



***The Last Just Man***  
**(Canada, 70 minutes)**  
**Director: Steven Silver**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

All acts of war are at some level unimaginable, but the 1994 Rwandan civil war, which saw the massacre of over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus by the Hutu militia in just 100 days, stands as one of the most shockingly incomprehensible – because it could have been prevented. Lt. General Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian commander of UN peacekeeping operations in Rwanda at the time, recounts in harrowing detail his growing awareness of the impending genocide, his endless urgent efforts to intervene and the disastrous refusal of his UN bosses to permit any intervention. Speaking directly from his heart and his shaken sense of morality and mission, Dallaire remains haunted by what he was forced to witness. *The Last Just Man* is a compelling and revealing historical deconstruction of the forces behind a tragic failure to achieve peace.

**Study Questions**

- How much do you know about the massacre in Rwanda?
- Where did you get your information?
- What are the differences and similarities between the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia vs. Rwanda?
- How did the US Government and the UN responses differ in regard to Bosnia vs. Rwanda? Why do you think the responses differed?
- What role did media coverage play in the attitudes of Americans in each case?
- How do you define genocide?

**Discussion Questions**

- What do you think General Dallaire could have done differently?
- Why did the UN react the way it did to General Dallaire's assessment of the situation prior to the massacre?
- What role did Colonization play in the events in Rwanda?
- What factors shape public attitudes toward world events?
- How does American public sentiment about world events shape US government actions/decisions?
- In your opinion, how could such a tragedy be prevented in the future?



***The Revolution Will Not Be Televised***  
**(Ireland, 2002, 74 minutes)**  
**Directors: Kim Bartley and Donnacha O Briain**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* is a feature length documentary on Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela. Over the course of 7 months, from January to July 2002, the filmmakers secured unprecedented access to film Chavez in his daily life. During this time, there was a coup and the filmmakers were the only crew inside the presidential palace at the time. They were also the first there for his triumphant return some 48 hours later. What had in fact taken place was the first coup of the twenty first century, and the world's first media coup. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* is a thrilling insight into President Chavez and the power of media.

**Study Questions**

- When you watch or read international news, do you ever wonder if there is another perspective to the story that goes unreported, or do you assume that new reports are unbiased?
- When you think of documentary films, do you imagine impartiality on the part of the filmmakers?
- What do you know about the political and economic situation in Venezuela?
- Venezuela is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest oil producing country in the world. With that information, would it surprise you to know that over 70% of the population lives in poverty? Why or why not?
- How would you define "globalization"?
- How would you define "neo-liberalism"?

**Classroom Exercise**

Compare the Venezuelan Constitution - Preamble and Fundamental Principles (English translation available here: <http://www.vheadline.com/readnews.asp?id=6831>) with the US Constitution.

**Discussion Questions**

- Do you think the filmmakers were unbiased in their approach to the story?
- After watching the film, do you think there are different meanings for the terms "globalization" and "neo-liberalism" outside of the US? What is the difference between how you define those terms and how they are defined elsewhere?

- What role, if any, do you think the U.S. played in the coup?
- In the film we learn that almost every Venezuelan carries a copy of their Constitution and refer to it regularly. Can you imagine people in the USA doing the same? If not, why not? If so, what would it take for that to happen?



***The Wooden Camera***  
**(South Africa, 2003, 90 Minutes)**  
**Director: Ntshavheni Wa Luruli**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

In Kayelitsha, a township close to Capetown, after the end of Apartheid, two thirteen-year-old kids- Madiba and Siphon - play along the railway line. A train passes by. A dead man is tossed from the train and rolls to their feet. His lifeless hand clutches an attaché case. Inside, the boys find a gun and a video camera. Siphon takes the gun and Madiba the camera. Madiba starts filming the township and its inhabitants. Through the lens, his bleak surroundings take on a strange new beauty. His status enhanced by gun ownership, Siphon becomes a gang leader and operates out of Capetown. In Capetown Madiba meets Estelle, who lives in a traditional Capetownian white community in which century-old prejudices have not died with the end of apartheid. Madiba introduces Estelle to Siphon, who inadvertently encourages her rebellion against her racist, strict father. Estelle introduces Madiba to Mr. Shawn, her music teacher who has taught music in the townships. Mr. Shawn encourages Madiba's filmmaking. Madiba and Estelle each deal with problems at home of a very different sort. For Madiba, it's the extreme poverty and an alcoholic father. For Estelle, it's the rising confrontations with her narrow-minded father. Meanwhile, Siphon's friendship with Madiba becomes strained as Siphon falls into drug use (sniffing glue) and deeper into crime.

**Themes of the Film**

Limited choices for people of color  
Class differences, Racism  
Post-apartheid South Africa

"Orphaned Generation" (While the AIDS crisis is not dealt with directly in the film, Unicef reports that 30% of the child population of S. Africa are orphans. Many of them are between the ages of 10 -14. Children are fending for themselves, taking care of dying relatives and attempting to take care of each other)

**Study Questions**

- Do you believe in fate? How do you imagine your life could be changed by the introduction of an object or instrument?
- In what ways are we defined by our economic class? In what ways can class differences strain a friendship? Have you ever experienced a friendship where issues of racial difference had to be dealt with?
- What are the forms of "institutionalized racism" that exist in this country? What are the similarities and differences between those forms and

Apartheid?

- How do you expect the long history of Apartheid state violence will impact the youth in the new, democratic South Africa?

### **Discussion Questions**

- Compare the lives of the three main characters: Madiba, Sipho and Estelle.
- How did the gun change Sipho? How did the camera alter Madiba's options?
- How did meeting Madiba affect Estelle's course?
- What do you think the director is saying about cultural production (video/filmmaking and music) through his characters?
- Why do you think the director chose to have Madiba's sister narrate the story?
- What do you imagine will happen to Madiba and Estelle?



***Triplets of Belleville***  
**(France, 2003, in French with very little dialogue/no subtitles)**  
**Director: Sylvain Chomet**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Adopted by his grandmother, Madame Souza, Champion is a lonely little boy. Noticing that this lad is never happier than on a bicycle, Madame Souza puts him through a rigorous training process. Years go by and Champion becomes worthy of his name. Now he's ready to enter the world-famous cycling race, the Tour de France. However during this cycling contest two mysterious men in black kidnap Champion. Madame Souza and her faithful dog Bruno set out to rescue him. Their quest takes them across the ocean to a giant Megalopolis called Belleville where they encounter the renowned *Triplets of Belleville*, three eccentric female music-hall stars from the 30's who decide to take Madame Souza and Bruno under their wing. Thanks to Bruno's brilliant sense of smell, the brave duo is soon on to Champion's trail. But will they succeed in beating the devilish plans of the evil French mafia?

**Themes In the Film**

French Culture  
Animation, Satire  
Jacques Tati  
Tour De France

**Study Questions**

- What are some of the characteristics that are stereotypes of the French?
- What are some characters that you know about from French history and culture?
- What do you imagine the French think of Americans? What are their stereotypical images of us?

**Classroom Exercise**

The film contains several dream sequences by the family pet dog, Bruno. Have the students write what they imagine their pet might dream about.

**Discussion Questions**

- There is very little dialogue in the film. In your opinion, did that help or hinder the narrative?
- Did you recognize any stereotypes of the French in the film? If so, what were they?

- The director uses animation similar to caricatures found in satirical comics. What are some of the over-exaggerations the film employs about human characteristics?
- The heroes in the story are not your typical storybook variety. Did you feel sympathetic towards them or relate to them in any way? Do you ever see your grandmother in a heroic light? If so, what is it about your grandmother (or other person in your life) that makes them heroic to you?



