



Blink

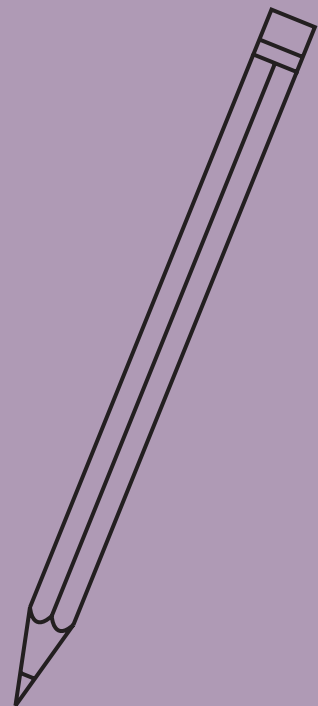
STUDY GUIDE

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All SFFILM Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFILM Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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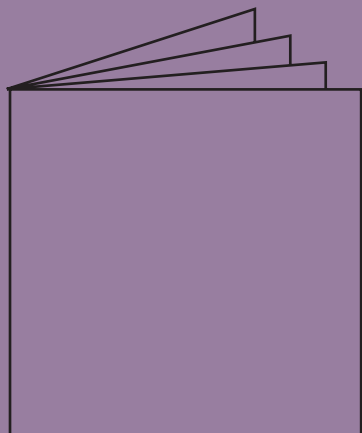
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About the Film

When three of their four children are diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a rare and incurable disease that leads to severe visual impairment, the Pelletier family's world changes forever. A doctor recommends that the parents provide their children with a multitude of visual memories before their sight eventually fades. In the face of this life-altering news, Edith Lemay, Sébastien Pelletier, and their children decide to set out on a journey around the world to experience all its beauty while they still can. Countless adventures await them at every destination as they crisscross the globe making stops that include Egypt, Nepal, Tanzania, Mongolia, and South America. As they fill their memories with breathtaking once-in-a-lifetime encounters, the family's love, resilience, and unshakeable sense of wonder ensure that their uncertain future does not define their present.

DIRECTOR

Edmund Stenson, Daniel Roher

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Amit Bay, Bob Moore, Carolyn Bernstein

PRODUCERS

Melanie Miller, Diane Becker

(Canada / USA 2024), English & Québécois French, 84 min

Teaching the Film

Blink highlights the themes of love, resilience, and the importance of cherishing life's moments. This documentary not only teaches us about a rare disease but also inspires us to live life fully, appreciate the present, and find strength in family and love. The Pelletier family's journey shows that even when facing life-changing challenges, it is possible to find beauty and joy in the world. By the end of the film, students will have a deeper understanding of how to cope with adversity, the importance of family support, and the value of living in the moment. A screening of this film will complement curriculum and educational experiences around social-emotional learning, disability justice, and global awareness. Central themes also exhibit empathy, adventure, and self-reflection.

Recommended Grades: 4–12

Subject Areas

- **Coming of Age**
- **Disability Studies**
- **French**
- **Health**
- **Journalism**
- **Peer/Youth Issues**
- **Social Studies**



Pre-Viewing Topics

The film follows the Pelletier family as they provide experiences to fill their visual memories with global destinations and iconic sights. Before watching the film, ask your class what visual memories they can recall from the past.

- What is a visual scene you can recall from a weekend adventure or a birthday celebration?
- Can you recall the visual elements of a moment that was meaningful or impactful? How would you visually describe that moment?
- How would you feel if you knew that you would lose your vision?
- What memories would you want to create now while you have the ability to see?



Presenter Bios



Daniel Roher is a filmmaker from Toronto, Canada. His first film, **Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and the Band**, was a music documentary executive produced by Martin Scorsese. His follow-up, **Navalny**, won Sundance's 2022 Festival Favorite Award, the BAFTA Award for Best Documentary, as well as the Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature. His latest project, **Blink**, premiered at the 2024 Telluride Film Festival and will be released by National Geographic Documentary Films in the late fall. In addition to his work in film, he is an accomplished visual artist whose work has been exhibited in galleries around the world. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, son, and dog, Moose.



Edmund Stenson's work as director, producer and editor spans both documentary and fiction and focuses on social issues, loners and nomads. He recently directed **Blink**, a National Geographic feature about the Lemay-Pelletier family, who dropped everything and traveled the world after learning three of their four children were losing their vision. Before that, he was an associate editor on BAFTA- and Oscar®-winner **Navalny** (2022), a documentary-thriller about the Russian dissident's poisoning.

