



Souleymane's Story

STUDY GUIDE

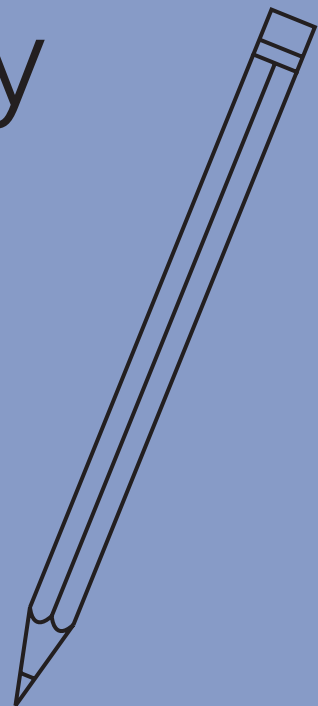
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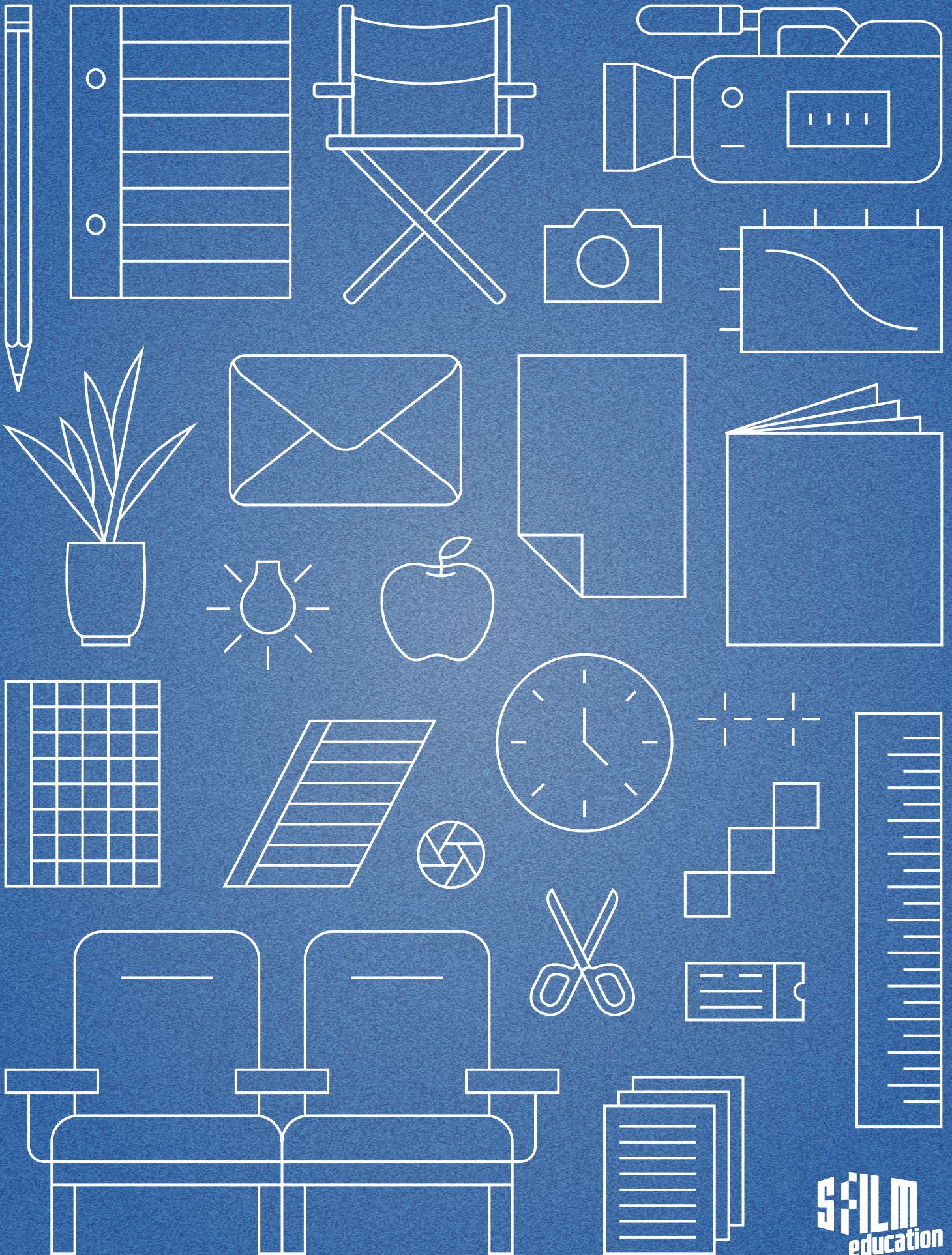
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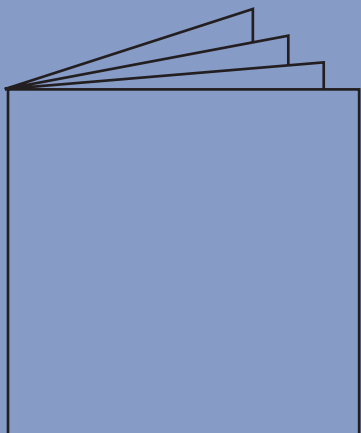
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About the Film