***Unknown Soldier***  
**(USA, 2003, 78 Minutes)**  
**Director: Ferenc Toth**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Bright, friendly and bubbling with hormones, Ellison is a typical Harlem teenager. He gets into good-natured mischief with his pals, stealing dogs and sneaking into amusement parks, and has a playful sexual tug-of-war with his girlfriend Tande. But when his father dies of a sudden heart attack, Ellison is evicted from their apartment and forced to grow up far too soon. Without relatives, he quickly runs out of friends' houses to stay in and finds himself homeless and desperate. He declines a job with local drug dealer and longtime acquaintance Zee, but after being refused by the Army (asthma) and victimized in a homeless shelter, Ellison is out of options. As Zee's personal assistant, he's entrusted with harmless tasks which slowly give way to dangerous assignments that leave him desperate for a way out. Ferenc Toth's astounding debut won Best Narrative Feature at the Los Angeles Film Festival.

**Themes of the film**

Homelessness

Personal ethics/morality

Transition into adulthood/adolescence

**Study Questions**

- Have you heard the expression “..one paycheck away from the streets/poorhouse/etc.” ? What does it refer to? Why do you think this saying has entered our vernacular?
- When you see a homeless person, do you wonder how that person came to be in that situation?
- Have you had ideas or assumptions about the homeless in the past? Did you ever think that homeless person's situation was primarily due to some failing on their part, such as a drug or alcohol dependency?
- According to the latest statistics, an estimated 3.5 million people are likely to experience homelessness in a given year. Why is homelessness on the rise?
- Do you know of anyone who has been homeless for a time? Where did they go?

## Discussion Questions

- Would you have done any of the things that Ellison did when faced with that situation, such as: Worked for Zee, knowing about his gangster background? Applied for military service? Stayed in a shelter? What would you have done differently?
- Do you think this scenario could happen in reality? Was there anything in the film that you felt was not realistic? If not, why not?
- Why do you think the director chose to end the film the way he did?
- Why do you think the film is called Unknown Soldier?
- What do you imagine will happen to Ellison?
- What do you think the film cost to make?
- Do you think you could make a film like this? Why or why not?
- At the website for the film, there is the following quote: "...to measure up to our own standards was the only way of affirming our notion of manhood." - Ralph Ellison, "Shadow and Act" How does that quote relate to the story?



***Violet Perfume: Nobody Hears You***  
**(Mexico/Netherlands, 2001, 90 minutes)**  
**Director: Marisa Sistach**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Violet Perfume: Nobody Hears You* is a riveting tale of two young girls growing up in a rough Mexico City ghetto. The two girls form a strong friendship at a public junior high school. They share everything until two violent accomplices kidnap one of the girls. The indifference and selfishness of the adults break up their friendship and pushes them to a tragic end. (Contains brief nudity)

**Study Questions**

- Have you ever had a friend that was not honest with you, but you continued the friendship?
- Children are affected by change every drastically. What affects do you think happen within family structures?
- What are the origins of the Hebrew Israelite community?

**Discussion Questions**

- Yessica is a very troubled young girl. Describe how you would handle her situation differently.
- How much do you think the girls' environment played a role in their choices?



***Wattstax***  
**(Documentary, 1973 USA)**  
**Director: Mel Stuart**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Experience the history and the soul of the African-American community in Watts, Los Angeles, 1972. *Wattstax* documents the gathering of over 100,000 at the Los Angeles Coliseum, hosted by a very young Jesse Jackson, for the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Watts riots. The music of The Stylistics, The Staples Singers, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Bar-Kays, and the legendary Isaac Hayes held the forefront of the spirit so vigorously displayed here. Interviews with the residents of Watts combined with astounding, sublime monologues by comedian Richard Pryor create an invocation-we are delivered from place and time to become in tune with this politically loaded era and the flame of the soul performing and reflecting it.

**Study Questions**

- What do you know about the Watts riots of 1965?
- What do you know about the “Black Pride” movement of the 60’s and 70’s?
- Did the movement improve the quality of life for African Americans? If so, what go better? If not, why not?
- How big a role does music play in your life? Do you feel that current recording artists speak to your generation? Which ones and why?

**Discussion Questions**

- Judging by the reflections of the Watts residents interviewed in the film, what did the Watts riots accomplish? Was there a lasting impact?
- In your opinion, how much has the attitude of the police toward African Americans changed in the past 30 years since the film was made?
- Did the Watts residents interviewed say anything that you feel still applies today? If so, what was it and why?
- What impact does humor have using serious issues such as social injustice and violence (like Richard Pryor’s in the film)?



**5 Girls**  
**(USA, 113 minutes)**  
**Director: Maria Finitzo**

**Synopsis**

The world is full of smart, resilient girls, but we don't often hear about them. From Maria Finitzo and the production company that made *Hoop Dreams*, *5 Girls* shows girls as the heroes of their own lives. Shot over the course of three years the documentary tracks the lives of Aisha, Corrie, Haibinh and Toby as they move through their tumultuous teenage years. With Chicago as its backdrop, everything from hairstyles to first loves to poverty and dealing with being an immigrant comes to the forefront in this tightly woven story.

**Study Questions**

- What does it mean to be successful? How can one become “a success”? What kind of success can be seen and what kinds of success can be seen and what kinds of success are harder to see?
- What are the struggles, problems and challenges facing teenage girls today?
- What does it mean to be feminine? What does it mean to be a “good” girl?
- What role do adults play on girls' lives? How do relationships with fathers or mother vary?

**Discussion Questions**

- What do the girls accomplish during the two years they are filmed? How do the girls experience and define success differently within the different parameters of their lives?
- What are the most visible struggles/challenges of the girls? What are the most important positive qualities/strengths?
- Discuss the girl's relationships with the adults in their lives and the messages they receive about how to resist or respond to the challenges they face.
- Are their relationships with fathers different from those with mothers, and if so, how?



***A Wedding in Ramallah***  
**(Australia/Palestine, 90 minutes)**  
**Director: Sherine Salama**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Even in the midst of intense political conflicts, people try to get on with their lives. So it is with Mariam and Bassam, a Palestinian couple who met during the relatively peaceful summer of 2000. This wonderfully observant film follows their relationship from courtship to marriage, and beyond. Bassam, a telephone repairman in Cleveland, returns to Palestine to find a “home-made” bride. He quickly meets and marries the young Mariam, but leaves her in Palestine with his family. Soon afterward, a new intifada takes place and violence erupts throughout Palestine. Life in wartime is brilliantly evoked: people talk on cell phones, quarrel and cook dinner while tanks are shelling buildings a few blocks away. After many months, Bassam is able to procure a visa for Mariam, but she soon discovers that life in exile in the US is not what she expected. This charming film says a great deal about love, courtship, and the roles of women and men in Palestinian society, while touching on the details of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

**Study Questions**

- What do you know about the conflict in the Middle East?
- How has media coverage affected your views on the situation?
- Have you heard, read or seen any depiction of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories?
- Do you know of other contemporary cultures that have arranged marriages?

**Discussion Questions**

- Why does Bassam travel all the way back to Ramallah to find a bride even though he is already living in the US?
- Why does Mariam agree to the arrangement?
- What do you think about arranged marriage?
- How would you feel if you did not know the person you were going to marry?
- What do you think about the husband’s expectations of the wives after marriage?
- What do you think Mariam and Bassam need to do to make their marriage work in the US?





***All Power To The People! The Black Panther Party and Beyond***  
**(US, 1998, 115 minutes)**  
**Director: Lee Lew Lee**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*All Power To The People!* examines problems of race, poverty, dissent and the universal conflict of the “haves versus the have nots.” US government documents, rare news clips, and interviews with both ex-activists and former FBI/CIA officers, provide deep insight into the bloody conflict between political dissent and governmental authority in the US of the 60s and 70s. Globally acclaimed as being among the most accurate depictions of the goals, aspirations and ultimate repression of the US Civil Rights Movement, *All Power to the People!* Is a gripping, timeless news documentary.