In 2018, he directed the award-winning **Finding Fukue**, the viral CBC success that has amassed over 14.5 million views online. He has also cut award-winning documentary features, shorts and television series in English, French and Japanese: most notably, Canadian Screen Award winner **Being Black in Toronto** (2020), **Ciao Plastique** (2020), **Ghosts of Our Forest** (2017), **Ma vie Made in Canada** (2017), **Sourtoe: The Story of the Sorry Cannibal** and **Retour aux sources aka The Roots Remain** (2015). Stenson is also somewhat obsessed with the Chilean filmmaker and magician Raúl Ruiz, as well as another kind of magician: Leicester City striker Jamie Vardy.



Discussion Questions

Understanding Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) - A group of rare genetic disorders that cause vision loss over time. It affects how light-sensitive cells in the eye respond to light, gradually leading to blindness. (See Beyond the Classroom section for more resources)

1. How does the family cope with the diagnosis?
2. What would you miss most if you couldn't see anymore?
3. If you could cure any illness or disability in the world, which one would you choose? Why?
4. How would you help advocate for a student at your school who has a visual impairment? What features could be improved to allow for more accessibility to navigate campus or to access learning materials?

Resilience and Positivity - The documentary shows how a positive attitude can help people overcome challenges and find joy in tough situations.

5. Write about a time that a positive attitude helped you overcome a challenge.
6. In the film, the family faces extreme challenges while hiking in Nepal, like bad weather and exhaustion. What do you do to keep going when you encounter obstacles?
7. Have you ever felt stuck in a situation, like the family when they were stuck in the cable car in Ecuador? What did you do to get through it, and who helped you?

Family Bond - The Pelletier's love for one another is a central part of their journey. The film shows how the family stays strong together, supporting each other no matter what.

8. What role does family play in helping us through difficult times?
9. The kids want to bring their grandpa on the trip. Who would you want to bring along on a big adventure? Why?

Exploration and Adventure - The Pelletier family's trip around the world is about more than just visiting new places. It's about embracing new experiences, meeting different people, and appreciating the wonders of the world.

10. How do you think the Pelletier children feel about traveling the world while knowing they will lose their vision? How would you feel in their situation?
11. What are some ways to experience the world that do not rely on vision? For example, think about the sounds, smells, and feelings you might encounter during an adventure.
12. If you could do any activity anywhere in the world, what would you do, where would you do it and who would join you?
13. Which destination in the film would you most like to visit? Why?

Living in the Present - The Pelletier family focuses on enjoying each moment and not letting fear of the future stop them from living their best life.

14. How can you make the most of your time and experiences today?
15. How does the family adapt to the challenges brought by RP? What strategies do they use to maintain hope and excitement about life?
16. What do you think it means to "seize the day"? How can you apply that idea in your own life?



Activities

1. **Research Project:** Pick one of the countries or landmarks the family visits. Research its history, culture, environment, and a community aspect that makes it special today.
2. **Call to Action for Change Makers:** Engage students in disability justice with research and action steps.
 - *Research* the history and implementation of topics such as:
 - Disability Right Movement
 - 504 Educational Plan
 - Americans with Disability Act (ADA),
 - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),
 - United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
 - *Define* the accessibility needs of your community. Who has barriers to accessing facilities or learning modalities?
 - *Create* an action plan to campaign for accessibility rights.
 - This could involve:
 - Petitioning for ramps, accessible restrooms, or ensuring all technology used in the classroom is accessible to everyone
 - Starting a disability club focused on inclusion and disability justice advocacy and education
 - Writing a persuasive letter to local representatives or school board officials to advocate for policies that ensure accessibility in your community or school

3. **Empathy Exercise (30-45 minutes):** Attempting everyday tasks without sight

Materials Needed:

- Blindfolds (one for each student or enough to share in pairs)
- Simple, everyday objects (e.g., a pencil, key, book, ball or fruit)
- A few obstacles to create a safe mini-obstacle course (chairs, cones, books)
- A few basic art supplies (paper, marker, crayons)
- A large open space or classroom with clear boundaries

Introduction: Ask students if they know what blindness is and if they've ever thought about how different life would be without vision. Discuss the challenges that people who are visually impaired face daily, but also highlight the ways in which they use other senses like touch, sound, and smell to navigate the world.

Prompt Questions:

- What do you think would be difficult to do if you couldn't see?
- How do you think people with vision impairments might do things differently?