Meet Souleymane, an undocumented Guinean immigrant in France striving to build a new life and apply for asylum. To earn money, Souleymane rents a verified Uber Eats account from another employee, a frequent option for new arrivals. Weaving through the streets of Paris, Souleymane's history unfolds in waves, its details revealed between the crushing countdown of the delivery clock, unpredictable weather, and frustrated customers. Despite his circumstances, Souleymane's innate kindness shines through as he finds moments of levity and connection with his sheltermates, street vendors, and fellow delivery drivers. **Boris Lojkine's** moody and propulsive film plays like a thriller, steadily laying out the mountain of obstacles Souleymane confronts as he desperately strives to make the right choices. The film is a stunning digest of a life lived in the shadows with a revelatory central performance from first-time, non-professional actor **Abou Sangare** (winner of Un Certain Regard Best Actor at Cannes).

Recommended Grades: 8–12

Program Note: This film contains mild profanity and brief violence

Subject Areas

- African Studies
- Current/World Events
- French
- Immigration
- Political Science
- Social Studies

DIRECTOR
Boris Lojkine

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Bruno Nahon

(France 2024)
French, Fulah, Malinke
92 min



Teaching the Film

Reflecting the struggles of undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers, **Boris Lojkine's** film walks us through the life experience and survival of Souleymane, an undocumented Guinean immigrant in France, who navigates precarious work as a delivery driver while preparing for his interview with the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons, the office in charge of granting a permit to stay in the country.

Starred by **Abou Sangare**, an undocumented immigrant from Guinea himself, the movie incorporates elements of reality from Sangare's personal story, as well as the many others who have to face many difficulties to find where to stay at night, earn money while avoiding being scam victims, or getting their documentation through a complex immigration process.

Infused with a documentary style, evolving sound design, and covering multiple complex elements of the immigration and asylum-seeking experience, this film screening may complement a curriculum in African Studies, Current/World Events, French, Immigration, Political Science, and Social Studies. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will encourage students to think about African diasporas, immigration and refugee life experiences, international law and immigration policies, as well as labor and technology.



Pre-Viewing Topics

In a time when national governments worldwide are increasingly tightening immigration restrictions, public discussions center on managing both undocumented and documented immigration. Meanwhile, humanitarian crises in some countries force people to flee their homes. **Souleymane's Story** offers a human perspective on this complex global issue.

Undocumented immigrants face numerous challenges on their way to a new country. Upon arrival, their lack of documentation often denies them basic rights, including the ability to work and support themselves. Souleymane, for example, has to rent an account to deliver food through a gig economy app. At the same time, he struggles to craft a compelling narrative for his asylum application, knowing that dishonesty is not the right approach.