**Themes in the film**

History of the Civil Rights Movement

Black Panther Party

FBI's COINTELPRO

American Indian Rights Movement

Political Prisoners in the US

Trials of political dissidents such as the Chicago 7 trial

**Study Questions**

- Why did the FBI perceive the Black Panther Party as a threat?
- How did the FBI's COINTELPRO contribute to the destruction of the Black Panther Party?
- What do you know about Fred Hampton?
- Can you name any former members of the Black Panther Party?
- Throughout US history, what are some of the organizations that have been labeled as “troublemakers” by the FBI?
- In your opinion, why were these groups the target of FBI investigations and operations such as COINTELPRO?
- Do you think this kind of surveillance and disruption of dissent exists today?
- In this film, we see clips of leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Huey Newton. Who would you categorize as the current leader in today's struggle for human rights?



***AMANDLA! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony***  
**(South Africa, 90 Minutes)**  
**Director: Lee Hirsch**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

The power of music to communicate, inspire, unite and, ultimately, beget change: the ideal, gloriously realized, lies at the heart of this film. *AMANDLA!* Explores the crucial role played by black South African freedom songs in the long battle against Apartheid. Threading the songs throughout the film, it covers 50 years of South African history and illustrates how resistance music grew and evolved in tandem with the fight for liberation. World-renowned musicians offer their candid personal recollections, while archival footage captures the brutal arc of Apartheid and the heroism of such leaders and Nelson Mandela, slain songwriter/activist Uyisile Mini and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Nine years in the making, *AMANDLA!* Tells an uplifting story of human courage, resolve and triumph.

**Study Questions**

- As far as you know, what factors led to the end of Apartheid in South Africa?
- Conversely, how was the Apartheid system able to exist for so long in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?
- Can you describe other instances where music has played a role in liberation struggles around the world?
- Why do you think music or other forms of art have such a powerful effect on people's attitudes about injustice and discrimination?

**Discussion Questions**

- How did the songs of the Anti-Apartheid movement spread despite the government ban on radio airplay?
- What effect did the songs and dance of the protesters have on the police?
- How did the struggle gain momentum?
- What role did the music have on support for the Anti-Apartheid movement overseas?



**Anne B. Real**  
**(USA 2003, 90 Minutes)**  
**Director: Lisa France**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

This coming of age tale set in the heart of New York is about a teenage girl Cynthia who uses the Diary of Anne Frank as her muse, as well as the events in her life, to create her own journal through rhymes. Cynthia is an introverted girl depressed since the death of her father who longs to be a Hip Hop star but hides her true talent from others, only practicing her rhymes in the privacy of her own bathroom. On top of that, her brother Juan, an addict, steals her writings to support his habit by selling them to another rapper who doesn't have half the talent Cynthia does. Will Cynthia finally break free from all that is holding her back and embrace her true self?

**Themes in the film**

Diary of Anne Frank  
Adolescence, Depression  
Drug Addiction  
Hip Hop/Poetry, Self-Expression

**Study Questions**

- Have you or people you know dealt with a death in the family? In what ways did it affect the family structure?
- What about drug addiction in the family? How did the addicted person's behavior change? How did the family deal with the changes in the addicted person's behavior?
- Anne Frank writes "You are responsible for your own upbringing". In your opinion, what does she mean by that?

**Classroom Exercises**

- Take a look at random entries from Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl. What are the issues touched upon in Anne's diaries that are relevant to all teenagers?
- Have students bring in their favorite (appropriate) hip hop lyrics and recite them to the class.

**Discussion Questions**

- Why did Cynthia continue to trust Juan after it seems clear that his crack

- addiction has changed him?
- Why do you think Cynthia's teacher changed his name from Dominguez to Smith?
  - List the correlations between the character Cynthia and Anne Frank.
  - What happened to Cynthia that finally gave her the push to perform her rhymes in public?



***Battleground: 21 Days on the Empire's Edge***  
**(USA 2004, 81 Minutes)**  
**Director: Stephen Marshall**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Three weeks before the Islamic celebration of Ramadan in 2003, documentary filmmaker Stephen Marshall went to Iraq to cover the war from all sides of the conflict as resistance amongst the citizens toward the U.S. occupation had increased. The people that are the subjects in the film span a wide range of viewpoints on the situation:

- An Iraqi that fled the country after rising up against Saddam in 1993 returns home for the first time, looking for family members;
- A Lt. Colonel who conducts a meeting with the local sheiks;
- An Iraqi woman working as a translator hears all sides;
- An Egyptian businessman;
- An Iraqi physician studying the effects of depleted uranium;
- A US Colonel stationed in the Sunni Triangle;
- A producer from Al-Jazeera;
- A US Tank Commander in Samarra;
- A taxi driver in Baghdad.

**Study Questions**

- What do you think about the Iraq war?
- If Bush had 20/20 hindsight, do you think he would he still have ordered the invasion? Support your conclusion.
- Are Iraqis better off now than with Saddam in power? Why do you think that?
- What do you think of how the media covered the "Shock and Awe" bombing of Baghdad?
- What is the difference between why the U.S. went into Iraq and what the U.S. is doing in Iraq?
- If you were President, what would you do differently with the current situation?

**Discussion Questions**

Did your position on the war in Iraq change after seeing the film? If so, why?



***Brown Sugar***  
**(USA, 108 Minutes)**  
**Director: Rick Famuyiwa**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Sidney and Dre can attribute their friendship and the launch of their careers to one single childhood instant: when they were introduced to hip-hop on a New York street corner. Now some 15 years later, she is a revered music critic and he is a successful, though unfulfilled, music executive. Both come to realize that their true love was found that day on the corner. *Brown Sugar* uses a love story to parallel the history and lost integrity of hip-hop music. Hip-hop artist Mos Def co-stars and provides music for the film

**Study Questions**

- What are the origins of hip-hop?
- What is the difference between hip-hop and rap?
- What evidence do you see of the commercialization of hip-hop?
- How has the commercial success of hip-hop affected the quality of the music?
- In your opinion, what does “integrity” mean in the context of music?

**Discussion Questions**

- In what ways did Dre compromise his values to achieve success?
- Did Sidney make compromises too? If so, what were they?
- Why do you think Mos Def’s character refused to sign with the record label Dre worked for?



### ***Cronos***

**(Mexico 1993, 92 Minutes, Spanish with English subtitles)**

**Director: Guillermo del Toro**

### **Study Guide**

#### **Synopsis**

*Cronos* begins with an alchemist who invents the Cronos device, a hand-held golden machine which secretes a life-giving substance into a human host in exchange for blood. Hidden for many years the Cronos resurfaces in the present-day antique shop of Jesus Gris, an older man surrounded by the articles of previous centuries. He discovers the benefits of the Cronos as his life rejuvenates into a youthful existence. However, he is mysteriously plagued by an intense craving for fresh blood. Meanwhile, a powerful but dying industrialist is also aware of the Cronos device and orders a frantic search for the machine. The struggle for the device intensifies as the industrialist's nephew Angel closes in just as Jesus' addiction becomes overwhelming and his ability to maintain any form of "life" begins to deteriorate.

#### **Themes in the film**

Vampire mythology

Alchemy

Symbolism

#### **Study Questions**

- What are some Vampire story clichés?
- What is alchemy? What do you know about the mythology of alchemy in terms of gold and the quest for eternal life?
- Why do you think our culture has a pre-occupation with stories of eternal life or youth, and how does that play into the popularity of vampire stories and imagery?

#### **Discussion Questions**

- How do the themes of alchemy and the pursuit for purity play throughout the course of the film?
- How does the film portray the vampiric elements in its plot? How does it change or play with the horror genre?
- Did you notice any religious symbolism within the film? Why do you think the Cronos device is hidden in a statue of an angel? Why might the antique dealer's name be Jesus, or the industrialist's nephew's name be Angel? How do these names fit and also conflict with their traditional associations?

