. What was the students’ relationship to the news?
5. What qualities did the student leadership team exhibit that made this a successful movement?
6. What were some of the creative ways students protested other than using signs? How do you think the utilization of the variety of methods served them?
7. The board said they would meet with the students only if the students open up the campus, as they generally never meet with their students. In what ways could this method of leadership be problematic?
8. Some of the deaf students didn’t believe they could get a deaf president. Why?
9. Why do you think the board would listen more to a student spokesperson?
10. Before the leaders came up with a plan, they decided to hold meetings with faculty, staff, and alumni - who had previously tried for years to get a deaf president - where they came up with four demands to the school’s administration. What was clever about this choice to meet with these people? How do you think this helped the movement leaders down the road? How did these people help the movement leaders take focused action?
11. When told by an administrator to stop recording, one of the students immediately yelled out to keep rolling. What was this an example of when they did this? Why do you think the movement’s leaders decided to film the whole movement?
12. Bridgetta said that, most importantly, they had to stick and stay together, and stay strong together. How was this a crucial part of their movement’s success? What might have happened if they didn’t do this?
13. What do you think Board President Spilman represented in the film?
14. What happened when Greg put back his hearing aid before appearing on national television?





# Discussion Questions (Cont.)

## Set 4: Perceptions of a Deaf World

*"Stop focusing on the dis in disability." -I. King Jordan*

1. Which other places in the world besides Gallaudet were the students able to go to be themselves and not "less deaf"?
2. When Greg was a child, he was told he had broken ears. How do you think that made him feel?
3. What if you were constantly told that people could help you, but others wouldn't let you help them? How would that make you feel?
4. For hearing students: If you didn't have access to your hearing, what do you think you as an individual might do more of? What might you want to do less? Do you think being deaf is a somewhat similar experience for everyone or that each experience is quite different? Why or why not?
5. For hearing students: In one part of the film, Bridgetta laughs and says that sometimes the radio goes on in the car and she thinks it is music when it is really the news. How do you think it feels not being able to hear what others are saying? What kind of peace might there perhaps be in that? If you couldn't hear, what sounds would you miss? What sounds would you not miss? In what ways do you think you might have an increased focus?
6. How do you think having movement as language affects self-expression?
7. When was a time you led something important to you?
8. How did you feel when you heard that board president Spilman said, "Deaf people are not ready to function in a hearing world"?

9. For hearing students: Why do we use vocal inflections when speaking? How would you feel if you spoke and couldn't hear your own inflections? How would using sign language make up for that? How would you feel if you were deaf and told not to use sign language, or to sign small?
10. I. King Jordan grew up hearing but ultimately became deaf and had to adapt to a deaf world. When he was running for president, some deaf students said he wasn't really deaf, so they didn't want him. How do you think that made him feel?

*"If you work with me, we can prove to the world that deaf people can do everything." -I. King Jordan*

*"And then there are people in the hearing community who don't understand what it's like to be deaf. So I'm not sure if I really have one foot in each world. I'm...I'm teetering." -I. King Jordan*





# Suggested Activities

## 1. Podcast

- a. In a team of four, produce a twenty-minute podcast episode using a free version of Adobe Podcast and use it to advocate for a topic that is important to you. <https://podcast.adobe.com/> Create a podcast cover using Adobe Express or Canva. When done, episodes can be played back in class.
- b. If you want to take this further, publish on popular podcast platforms (Apple Podcasts, Spotify, etc.) through RSS. There is a one-month free trial for this software. <https://rss.com/>

## 2. Publish a 60-Page Hardcover Book on Amazon - Semester-Long Project

- a. Work in groups or individually to write a book on an inequality that needs to be made equal, and publishes and lists it on Amazon to sell for themselves, if they wish to do so. The publishing is encouraged but not mandatory.
- b. Four-Step Guide to Self-Publishing:
  - i. For self-publishing hardcover books on Amazon that require no capital to publish and list, use Kindle Direct Publishing. [https://kdp.amazon.com/en\\_US/bookshelf](https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/bookshelf)
  - ii. Be sure to download the manuscript document template in the manuscript area of the website, where you can write all the parts of your book in Google Docs so that it's perfectly formatted.
  - iii. For great book covers, check out Canva's templates: <https://www.canva.com/book-covers/templates/>
  - iv. To create mockups for sales pitches or anything else, follow this link: <https://diybookcovers.com/3Dmockups/>

