



Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival
Education Outreach Program Screening: *I've Seen the Unicorn*
Director: Vincent Toi
61 Minutes

Please use this guide to lead your students in preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the film, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays must be sent to Cinema/Chicago in order to be invited to subsequent film screenings.

Synopsis

I've Seen the Unicorn follows the inhabitants of the island nation of Mauritius as they prepare for The Maiden Cup horse race, a very popular and important event for their culture.

Colonialism and the Republic of Mauritius

Mauritius is an island nation off the southeastern coast of Africa. Composed of five small islands, the country is named after one of the largest, Mauritius. The nation has passed through the hands of many colonialist influences throughout its history. The Dutch were the first to establish a colony on the island in 1638. The Dutch colony was abandoned in 1710 and became a French Colony shortly after. The country again changed hands in 1810, becoming a British Colony, which it remained until its independence in 1968.

Indigenous peoples did exist on the islands before it became to be a colony. However, the colonization of the island, and the changing of colonial influences destroyed much of the indigenous culture and has caused the Mauritius natives to be multi-cultural. In fact, the country has no official language, most inhabitants speaking English, French, Mauritian Creole, or Asian languages, or some combination. The Governmental system of the country is also closely modeled after the parliamentary system used in Great Britain, exemplifying just how much influence the colonialist powers had over the country's culture and social and political values.

Colonialism, also often referred to as Imperialism, is the process by which a country, such as Great Britain, Holland, or the U.S., assumes political control over another country or nation, utilizing the colonized country for its own economic gain, exploiting the country's indigenous population and its resources. Possibly the most well known example of colonialism is the colonization of African countries by Western European colonialist powers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. African peoples were used on the continent as slaves, and transported to other countries to be used as slaves, and many of the

countries' natural resources were harvested and used by colonialist powers. While Africa remains the most prominent example of colonialism, the process can be traced all the way back to the colonization of the Americas by Spanish Imperial powers in the late 1400's.

The Mauritian Maiden Cup

Horse racing began in Mauritius in 1812; just two years after the nation had changed hands from French to British Colonialist influence. Horse racing was started as a way to foster unity between the French settlers and the English powers on the island, as tension was running high because of the Napoleonic Wars.

Study Ideas/Questions

1. Why do you think the film is titled *I've Seen the Unicorn*? We know unicorns to be mythical creatures, so what implications does this title have for the events depicted in the film?
2. Why do you think the horse racing culture is so important to the citizens of Mauritius, especially since it was a practice of the colonialist powers on the Island?
3. The people we see in the film speak many different languages. In what other ways do you think the culture of the inhabitants of the island has been influenced or changed by the presences of Colonialist powers?
4. The film opens with footage of The Maiden Cup horse race shortly after the country gained its independence in 1968. How do you think the Maiden Cup served as a symbol of their independence?
5. Why do you think Alvinio wants to become a jockey? What significance does this career have to him, and to the people of Mauritius?

Useful Links/Resources

[Interactive Map Of Colonialist Powers and Colonies 1492-Present](#)

[Mauritian Horse Racing History](#)

Interested in Film?

The Chicago International Film Festival's Student Film Council is looking for members for the 2015-2016 school year! Visit chicagofilmfestival.com for more details!

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