- Both Jesus and the industrialist have relatives who are at their side in the quest for the Cronos device. How does each man's supporter affect his quest?



***Dark***  
**(USA, 2002, 95 Minutes)**  
**Director: D.A. Bullock**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Dark Freeman lives in two vastly opposed worlds: one of privilege and opportunity – the University of Chicago and one of violence and fear – Chicago’s ‘South Side.’ He is a student in the first and a resident in the latter, but belongs to neither. Dark’s uniqueness lies in its attempt to construct a personal but equally symbolic vision. It deals with the effects of poverty and violence on the young in Chicago, but focuses on the tragic results of internalizing the frustration arising from these conditions. Ultimately, Dark imagines a new type of redemption: the path a man can take to heal himself.

**Themes In the Film**

Depression, Alienation  
Drug use  
Family trauma  
Transition to adulthood  
Catcher In the Rye, Native Son

**Study Questions**

- What are some of the struggles faced by young African-American men trying to succeed in today’s society? What are some of the ways these struggles can be faced personally?
- Do you ever feel distanced from your own life, as though watching it unfold from afar? What do you think causes those feelings? What can be done to combat such feelings of powerlessness?

**Classroom Exercise**

Have the students write about someone they know who is “in trouble”. Then discuss their recommendations for recovery.

**Discussion Questions**

- Dark Freeman has been described as an “inaction hero”. What do you think was meant by that?
- Why do you think Dark attacked the pedestrian?
- Do you think Dark “hit bottom”? If so, do you think he had to fall before he could recover, or was there an earlier point in the story where you thought he would have gotten it together?

- What event, person, realization or moment caused him to finally bounce back from the abyss?



***Forbidden Games***  
**(France, 1952, 102 minutes)**  
**Director: Rene Clement**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Forbidden Games* is a French film that shows what happens to a child whose world is shattered by combat during World War II. Although the film is over forty years old, it has neither lost its impact nor significance. It reveals the psychological plight children suffer when they are caught in the devastating reality of war. The film follows a young girl, Paulette, who is orphaned and lost in the chaos of battle. She is given shelter by a family of farmers who seems unaffected by the war as they go through their chores and are engaged in the farmer's age-old struggle to survive. While the family gives Paulette a place to live, they seem oblivious to how the war has marked her. Maybe her own experiences, irrespective of how hard they are, give them no understanding that Paulette is seriously troubled. It is only their son, a boy a little older than Paulette, who seems to notice. But he is only a child himself. Few films have as effectively captured the powerlessness that children feel and the disturbing fact that adults can sometimes be completely insensitive to the emotional needs of children.

**Themes in the film**

City vs. rural life

Children in wartime

How children deal with death

How adults deal with death

Religious symbols, rituals and what they mean during wartime

Civilian casualties in war

Neighbors

**Study Questions**

- What were the circumstances of the Nazi occupation of France in WWII?
- Who fled and who stayed?
- Were there casualties?
- What forms did the resistance take?
- In what ways do children deal with the complexities of war and death?
- What role did religion play in France around the time of WWII?

**Discussion Questions**

- What did the crosses mean to the adults in the film?
- What did they mean to the children?

- What role did religion play in the lives of farm people?
- Were any analogies being made with the family feud of the Goards and the Dolles? Explain.
- Was there some correlation being made between the death of the animals in the film and the death of the humans in WWII? Explain.
- Do you notice any hypocrisy in the adults behavior vs. what the children were blamed for?
- Why does everyone in the film seem so detached from their religious rituals, the war and death?



***Good Morning***  
**(Japan, 1959, 93 minutes)**  
**Director: Yasujiro Ozu**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

This classic Japanese film is the story of a family in which a great storm is brewing. The father has upbraided his two sons for watching too much television at a neighbor's house. When the boys try to convince their father that they would spend more time at home if he would buy them their own television, he refuses to listen and decrees that no television will enter his home. The boys retaliate by vowing to remain silent at home and school until the father purchases the offending television. At the core of *Good Morning* lies a very human truth: life is not made of big moments and great thoughts; it is marked by its quiet moments and small talk. Ozu is a true humanist who uses small familial issues to define the much broader context of human social interactions.

**Study Questions**

- What role does small talk play in your life?
- Is the role different for older generations? Why or why not?
- What is the role of gossip in your community? Is it harmful?
- If so, how harmful do you think it is and why?
- What are some of the attitudes toward television amongst people in your parent's generation, your grandparent's generation, or people from other cultures?
- What were some of the predictions made in previous eras about the impact of television?

**Discussion questions**

- How does the boys' silence affect the village?
- Why do you think the parents relented and purchased the television?
- What were some of the repercussions of the gossip that went on in the film?
- What did you learn about Japanese culture that you did not expect?



***Grand Illusion***  
**(France, 1938, 114 minutes)**  
**Director: Jean Renoir**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

One of the most celebrated antiwar films ever made- Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusions* filters its indictments through the interactions and sacrifices of characters that are divided by class more than national borders. This escape story concerns French soldiers held in a World War I German prison camps. All the soldiers at the prison camp come from different social classes. A friendship based on mutual respect and rank develops between the German von Rauffenstein and the French Captain Boeldieu. And there is a romance between the French escapee Marechal and the German woman who takes him along with the Jewish character, Rosenthal. Renoir made the film in 1937 as WWII seemed unavoidable. Referring to his film as "a statement of man's brotherhood beyond political borders," he hoped it would be a message for German soldiers to ignore their hyper nationalists leaders. Unfortunately it never had a chance – all prints of the film were confiscated and only after WWII it was it re-discovered and restored.

**Themes in the film**

Europe in World War I and II  
National Boundaries  
Anti-Semitism  
Class issues  
Rules of war and the Geneva Convention

**Study Questions**

- What countries fought in WWI and on what side of the conflict?
- How were prisoners of war treated in WWI?
- How do you think soldiers from the allied countries got along in the POW camps despite the differences in language, ethnic background, classes and political beliefs?
- How do the types of combat in WWI differ from WWII? From wars waged in the present day?

**Discussion Questions**

- Why did von Rauffenstein feel such remorse for shooting Boeldieu, even though they were supposed to be enemies in wartime?
- In what ways did you see class differences highlighted in the film?

- The only battle scene in the film is when one high-ranking officer shoots another of the same rank. What do you think the director was trying to say about war in choosing this as the only battle scene?
- It is the Jew, Rosenthal, who acts as translator between the German country girl and the French soldier Marechal as they fall in love. Since the film was made right before the start of WWII, what meanings could the director have been trying to convey here?
- At the end of the film, Marechal and Rosenthal escape Germany through high snow. German soldiers are about to shoot them until they realize that the escapees have crossed the boundary into Switzerland. What do you think this scene says about country boundaries, war and national identity?



**Grey Gardens**  
**(USA, 1976, 94 Minutes)**  
**Directors: Albert and David Maysles**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Filmmakers Albert and David Maysles can be credited with turning documentary film into an art form. Spanning five decades of work, the Maysles' "direct cinema", including *Salesman* and *Gimme Shelter*, have been an important part of American cultural history. Part of the Maysles' legend involves their intimate profiles of unique personalities, and the filmmakers' ability to get subjects to reveal themselves in ways they normally never would. *Grey Gardens* is a hypnotic, tragic and affectionate classic, featuring 79-year-old Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter Edie, the aunt and cousin of Jackie Kennedy. Sharing a decaying seaside mansion with countless cats and rodents, the disarmingly eccentric duo competes for attention, revealing a complex relationship, as well as some famously far-out fashion experiments.

**Themes of the film**

Aging

Disappointment

Tragedy

Character study

Family relationships

Literary Comparisons: Anton Chekov, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Miss Havesham from *Great Expectations*

**Study Questions**

- They say every family includes an eccentric relative. Who is the eccentric one in your family? How is this person treated by the family? What do people say about him/her? Is there some circumstance in this person's past that caused the eccentricity?
- Do you have certain assumptions about the upper-classes; how they live and behave?
- Do you have a favorite "reality TV" show? Why do you enjoy watching those types of shows? How do you imagine the tv show producers feel about the subjects? What purpose do these shows have?
- In documentaries where people are the focus, where do you draw the line between exploitation and homage?