Activities (Cont.)

Activity #1 Sensory Exploration Blindfold Challenge: Split students into pairs. One student in each pair will wear a blindfold and the other will be their guide. The blindfolded student's task is to identify everyday objects by using their sense of touch, smell, or sound. The guide can hand them objects like a pencil, fruit, a book, or a toy but cannot say what the object is.

After a few minutes, have the partners switch roles so everyone has a chance to experience the challenge.

Reflection Questions:

- How did it feel to rely on your sense of touch or smell?
- What was easy? What was challenging?
- How important was it to trust your partner?

Activity #2 Mini-Obstacle Course Trust Walk: Set up a mini-obstacle course using chairs, cones or other objects. Students should stay in their pairs, with one student blindfolded and the other acting as their guide. The guide must verbally direct the blindfolded student through the obstacle course without touching them (using phrases like "take two steps to your right" or "careful, there's a chair ahead") Have students switch roles.

Reflection Questions:

- How did it feel to rely only on someone else's directions?
- What did you learn about trust and communication?

Activity #3 Drawing Blindfolded: Hand out a blank sheet of paper and marker or crayon to each student. Instruct them to draw a simple picture (like a house, tree or animal) while blindfolded. Let them work on this for a few minutes.

Once done, have students take off their blindfolds and look at their drawings. Encourage laughter and fun, but then transition into a reflective discussion.

Reflection Questions:

- How did drawing without seeing feel compared to drawing with your vision?
- What senses did you use to try to complete your drawing?

Group Reflection and Discussion: Bring the students together to reflect on the activities. Ask them how their experiences might relate to what it's like for someone who is blind or visually impaired in their everyday life. Encourage them to think about ways people with visual impairments navigate the world successfully. This is a great opportunity to discuss empathy and what it means to step into someone else's shoes. Encourage students to think about real-world applications, such as how accessible environments (e.g., Braille, audio descriptions) help people with vision impairments.

Discussion Prompts:

- What did you find most challenging when you couldn't use your sight?
- What surprised you about this experience?
- How do you think people who are blind or visually impaired learn to overcome these challenges?
- How could you show more understanding and support for people who have visual impairments?
- How can you advocate for more inclusive spaces for those who have visual impairments?



Beyond the Classroom

More information on vision treatments, cures and advocacy:

1. LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Website: www.lighthouse-sf.org

About: Based in San Francisco, LightHouse offers programs and services for people who are blind or have low vision. They focus on education, technology, advocacy, and independent living skills.

How Students Can Get Involved: LightHouse has advocacy programs that help improve accessibility in the community. Students can attend workshops, join advocacy efforts, and volunteer in various capacities to help create more inclusive spaces for people with visual impairments.

2. Foundation Fighting Blindness

Website: www.fightingblindness.org

About: This organization is dedicated to funding research for treatments and cures for retinal degenerative diseases, including RP. The website provides detailed information about RP, research updates, and support for individuals and families.

Resources: Educational materials, clinical trials, and access to local chapters for support.

How Students Can Get Involved: Students can organize a fundraising campaign or join a local chapter.

3. National Eye Institute (NEI)

Website: nei.nih.gov

About: Part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the NEI offers reliable, science-based information on RP and other eye diseases.

Resources: Fact sheets, research information, and eye health resources.

How Students Can Get Involved: Join an ongoing campaign [to teach younger students about eye health](#).

Other media to support the understanding of blindness, vision impairment, and disability justice:

Blindsight (2006)- This documentary follows a group of blind Tibetan teenagers as they attempt to climb the 23,000-foot Lhakpa Ri peak on Mount Everest, guided by a blind mountaineer.

Why it's great for middle schoolers: It is an empowering film about courage, teamwork, and breaking barriers despite the obstacles of blindness, making it a great choice for inspiring resilience and self-confidence in middle schoolers.



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

College and Career Readiness for Reading (CCR)

CCR Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Reading Standards for Literature (RL)

RL.4.1 - RL.12.1: Key Ideas and Details Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Writing Standards (W)

W.4.1 - W.12.1: Opinion Writing Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

W.4.3 - W.12.3: Narrative Writing Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

W.4.7 - W.12.7: Research Projects Conduct short or sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Speaking and Listening Standards (SL)

SL.4.1 - SL.12.1: Collaborative Discussions Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.4.4 - SL.12.4: Presenting Information Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning.

Language Standards (L)

L.4.4 - L.12.4: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.