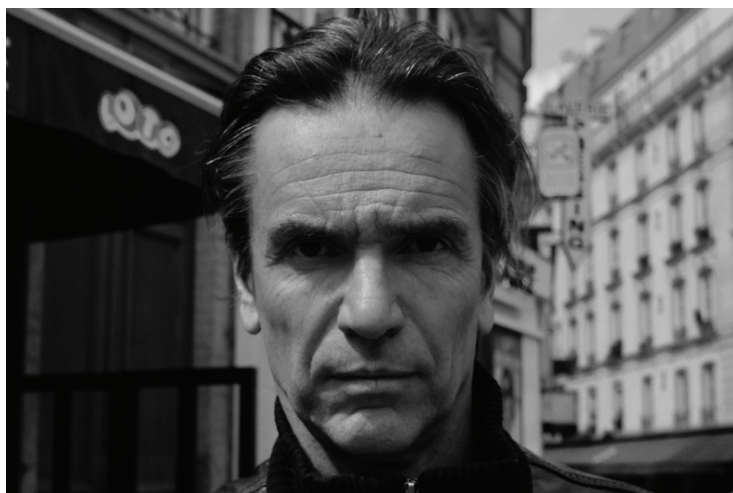
To prepare students for a screening of this film, begin by inviting them to reflect on their previous knowledge of immigration and asylum. Encourage them to consider what they've heard from friends, family, and the media, and to examine their own preconceived notions about people emigrating from other countries. Identifying preconceptions, stereotypes, and biases is essential for carrying an open and honest discussion on this highly controversial topic, which intersects with various social issues impacting millions of lives and communities.

Following this reflection, invite students to explore immigration experiences within their own families, if applicable, whether those have happened recently or a long time ago. Encourage them to investigate the circumstances of their relatives' immigration and the challenges they faced when they moved to the United States. While this exploration may be sensitive, it offers a valuable opportunity to connect personal stories with the main character's circumstances, challenges, and emotions.

As a pre-viewing activity, ask students to research and define the distinctions between immigrant, asylum seeker, and refugee.



Presenter Bio



Boris Lojkine

Director

Boris Lojkine, a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure with an “agrégation” in philosophy and a thesis on “Crisis and History”, decided to leave the university after completing his thesis. He closed his books and left for Vietnam, where he had previously lived and learnt the language. There he made two documentary films, **Ceux qui restent** (2001) and **Les âmes errantes** (2005), both of which tell the Vietnamese side of the impossible mourning of men and women whose lives have been torn apart by war. **With Hope** (2014), his first feature film, he switches continents to immerse himself in the Africa of migrants. The film was presented at the Critics’ Week in Cannes and received dozens of awards in international festivals (including 2 Valois Awards at the Angoulême Film Festival). In 2019, Camille won the Audience Award on the Piazza Grande at the Locarno Festival, as well as the Valois and Lumière Awards for Best Actress for Nina Meurisse. Presented at the Cannes Festival 2024 in the Un Certain Regard section, **Souleymane’s Story** is his third film.



French Vocabulary / Vocabulaire du film

Termes de l'Immigration et le Récit

1. un demandeur d'asile = asylum seeker
"Demandeurs d'asile, par ici, avancez, s'il vous plaît."
2. un opposant politique = political opponent
"J'ai été envoyé en prison comme opposant politique."
3. les partisans de l'opposition = members of the opposition
"C'est un quartier où les partisans de l'opposition habitent."
4. le secteur d'éducation = education field
"Concernant le secteur d'éducation, nous voulons faire une obligation que tous les enfants vont à l'école à partir de cinq ans."
5. une attestation = a certificate (document)
"Il faut avoir toutes les attestations."
6. les quartiers = neighborhoods
"Est-ce qu'ils connaissent les quartiers?"

Son travail et Sa vie personnelle

7. une commande = an order (food)
"La commande pour Tristan, s'il vous plaît."
8. un bonbon = candy
"Vous voulez un bonbon?"
9. dégueulasse = disgusting
"Je vois bien que le sac est dégueulasse."
10. un chef = a boss
"Bonsoir chef, où est la commande?"

11. annuler = to cancel
"On va annuler la commande."
12. les esclaves = slaves
"Nous ne sommes pas vos esclaves!"
13. le livreur = delivery man
"C'est le livreur, je suis avec votre père."
14. un collègue du travail = a work colleague
"C'est un collègue du travail."
15. crier = to shout
"Tu ne dois pas crier."
16. le compte = account
"Tu as bloqué mon compte."
17. souhaiter (qch) = to wish
"La seule chose que je te souhaite est le bonheur."
18. grave = serious
"Non, ce n'est pas grave."