**Discussion Questions**

- Is the film exploitative, or is it a loving portrayal? Support your conclusion.

- Why do you think the Maysles chose the Bouviers as documentary subjects?
- Why do you think Edie stayed with Edith for so many years?
- What did Edie mean when she said “The hallmark of aristocracy is responsibility”?
- Did Edith play a role in her daughter’s spinster status?
- Is there any correlation between madness and creativity?
- Do Edith and Edie create their own reality?
- How do you think they came to be this way?
- What do you imagine happened to the two women after the film?
- Grey Gardens is considered a cult classic film. Lines from the film are quoted often by its aficionados. What is your favorite line from the film? Why?



***Harlem Aria***  
**(USA, 1999, 100 minutes)**  
**Director: William Jennings**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Harlem Aria* is a comedic fable about a mentally disabled young man from Harlem who runs away from home to become an Opera singer and ends up homeless on the streets of New York. *Harlem Aria* asks some serious questions of the audience, with themes of what people do to chase after dreams and aspirations.

**Study Questions**

- Have you ever befriended a bully?
- What makes someone a friend and at what point do they become more than someone you know?
- Have you ever taken advantage of a person or a situation?

**Discussion Questions**

- Who would be the antagonist in the story?
- What steps would you take to live our your dream?
- There are thousands of people who live in the streets of Chicago. Have you ever thought how they got there and what choices they made?
- What happens when you can't live our your dreams and how was this laid out in the film?



***Lalee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton***  
**(USA, 2001, 88 minutes)**

**Directed by: Susan Froemke, Deborah Dickson and Albert Maysles**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

LALEE'S KIN takes us deep into the Mississippi Delta and the intertwined lives of LaLee Wallace, a great-grandmother struggling to hold her world together in the face of dire poverty, and Reggie Barnes, superintendent of the embattled West Tallahatchie School System. The film explores the painful legacy of slavery and sharecropping in the Delta. 62-year-old LaLee Wallace is the lifeblood of this film. Matriarch to an extended family that moves in and out of her house, LaLee is a woman of contradictions and hope. "Could have been worse," she says quietly, surveying the rat- and roach-infested trailer she has been granted through a government program after her own house was condemned. Wallace grew up in a family of sharecroppers; she began picking cotton at the age of six, stopped attending school a few years later, and still cannot read. As happened throughout the South, sharecropping gave way to low-paid labor, but with the enforcement of minimum wage laws and increasing mechanization, even those jobs were hard to come by. Without education or skills, Wallace and other residents of Tallahatchie County had few options, and the poverty and hopelessness they felt was passed down to the generations that followed. The film also profiles educator Reggie Barnes, who is determined to stop this cycle. Barnes was hired as Superintendent of Schools in West Tallahatchie in an effort to get the school district off probation, where it was placed by the Mississippi Department of Education because of poor student performance on statewide standardized tests (the Iowa Test for Basic Skills, ITBS). If Barnes fails to raise the school from its current Level 1 status to a Level 2, the state of Mississippi has threatened to take over. Barnes and his faculty oppose this, fearing that administrators in far-off Jackson would not do as well in addressing the special needs of the community. "It's a different world," he says. "We get kids in kindergarten who do not know their names; we get kids in kindergarten who don't know colors; we get kids in kindergarten who have never been read to." He adds, "If we can educate the children of the illiterate parent, we stop this vicious cycle."

**Themes of the film**

Poverty/ Economic changes in the deep south  
Slavery to sharecropping/The Mississippi Delta region

## Illiteracy/School Testing Standards

### **Study Questions**

- Why is the USA often referred to as “The richest country in the world” if extreme poverty still exists here?
- What is the “No Child Left Behind” act and how does it affect your education?

### Classroom Exercises – Analyzing Census Data

- Have your students discuss the link between an individual’s education level and their future economic picture. Now map out a region of the US and look at the test scores, income level and spending per pupil. Do the test scores of a region reflect the future economic picture of that region? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Compare spending per pupil in Mississippi vs. your state; your state compared to others. What does the data mean?

### **Discussion Questions**

- Did you find it surprising that such extreme poverty still exists in the US?
- Why were the students so invested in the outcome of the ITBS tests?
- What do you think will happen to Granny? Redman? Main?
- If you were School Superintendent Reggie Barnes, what would you do to improve student literacy and the ITBS scores without any additional funding?
- Look at Charles Dickens’ England and compare the poverty he described to what Lalee and her children experience.



***Legacy***  
**(USA, 2002)**  
**Director: Tod Lending**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Legacy* tells the story of a Chicago family living in the projects and their transcending of hardships. Shot over a five-year period, this emotional feature looks, with an intimate eye, into three generations of powerful women – how they winter through the murder of a son, welfare, drug addictions, and the violence of their community and life in the projects. All of the women in the film manage to change their situations, with the help of social workers, teachers and related professionals, through great struggle and pain. *Legacy* curiously draws both compassion and inspiration amidst social cruelties.

**Study Questions**

- What do you know about life in public housing projects?
- Do you sympathize with those who depend on welfare? Why or why not?
- Do you know someone with a drug problem? How does their addiction affect the lives of those around them?
- What are some methods you can think of for a persona to get out of poverty? Drug addiction? A violent environment?

**Discussion Questions**

- In your opinion, does the family depicted in *Legacy* represent a typical family struggling in the urban housing project?
- In what ways could you attempt to help someone in Alaisa's position?



***Les Choristes***  
**(France 2003, 95 min, French with English subtitles)**  
**Director: Christophe Barratier**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Most of the pupils at the austere Fond de l'Étang (which translates as "bottom of the pond") boarding school are bullies and pranksters whose parents have given up on them; others are orphans who have recently lost their families to World War II. These rebellious youngsters endure day after day under the thumb of headmaster Rachin, a sour-faced disciplinarian who terrifies his students and resolves issues by banishing boys into solitary confinement. Into this decidedly unhappy environment comes Clément Mathieu, a beautiful dreamer trapped in the form of a frumpy, middle-aged music teacher. Hired as a mere assistant, the big-hearted Clément quickly recognizes the pupils' desperation for real encouragement and respect. When he discovers that several of the boys are gifted singers, Clément skirts around Rachin's policies and arranges the students into a choir. While incurring the wrath of his superior, the teacher gamely suffers the boys' pranks, nurtures their talents and eventually wins their trust through the music they create together. Remarkably, the worst of the bullies even emerges as the choir's angel-voiced soloist.

**Themes in the Film**

Redemption  
Music  
Post-WWII France

**Study Questions**

- What do you imagine would make someone choose a teaching career?
- What about choosing to teach in particularly difficult circumstances, such as a reform school or remote location? Who would make those kinds of choices and why?
- What happened to the children whose families were affected by the war, through separation, death, destruction of homes or loss of possessions?
- How do you think it affected their education and upbringing?
- How did WWII affect the different social classes in France?

**Discussion Questions**

- What did M. Mathieu do before and what brought him to Fond de L'Étang?
- How does Pierre Morhange feel about his mother?

- What are some of the various reasons the boys are at Fond de L'Etang?
- Who was "redeemed" in the story? Who was "condemned"? Why?



*Lift*

(USA, 2001, 83 minutes)

Directed by: DeMane Davis and Khari Streeter

**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Lift*, a penetrating film set in Boston dealing with the bonds between a mother and a daughter is part melodrama, part consumerist critique, part heist flick. *Lift* portrays an embittered mother-daughter relationship located within a circle of dysfunctional friends and associates who aspire to materialism they cannot afford. "Lifting" provides the daughter an intoxicating rush and the means to win the affection of her distant mother.