## 3. Building a Relationship with Silence: 7-Day Social Media and/or Tech Break Challenge

- a. As previously mentioned in the *Pre-Viewing Topics* section of this guide, silence is a tool to fuel creativity, productivity, focus, joy, and much more. All humans need it, in one form or another, and all humans need to build their relationship with it. Here is a seven-day challenge to fuel that relationship and to further understand the intense value in the absence of noise, or to not constantly be engaging all of one's senses at once. This challenge commences with a 10-minute group meditation suggested to be done together in the classroom. The rest can be done at home.
- b. **Jangama Meditation** - Meditation is an incredible tool and habit for silencing the mind which, once adopted, can yield outstanding lifelong results for stress reduction, enhanced focus, following dreams, leadership capabilities, etc. It's a great way to focus the senses and adjust one's relationship with silence. Following the ancient Jangama meditation technique, ask your students to close their eyes for ten minutes together with you and simply watch their thoughts without judging them and without trying to think about anything, just focusing on the act of watching while also imagining that they are watching the area in between the eyebrows. When you finish the meditation, open the activity for discussion and ask your students what their experience was like.
- c. Turn your phone and computer screens to black and white, and add a custom button in your control center if you have an iPhone, for easy access to the button in case you need to turn it on temporarily.
- d. Go through your notifications and turn off all the notifications you don't need, for apps, etc.
- e. Replace phone notes with hand-written notes as much as possible
- f. At the end of the week, journal a couple of paragraphs on how this experience made you feel, and if you noticed a change in any of the colors around you in the 3D world, your relationship with your technology, and anything you noticed after switching your devices back to color when the challenge was complete.





## Suggested Activities (Cont.)

### 4. Invent Your Own Shareable Working Software

- a. Think of a group of people or a cause you deeply want to advocate for, then create your own brand-new software that helps make something accessible to people that isn't usually accessible, by using chatbot Claude's artifact feature, and share it with the rest of the class (it has a shareable link directly on it). A good way to start is to think about some problems these under-talked-about groups or situations have, and how a software can solve it. Some ideas can include sign language flashcards, an ADHD-friendly brainstorming dashboard, a video game that teaches the gamer about global warming, etc. Claude can help you build them all. <https://claude.ai/>
- b. Utilize the following prompt: "Using javascript/html/css, and using your artifact feature, create a software that can [your prompt here]. Give it a modern interface, make it look fantastic. And make sure everything works."
- c. If the creator of the software wants anything changed, they can use the following prompt: "That looks perfect, except change [your prompt here]."

### 5. Silent Short Film

- a. Create a one-minute short film that has no sound by using your phone and a video editor. It must utilize one of the silence techniques that is mentioned in the Pre-Viewing Topics section of this guide. Get creative with camera angles and shots, and see how you can communicate a story purely visually in a film without sound. You may use vibrations.



# Beyond the Classroom

## Film Production Resources:

1. **Pre-Production:** Screenwriting: <https://www.studiobinder.com/scriptwriting-software/>  
Film Planning Software: <https://bit.ly/4cbmxDC>
2. **Production:** Camera = Smartphone, using Protake Mobile Cinema App  
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/protake-mobile-cinema-camera/id1498431506>
3. **Director's Vocabulary. There are the magic 3 words the director says right before shooting:** Director: Camera? (camera person: Rolling!) Director: Sound? (Boom Operator/Sound Recorder: Speeding!) Director: Hold for action, and...Action! **When you are finished shooting a take, you say "CUT".**
4. **Post-Production:** Avid First - Industry-Standard Video Editing Software  
<https://my.avid.com/get/media-composer-first>  
Fusion 19 - Industry-Standard, great for Special Effects with Fusion 19 - <https://www.blackmagicdesign.com/products/fusion>
5. **Free Filmmaking Resources Guide:** <https://bit.ly/film-makingcheatsheet>
6. **Free Creative Smartphone Filmmaking Apps:** Voice Record Pro <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/voice-record-pro/id546983235>  
VLLO Video Editor [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.darinsoft.vimo&referrer=af\\_tranid%3Dg-MA2qYVZI5DfnTrUpkg08A%26c%3Dwebsite-AOS%26pid%3DVLLO+WEB&pli=1](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.darinsoft.vimo&referrer=af_tranid%3Dg-MA2qYVZI5DfnTrUpkg08A%26c%3Dwebsite-AOS%26pid%3DVLLO+WEB&pli=1)