French Vocabulary / Vocabulaire du film

l'Entretien

19. l'entretien = an interview

"Nous allons commencer l'entretien."

20. convaincre (qqn) = to convince

"C'est le programme qui vous a convaincu?"

21. élu = elected

"Vous êtes élu, quand?"

22. pas de souci = no problem

"Prenez votre temps, il n'y a pas de souci."

23. le rapport = the connection

"Je ne vois pas le rapport."

24. arrêter = to be arrested

"Quand est-ce que vous avez été arrêté?"

25. des armes = weapons

"Ils avaient des armes, il y avait des machettes et des fusils de chasse."

26. la manifestation = protest

"Pas une personne que vous auriez pu croiser à la manifestation?"

27. un dossier = a file

"Ce qui a été déposé dans ton dossier, il n'est pas trop tard pour changer."

28. malade mentalement = mentally ill

"Elle est malade mentalement, mais ce n'est pas de sa faute."

29. gagner = to earn (money)

"Le petit que je gagnais en Guinée, ça ne suffit pas."

30. mentir = to lie, un menteur = a liar

"Elle m'a dit de ne pas mentir."



Discussion Questions

Characters and Story

1. What are Souleymane's conditions living as an undocumented immigrant in France?
2. Why did he leave his hometown?
3. How is the relationship with his relatives in his hometown?
4. Who is in his social network in Paris? Who are they? How is his relationship with those people?
5. Souleymane is instructed to learn a false story to get refugee status in France. He learns the story, but he ends up sharing the real one. Why did Souleymane decide to tell his story instead?

Style and Messages

Director Boris Lojkine incorporates documentary elements in his movie as a storytelling tool, providing a sense of truth in the reality that undocumented immigrants experience.

1. How do you recognize if a movie is a documentary or fiction? How did you recognize it in this movie?
2. What are the storytelling tools: camera movements, editing, lighting, etc., that give you a sense of realism?
3. What do you think this filmmaking style is trying to convey to the audience?
4. What do you think is the filmmaker's point of view regarding immigration?

Themes and Context

People immigrate looking for better living conditions, job opportunities, and economic prosperity. However, all countries have immigration systems to regulate how people come in. Those systems do not always take into consideration the crisis that some communities face in their countries.

1. What are the social and economic conditions that force people, like Souleymane, to leave their countries?
2. Traveling as an undocumented immigrant is not easy. What challenges might an undocumented immigrant have to face on the road to get into a new country?
3. Souleymane has struggled from a lack of opportunities and access to health care for his mother in Guinea. At the same time, he might not qualify with the requirements to be considered a refugee who fled for persecution. What do you think should be a path to allow Souleymane to stay in France?

Souleymane rents an account to deliver food through an app. As an undocumented immigrant without a permit to work, he faces a precarious job and work environment.

4. What are the job conditions for food delivery drivers?
5. How are those job conditions different for an undocumented person, like Souleymane?
6. The food delivery apps have some requirements for orders and time that drivers must fulfil. How is that pressure playing a role in these precarious conditions?
7. How are the interactions of Souleymane with customers? What do you think is the director's commentary on those characters



Les Questions pour Discussion

Les Personnages et l'Histoire

1. Quelles sont les conditions de vie de Souleymane comme un immigrant sans papiers en France?
2. Pourquoi a-t-il quitté sa ville natale?
3. Comment est sa relation avec sa famille dans sa ville natale?
4. Qui est dans son réseau social à Paris? Qui est-ce qu'ils sont? Comment est la relation avec ces gens?
5. Souleymane est enseigné à apprendre une histoire fausse pour obtenir son statut de réfugié en France, Il apprend l'histoire mais enfin il partage la vraie histoire. Pourquoi Souleymane a-t-il décidé de raconter sa vraie histoire à la place de l'autre?

Style et Messages

Le réalisateur Boris Lojkine a incorporé des éléments documentaires dans son film comme un outil de narration, qui fournit un sens de la vérité à la réalité que les immigrants sans papiers ressentent.