**Study Questions**

- Name some of the influences that may lead people to shoplift.
- Have you ever been in a situation where a friend has shoplifted In your presence? What was your reaction?
- How important is it to have a good relationship with your parents when you are a teenager? Why do most teens have difficult time communicating with parents?

**Discussion Questions**

- Why did the main character choose to steal?
- Name some of the metaphors that filmmaker used in the film.
- How did the aesthetic that was chosen for the film parallel the story?
- What do you think should have happened to Nancy?



***Minerva's Quest***  
**(Spanish with English subtitles)**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

This modern fairy tale magically unfolds in flashbacks as a middle-aged writer, suffering from writer's block, returns to her childhood in search of the key to the future. Minerva grows up motherless, volleyed between a sadistic Catholic school and a home divided by a terrible secret. Looming large is Uncle Alberto, whose sporadic visits bring the most charming and wondrous gifts, stories, fantasies and hope. He weaves fantastic tales and promises to take Minerva away someday – the biggest fairy tale of all. The adult Minerva makes a desperate pilgrimage home for answers to the shadowy mysteries that are a part of her, finding Uncle Alberto's greatest gift – the truth.

**Study Questions**

- Can you think of examples in mythology of a hero who must overcome fears and demons from past to face present obstacles? Can you think of any examples that apply to women in film, literature of mythology?
- Can you think of people you know in your lifetime who have learned at an older age about secrets or mysteries from their childhood? How did they react when they learned the truth?

**Discussion Questions**

- Why do you think Minerva headed back to her childhood home? What did she expect to find there? What do you see as cause of her writer's block?
- Does the child Minerva continue to believe Uncle Alberto's stories? If not, at what point does she stop? If so, why did she, despite the continued disappointments?
- What do you imagine happened to Minerva between the end of her childhood tale and where the film picks up in her adult life?



***My Architect***  
**US 2003, 116 Minutes)**  
**Director: Nathaniel Kahn**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Louis Kahn, a giant among twentieth-century architects, left a legacy of brilliantly designed and engineered buildings that have a tough beauty and deep spirit. His work challenges us to discover an astonishing sensibility and poetry through light, space, and texture. Kahn's personal life was even more mysterious, and his death, alone and unidentified in Penn Station in 1974, revealed that he led not a double but a triple life, shuttling between his legitimate family and two women and the children they bore him. One of these, his son Nathaniel, takes us on a personal journey to consider the contradictions of this complicated genius and eccentric parent.

**Study Questions**

- In your opinion, do adults define themselves more through their personal relationships or their professional accomplishments? Why?
- Is there a particular person that you are curious about in your family who died when you were younger? What steps would you take to learn more about this person?
- What are your thoughts on architecture? How important is the design of a building compared to its actual function?
- What do an architect's buildings reveal about the designer?

**Classroom Exercises**

- Have the students evaluate the structures they encounter in everyday life (home, school, office, place of worship, etc.). In what ways do these buildings succeed or fail?
- Have each student list their favorite buildings in Chicago and discuss their choices.

**Discussion Questions**

- At the time of his death, Louis Kahn was near bankruptcy. How do you define "success"?
- Do you think the film director's search to learn more about his father helped make up for his father's lack of involvement in his life? Is so, why? If not, why not?
- Can you compare Nathaniel Kahn's filmmaking style to other biographical

documentaries you've seen?

- What do you think of Louis Kahn's buildings? Do they live up to the praise of his colleagues?
- What makes his creations stand out from others?
- What do you think Louis Kahn meant when he said "Ask a brick what it wants to be"?



***My Life As McDull***  
**(Hong Kong, 75 minutes)**  
**Director: Toe Yuen**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

McDull was born dimwitted despite his mother's prayers for a handsome, smart son. There's no Dad around, so Mom has to make do alone. She continually prays for McDull's luck and life to change. However, his desires are simple. He wants to go to the Maldives. He wants turkey dinner for Christmas. He wants things that are beyond their means. *My Life As McDull* is steeped in a realistic, actual representation of Hong Kong, from the Peak Tram to the Welcome grocery stores. McDull and his mother may be animated pigs, but their lives are those of working class Hong Kong residents. The film is a charming, involving picture that epitomizes the irrepressible and happy-go-lucky spirit of Hong Kong.

**Study Questions**

- When did Hong Kong officially become part of China?
- What were the circumstances?
- As far as you know, how does life in Hong King differ from life in Mainland China?
- What holidays are celebrated in Hong Kong?
- What similarities are there with the ways that holidays are celebrated in the US?

**Discussion Questions**

- How does McDull feel about his mother?
- What do you think of her and her relationship to McDull?
- Why does McDull seek a Master?
- What is McDull's final philosophy on life?
- What images do you take away from the film about life in Hong Kong?



***Noi Albinoi***  
**(Iceland 2003, 82 Minutes, Icelandic with English subtitles)**  
**Director: Nathaniel Kahn**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

The film follows a teen non-conformist whose dreams are frostbitten by dead-end small-fjord life. 17-year-old Noi ditches school, rebels against authority, and fantasizes about escaping his desolate Icelandic town. Misunderstood at school and by his family – a loving but aging grandmother, alcoholic father and absent mother – Noi’s lively spirit is stifled. Hope appears with the arrival of city girl Iris. Inspired, he hatches a madcap scheme to escape to Hawaii. But Noi’s path to escape will not be an easy or predictable one. The film has striking cinematography, audacious storytelling and a universal theme in a unique setting.

**Themes in the Film**

Isolation  
Family Relations  
Teenage angst, Frustration  
Small town life

**Study Questions**

- What are some of the issues you have had to face as a teen growing up in today’s society? Have these issues ever prompted you to rebel against adult authority?
- Where would you recommend a friend go to for support when he/she is misunderstood at home and at school?
- Have you ever made some major mistakes in your life? What did you do to undo the damage done?

**Discussion Questions**

- Noi feels trapped in his small, boring fjord town. Do you ever have similar feelings of captivity even though you live in a bustling city? If so, what do you do to combat those feelings?
- What about Noi’s troubles as a 17-year-old are universal? Which problems are more particular to his situation? Why do you think the film’s screenwriter chose to end the story that way? What do you imagine would happen to Noi in the future?



**Notorious**  
**Feature Film (USA, 1946, 102 Minutes)**  
**Filmmaker: Alfred Hitchcock**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

In *Notorious*, Hitchcock fuses two of his favorite elements: suspense and romance. Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman), a beautiful woman with a tainted past, is enlisted by American agent Devlin (Cary Grant) to spy on a ring of Nazis in post-war Rio. Alex Sebastian (Claude Rains), the leader of the Nazi cell, is in love with Alicia. Alicia has fallen for Devlin, but goes through with the plan and marries Sebastian. The story plays with the audience's sympathies of the three complex main characters. The heroes are not completely clean, the villain not completely evil. Stunning performances, Ben Hecht's excellent script, and Hitchcock's direction at its best make *Notorious* a perfect film.

**Themes in the Film**

- Conflict between love and duty
- Uncertain morality
- Manipulation of the audience
- Deception vs. appearances

**Study Questions**

- It was once said of Hitchcock "Through the power of his consummate technique, he directs not actors, but the audience". In what ways do filmmakers "manipulate" their audiences? Why do you feel certain emotions when watching a film (such as empathy, anxiety)?
- What is a "McGuffin"? A term invented by Hitchcock, defined as: 'A device or plot element that catches the viewer's attention or drives the plot. It is generally something that every character is concerned with. The McGuffin is essentially something that the entire story is built around and yet has no real relevance such as stolen papers/documents, jewels, microfilm, secret formulas, etc. Give some examples of "McGuffins" you know of from other films. Does the McGuffin propel the plot? If so, how? If not, what purpose does it serve?

