



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?