1. Comment est-ce que vous reconnaissez si un film est un documentaire ou si c'est de la fiction? Comment l'avez-vous reconnu dans ce film?
2. Quels sont les outils de narration- les mouvements de caméra, le montage du film, l'éclairage, etc.- qui vous donne un sens de réalisme?
3. Selon vous, que cherche ce style de réalisation chez le public?
4. Quel est le point de vue du cinéaste sur l'immigration?

Les Thèmes et le Contexte

Les gens émigrent en cherchant de meilleures conditions de vie, des opportunités de travail, et une prospérité économique. Pourtant, tous les pays ont des systèmes d'immigration pour réguler comment les gens entrent. Ces systèmes ne prennent pas toujours en considération la crise que quelques communautés font face à dans leurs pays.

1. Quelles sont les conditions sociales et économiques qui forcent des gens, comme Souleymane, à quitter leurs pays?
2. Voyageant comme un immigrant sans papiers n'est pas facile. Quels défis est-ce que quelqu'un doit faire face à sur le chemin d'entrer dans un nouveau pays?
3. Souleymane s'est débattu d'un manque d'opportunités et l'accès aux soins médicaux pour sa mère en Guinée. Au même temps, c'est possible qu'il ne remplit pas les conditions requises pour être considéré comme réfugié qui a fui pour persécution. Que doit être un chemin à suivre pour permettre à Souleymane de rester en France?

Souleymane loue un conte pour livrer la nourriture par une appli. Comme un immigrant sans papiers sans permis de travail, il fait face à un job et un environnement précaire.

4. Quelles sont les conditions de travail pour les chauffeurs-livreurs de nourriture?
5. Comment sont ces conditions de travaux différentes pour une personne sans papiers, comme Souleymane?
6. Les applis pour la livraison de nourriture ont des conditions nécessaires pour les commandes et l'heure que les chauffeurs doivent remplir. Comment joue un rôle cette pression dans les conditions précaires?
7. Comment sont les interactions de Souleymane avec les clients? Selon vous, quel est le commentaire du réalisateur sur ces personnages?



Activities

1. Immigration in the U.S.

The United States has an immigration system that allows citizens to access international protection through multiple paths.

In groups, research online and in the library the following topics and organize your findings in a synoptic table:

1. Definitions of refugee and asylum seeker.
2. International protection programs offered by the United States.
3. Steps and requirements for applicants for those programs.
4. Challenges faced by individuals awaiting approval of their cases.

Also in groups, analyze and discuss your findings, and write down the similarities and differences of Souleymane's experiences in France.

2. Essay Prompts

- When immigrants leave their home countries behind, some connections remain. Souleymane has his mother and a girlfriend who is starting another relationship. Based on the film and your own reflection: What are the emotional impacts for immigrants? How can families and relatives keep a connection from a distance? What is the emotional and social tool for someone to immigrate?
- Souleymane is getting ready for his interview using a false story. He was told that this is the best way to get documents in France. The film leaves us with an open ending. However, we know that there are few options for him. Based on the movie, why did he at first decide to tell a false story? What were the circumstances for making that decision? Did he have a full knowledge of how the process works? Did he need more professional assistance? Did he know that there was a risk of giving a false story? Which other options might he explore?

3. Language and Colonization

French is the official language in Guinea. Research how colonization shaped the French language and culture in Guinea, using online and library resources. In your research, find out how Guinean French is different from the French spoken in other countries, especially in France. Try to identify pronunciation, use of different words and phrases, cultural routines, and any other artistic or cultural expressions that have been influenced.



Beyond the Classroom

Here are other resources to expand your screening:

1. The Undocumented Story of Abou Sangare (Filmink)
<https://www.filmink.com.au/the-undocumented-story-of-abou-sangare/>
2. Why is Guinean film star Abou Sangaré's story bringing French division over immigration to the fore? (Euronews)
<https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/10/14/why-is-guinean-film-star-abou-sangares-story-bringing-french-division-over-immigration-to->
3. Souleymane's Story: Award-winning Guinean actor Abou Sangaré granted visa to remain in France (Euronews)
<https://www.euronews.com/culture/2025/01/09/souleymanes-story-award-winning-guinean-actor-abou-sangare-granted-visa-to-remain-in-franc>



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.8.3

Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the 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.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.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.11-12.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

For more information about Common Core standards, visit <https://www.thecorestandards.org/>