**Classroom exercise**

- Hitchcock on designing a script: "When I am given a subject, probably a book, play, or an original story, I like to have the story, in its barest bones, just laid out on a sheet of paper. You might call it the steelwork...The particular reason why I prefer to do that is because I do not like to let myself think that there is more in it than there really is, because I believe that one should build up". Based on that idea, have the students take their

favorite novel, film or play and lay out the entire story on one sheet of paper. Then compare with their classmates and see whose was the most concise.

### **Discussion Questions**

- How did you feel about the various characters in the film? Who did you feel the most sympathy for? Why?
- What betrayals can you name that took place in the film?
- How were you “directed” when watching the film?
- List the various objects you saw in the film that became ominous. How did they add to the feeling of anticipation or suspense?
- What was the McGuffin in Notorious? Was there more than one?



***One Week***  
**(USA, 2000, 97 minutes)**  
**Director: Carl Seaton**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Varon's plans to marry his fiancé Kiya on Saturday are quickly yielded when news from a health center informs him that a previous sexual partner has been diagnosed with HIV. Monday at the health center, Varon takes his own HIV test and is told he must wait "one week" for the results. Caught in a moral dilemma, Varon must choose between telling his fiancée and risk losing her or going ahead with his marriage plans, in keeping with a silent lie. Another curve ball is added when his best friend Tyco reveals that he is on the same notification list. Varon's life changes irreversibly in a very short time. He finds out that his fiancée is pregnant, loses his job, spends the night in jail, the wedding is canceled and then, Tyco gets his test results.

**Study Questions**

- What do you know about HIV and AIDS?
- What is the quality of life like for those living with HIV?
- In what ways would your life change if you discovered that you were HIV positive?
- How would you react to the news that a former partner had HIV?

**Discussion Questions**

- Do you think Varon should have told Kiya himself before the results of the HIV test?
- In what ways did keeping the truth from Kiya affect Varon's life?
- What do you think about Tyco's reaction to his test results?
- How did Tyco's death affect Varon's next actions?
- What message do you think this movie is trying to convey?



***Public Enemy***  
**(USA, 1999, 88 minutes)**  
**Directed by Jens Meurer**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

The film is a documentary of The Black Panther Party as told by four former Party members: founding Party member Bobby Seale, now an author on the lecture circuit; Kathleen Cleaver, a Party organizer, now a professor of Law at Sarah Lawrence College; Jamal Joseph, an organizer in the Party's Harlem office, now poet, founder of Impact Repertory Theater; award-winning director, producer and assistant professor of film at Columbia University; and Nile Rogers, Party member, founder of the musical group Chic, producer and musician. The stories they tell are personal ones. *Public Enemy* is not an in-depth look at Party history, but it is all the more effective when one realizes through film what these people saw, what they accomplished, how it affected them and how it failed. Ultimately, it is the telling of the story that is the success of the Panther's legacy.

**Study Questions**

- What do you know about The Black Panther Party?
- What do you know about Fred Hampton, Sr. and the Chicago Panthers?
- Do you feel that the Panthers played a major role in African American history?
- What is the legacy of the Black Panther Party?

• **Discussion Questions**

- Why were government officials and the FBI so worried about the Black Panthers?
- What do you know about CONTELPRO, and who do you think was its' purpose?
- In what ways do you think the Party succeeded? In what ways do you think it failed?
- Could there be organizations like The Black Panther Party in America today?
- If so, how would it differ from the Panthers of the 60s?
- If not, why do you think such an organization couldn't exist today?
- Do you think the goals of the Party were achievable, why or why not?



***Rashomon***  
**(Japan, 1950, 88 minutes)**  
**Director: Akira Kurosawa**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Rashomon* depicts the retelling of a rape and murder from several different points of view, each claiming a different version of who committed the murder. There is the woodcutter, who claims to have witnessed the crime, the bandit, the raped women and the dead man, speaking through a medium. The film is framed with the telling of the tale by the woodcutter and a priest, both present at the inquest, to a stranger while they are all taking shelter in a torrential rainstorm at Rashomon gate. The popularity of the film and the short stories has led to the naming of the “Rashomon Effect or Rashomon Principle” used as a model in anthropology and journalism in measuring objectivity. Kurosawa’s films have inspired numerous homage, rip-offs and remakes in cinema history. For the closest homage to *Rashomon*, see *Pulp Fiction* and *Courage Under Fire*.

**Themes in the film**

Japan recovering from devastation in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and after WWII  
Objectivity and the search for the truth  
Rashomon Principle: truth is relative  
Human nature  
The role of women, class and religion in Japanese society

**Study Questions**

- What is a fact? How do you define “truth,” and what is objectivity?
- How are these issues of objectivity dealt with by journalists, anthropologists and historians?
- What was the mood of the Japanese after WWII?

**Discussion Questions**

- Whose story did you find most believable and why?
- How does each version reflect the biases of each person recounting the story?
- What details are common to all accounts of the crime?
- What is the role of women in Japan as reflected in the film?
- What are the metaphors used to show the decline of the Japanese empire?



***Real Women Have Curves***  
**(USA, 86 minutes)**  
**Director: Patricia Cardoso**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Real Women Have Curves* is the story of Ana, a first generation Mexican-American teenager on the verge of becoming a woman, who's torn between her mainstream ambitions and her cultural heritage. The film features a group rarely portrayed in mass media: complex, deeply human, hard-working Latina women. Ana has just graduated from high school. Because she is a talented writer, a caring teacher urges her to apply to college. Ana secretly is excited about the possibility, but her overhearing and hypercritical mother, Carmen, insists that it is time for her to help provide for the family by working in her sister's sewing factory. When a crisis arises at the factory, it seems as if Ana's fate is unhappily sealed, but her indomitable will to reach beyond a sweatshop life eventually leads her to burst, defiant and resplendent, through every restriction on her life. *Real Women Have Curves* gives a fresh new voice to the yearnings of Chicana women struggling against insecurities to love themselves and find respect in the world. (In English and Spanish with English subtitles).

**Study Questions**

- What role does body image play in adolescence?
- How do commercial images, advertisements, fashion affect the way women feel about themselves?
- What are some of the issues that face second-generation immigrants?

**After the Film**

- Why does Carmen care so much about her daughters' appearance?
- If Carmen had sons, do you think she would care as much about how they look? Why or why not?
- What are the causes of the tension between Ana and her mother?
- Why doesn't Carmen want her daughter to go to college?
- In what ways does the experience in the sewing factory affect Ana?



***Refugee***  
**(USA, 63 minutes)**  
**Director: Spencer Nakasako**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

In *Refugee* by Spencer Nakasako, three young Cambodian American men, raised on the streets of San Francisco's tough Tenderloin district, travel to Cambodia wielding video cameras to capture their experiences of meeting fathers, sisters and brothers for the first time. These family reunions reveal the quagmire of Cambodian political upheaval and military invasion, as well as the heavy toll of years spent apart in different worlds. As we follow their journeys we learn about the impact of war, refugee and immigrant culture, family, death, personal and political history, identity and, ultimately, reconciliation and forgiveness. In the seventies and eighties, many Southeast Asians, including Cambodians, fled war-torn countries and traveled to the U.S. as refugees. These families experienced tremendous turmoil, separations and culture shock upon arrival in their new home in America. Often, these communities faced difficulties in language, education and employment. Years later, the younger generation's exposure to this impoverished legacy and their increased fluency with the digital age has created a number of documentary films on this much-overlooked segment of American society. As we watch we learn that many other youth share similar issues: cultural barriers, war trauma, intergenerational misunderstandings, low-incomes, violence and drug abuse.