3. **Gallaudet Today:** Explore their current website. <https://gallaudet.edu/>
4. **Gallaudet University's YouTube Channel:** Explore a wealth of videos in ASL that include an option for captions <https://www.youtube.com/c/GallaudetU>

## For Activities

1. **Meditation: Focusing the senses.** Sometimes there is a lot in the hearing world that is grabbing for your attention. 30 minutes a day of Jangama Dhyana Meditation (as described in the Activities section of the guide) can work wonders. Perhaps try starting with ten minutes.
2. **Mindfulness App for Self-Care:** Finch is free, offline, and private. Take care of a little pet bird as you complete habits. Lots of cool features packed in. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/finch-self-care-pet/id1528595748>
3. **The Power of Off** - A fantastic book on our modern relationships with silence and technology. <https://www.amazon.com/Power-Off-Mindful-Virtual-World/dp/1622037952>
4. **Libby** - Free popular e-books and e-magazines powered by your local library. <https://libbyapp.com/interview/welcome#doYouHaveACard>
5. **Mimo** - Learn coding for free on your smartphone, like Duolingo <https://mimo.org/>
6. **GitHub** - Free, shareable place to store and share html/javascript/css projects via GitHub Pages, now with built-in ai to help complete beginners build their own software <https://github.com/>
7. **Fingerspelling** - Learn the alphabet in ASL <https://www.signlanguageforum.com/asl/fingerspelling/alphabet/>

## From the Film

1. **Behind the scenes of the directing of Deaf President Now!:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwuCO8ljYY>
2. **More information on Alexander Graham Bell and his relationship to the deaf community** <https://www.star-tasl.com/alexander-graham-bell/>





# 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

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.9

Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.7

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

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.RH.9-10.7

Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

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.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

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.

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.



# California Media Literacy Standards

## **Responding to Media**

Standard Identifier: 7.MA:Re7 and 8.MA:Re7

Grade: 7-8 Discipline: Media Arts Artistic Process: Responding. Anchor Standard: 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work  
Enduring Understanding: Identifying the qualities and characteristics of media artworks improves one's artistic appreciation and production. Essential Question(s): How do we 'read' media artworks and discern their relational components? How do media artworks function to convey meaning and manage audience experience? Process Component(s): Perceive Performance  
Standard(s): a. Describe, compare, and analyze the qualities of and relationships between the components and content in media artworks. b. Describe, compare, and analyze how various forms, methods, and styles in media artworks interact with personal preferences in influencing audience experience.

## **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).

## **Media Production**

Standard Identifiers: 7.MA:Pr4, 8.MA:Pr4 Grades: 7-8 Discipline: Media Arts

Artistic Process: Producing (Media Arts only) Anchor Standard: 4. Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Enduring Understanding: Media artists integrate various forms and contents to develop complex, unified artworks. Essential Question(s): How are complex media arts experiences constructed? Process Component(s): Integrate Performance

Standard(s):

Integrate multiple contents and forms into unified media arts productions, such as an interactive video game, that convey consistent perspectives and narratives.

Standard Identifier: Prof.MA:Pr4. Grade Range: Proficient. Discipline: Media Arts. Artistic Process: Producing (Media Arts only)Anchor Standard: 4. Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation. Enduring Understanding: Media artists integrate various forms and contents to develop complex, unified artworks. Essential Question(s): How are complex media arts experiences constructed? Process Component(s): Integrate. Performance Standard(s): Integrate various arts, media arts forms, and content into unified media arts productions, considering the reaction and interaction of the audience and experiential design.