**Discussion Questions**

- Statements about the films. Agree, not sure or disagree?
  - The father was responsible for the separation of Mike's family.
  - The Aunt should have brought Mike's brother to escape.
  - Mike's mother was right to not talk to him about his father and brother while he was growing up.
- Compare Mike, David and Paul's arrival and departure in Cambodia. What is different about their attitude and how it's represented?
- How do Mike, David and Paul differ in their relationship to Cambodia? How do their different attitudes affect their experiences?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to end *Refugee* at the Killing Fields? What are Mike's reflections in that scene? What do you think about him forgiving his father?
- Have you ever lived in or visited another country? What was different about this place and the people who lived there? How does your experience

- make you think differently about where you live now?
- What are some examples of the different kinds of family represented in the film? Are there people outside your relatives who have become like family to you? What makes them like family? Do you feel like a stranger in your family? When and how?
  - Where were you born? How has the place of your birth shaped how you identify yourself?



***Runaway***  
**(2001, 87 minutes)**  
**Directed by: Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

*Runway* is a documentary about young Iranian girls who runaway from home each with a different tale of abuse or torment. Many come from good homes and are just looking to gain independence. The scene is set in a desert oasis that is run by a group of Islamic nuns who consult the young women about being abandoned, and the nuns soon become a bridge between broken families and the troubled teens.

**Study Questions**

- What role do women play in the Tarhan culture?
- Here in the States, children runaway quite often. Contrast how each culture affects its youth and their psyche.
- Teenagers usually want freedom and independence. Have you ever considered running away from home? What were the factors?

**Discussion Questions**

- How does the culture that they live in impact the girls decisions?
- Who was the person that you were drawn to in the story, which story impacted you the most?
- How did abuse play a role in the girls who ran away?
- How did the way the filmmakers chose to shoot the film make you feel: more or less empathetic and sympathetic for the girls?



***Set Me Free (EMPORTE MOI)***  
**(Canada, 1999, 95 Minutes, French with English subtitles)**  
**Director: Lea Pool**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

A 13-year old girl in the Montreal of the 1960's goes through many of the experiences of adolescence, attempting to become a woman in a household where she comes into conflict with parents who both love and hate one another. Her Jewish father is an unknown poet whose soul is tormented. Her young Catholic mother is fragile and overworked. She finds refuge in a love of movies, but trying to emulate a character from her favorite film leads to trouble.

**Themes in the Film**

Independence, Adolescence/Growing up, Teen Sexuality, Depression  
Family Relations, Parental Conflict, Issues of Inter-faith marriage, Judaism,  
Catholicism French New Wave Film/Jean Luc Godard

**Study Questions**

- Do you feel you are free to live your life as you wish, or do you have certain responsibilities that restrict you?
- List a film or two that had a big impact on you at a particular time in your life. How did you relate to the protagonist?
- Have you ever thought of running away from home? What did you imagine you would do and where would you go?

**Classroom Exercise**

Have the students make a list of films that are their favorites, naming only films they think others may not know about.

**Discussion Questions**

- Hanna uses movies as a way to escape the pain in her life. What do you turn to for consolation? How does that help you?
- Hanna's parents each have their own problems. How do the problems of her parents affect Hanna?
- Do you think Hanna discovers her true identity by the end of the film? Is she "set free"?



### ***Swing***

**(France, 90 minutes, French with English subtitles)**

**Director: Tony Gatlif**

### **Study Guide**

#### **Synopsis**

Ten year-old Max is bored, he's looking for some fun. One day, he finds himself listening to the virtuoso guitar-playing of a gypsy named Miraldo. Max is transfixed by the unusual music: he has discovered "manouche". Like a bee to honey, he's drawn to this haunting music, heading off to the wrong side of town, where the gypsies live—a place he knows he's not supposed to visit. Undeterred, he buys a guitar and convinces Miraldo to tutor him. Soon he's discovered a whole new world—gypsy jazz and a girl named Swing. A generous, purely joyful and exuberant film that teaches the importance of delving into other cultures.

#### **Study Questions**

- What/who are the Gypsies?
- What are common misconceptions and stereotypes about Gypsies?
- How are they typically depicted on film?
- What do you know about the persecution of the Gypsies?
- How big a role does music play in your culture?

#### **After the Film**

- Did the music in the film remind you of any other music you are familiar with?
- Do you feel you have a new appreciation of Rom (Gypsy) culture?
- How is oral culture transferred from generation to generation?
- Why do you think Max felt the need to keep a journal?
- How big a role does music play in Manouche culture?
- Why do you think the Gypsies are forgotten in the teaching of Holocaust history?



***The Agronomist***  
**(USA, 2003, 90 Minutes, English and French with English Subtitles)**  
**Director: Jonathan Demme**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Haiti: courage amidst suffering, long denied aspirations of democracy, rare episodes of progress, and repeated setbacks. *The Agronomist* embodies all of these in the deeply affecting and inspiring story of radio journalist and human rights activist Jean Dominique, founder of Radio Haiti Inter, and one of the country's authentic heroes. In this moving homage to his friend, director Jonathan Demme weaves together many threads to produce a rich view of Dominique's amazing life and work: historical footage of Haiti's vivid and tumultuous past; interviews with Dominique and with Michele Montas, his heroic wife, life-long love, and extraordinary partner; and footage shot for this long-planned documentary whose course was forever altered by Dominique's assassination on April 3, 2000.

**Study Questions**

- What do you know about the history of Haiti: The Slave Trade: Landowners, Petite Blancs Freed slaves, The Maroons The Slave Rebellion of 1791 Culture and Religion, Agrarian Population, Urban life, Economics US Occupation, The Dictatorship of "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier and the Ton Ton Macoutes, Recent History: Free elections, Military Coup, Presidency of Jean-Bertrand Aristide

**Discussion Questions**

- Why did Radio Haiti Inter do its' initial news broadcasts only in Creole?
- What does Jean Dominique mean when he refers to "sniffing" the climate each broadcast day before going on the air?
- Why do you think the director decided to call the film "The Agronomist", since Jean Dominique ran the radio station and hadn't worked in agriculture in many years?
- What do you think of Michele Montas' radio broadcast after Jean Dominique's death?



***The Manchurian Candidate***  
**(USA, 1962, 126 minutes)**  
**Director: John Frankenheimer**  
**Study Guide**

**Synopsis**

Sergeant Raymond Shaw returns from the Korean War where he is declared a hero and decorated for having single-handedly rescued his patrol from behind enemy lines. But in reality the whole patrol were abducted by the Communists who then placed them all under hypnotic conditioning where Raymond was turned into the perfectly programmed assassination tool to be activated by a particular code phrase. Now back in civilian life Shaw's commanding officer, Major Bennett Marco, begins to suspect something when he investigates reports from other men in the troop all reporting similar nightmares. In doing so he uncovers a plan by Communist spies to use Marco to assassinate The President.

**Themes in the Film**

Cold War/McCarthyism  
Paranoia/Conspiracy Theory  
Book by Richard Condon

**Study questions**

- Who was Joseph McCarthy? What was the mood in the United States during the Cold War?
- How did that mood facilitate the rampant paranoia of McCarthyism?
- Do you think that soldiers who participate in war are easily able to put their experiences into perspective?
- How do you imagine Pvt. Jessica Lynch feels about the way her rescue was handled and portrayed in the media? How do you feel about it?
- How easy might it be for a soldier who has been asked to kill to reintegrate into society? Family life? Why do you feel this way?

**Discussion Questions**

- What is the perspective of the filmmaker on the anti-Communist attitudes prevalent at the time?
- Does the filmmaker represent the anti-Communist characters in a favorable way? Does the filmmaker consider their fear of communist presence in the U.S. helpful to the process of government or dangerous to democracy?
- Why do you think the writer chose to make the anti-Communist Senator a conduit of communist propaganda/espionage? What similarities exist

between Senator Islin and Senator McCarthy?

Do you think a plot like the one in the film could ever have happened? Can you think of any parallels in reality near the level of this conspiracy? Do you see any similarities between the anti-Communist fervor of the 1950's and anti-terrorism of today?