

MVFF EDUCATION

Mustache



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 8-12

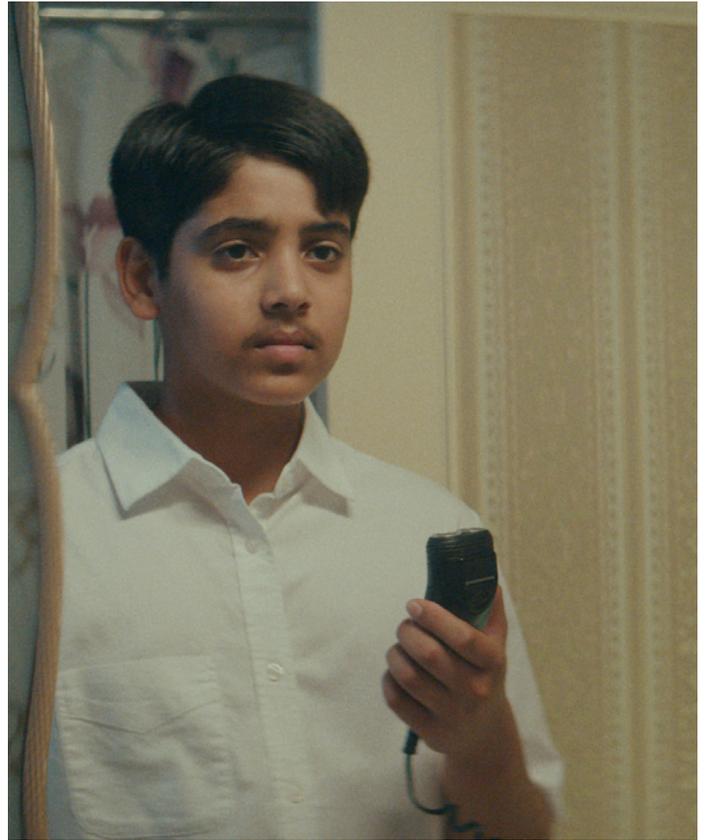
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Instructor Resources

A Letter to Educators	ii
Discussion Questions	iii
Interpretive Essay Prompts	iii
Additional Resources	iv
About CAFILM	iv
Standards	v

Student Handouts

About the Film	1
Contextual Information	2
Viewing Activities	3
Extension Activities	8
About Film Festivals	12



Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 46th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of *Mustache*.

This year, our MVFF Education film selections continue to focus on increasingly relevant issues of global empathy and active citizenship, and we believe this film will be a powerful and engaging text to use in your classroom. These curricular materials are designed to get students to engage deeply with film by the common-core aligned skills of developing an evidence-based interpretation of a text.

The discussion questions on the following page offer a variety of options for fostering small-group or whole-class dialogue. If your students are already familiar with a process of writing evidence-based interpretive essays, consider using the suggested essay prompts for a short writing piece. Additionally, individual handouts for before and after viewing are provided as stand-alone activities to be used individually or in sequence, with a particular emphasis on social-emotional learning. We have also included a handout that provides some context for the film festival experience, which may help to introduce your screening experience.

Thank you so much for your tireless work!

Sincerely,

The CAFILM Education Team

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did the film move you emotionally? How did it make you feel? What did the film make you think about?
2. What is the film's central theme? How is the theme developed and emphasized throughout the story? Is the theme expressed in a fresh, unique way?
3. What cultural values does the film communicate? How do you know?
4. In what ways does the film comment or reflect on aspects of the immigrant experience?
5. Describe a moment or a scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about the scene that was especially compelling for you?
6. Did anything that happened in this movie remind you of something that has occurred in your own life or that you have seen happen to others?
7. Considering the film's title, how is the central conflict of the film symbolic of collective teenage insecurities and the challenges we all face growing up?
8. How would different people view this film differently, based on their gender, age, ethnic background, and/or worldview?
9. What are the main differences between Ilyas's private school experience and his public school experience?
10. What are some of the religious requirements and prohibitions that govern Ilyas's life?
11. What type of adult hypocrisy does Ilyas have to come to terms with? How does this further complicate his own decision making and behavior?
12. How does the film use humor to counterbalance the sensitive religious themes in the story?

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. How does *Mustache* convey the universal struggle of teens who are trying to follow a set of rules on a predetermined path while also attempting to map out their own individual life journey?
2. How does *Mustache* reflect on faith, family, and self-acceptance?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Guide to Pakistani Culture, Etiquette and Business Practices

<https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/pakistan-guide>

Pakistan is derived from the word 'Pak' - a Persian word meaning pure or clean and "istan" - a Hindi word which refers to a land. Pakistan means the 'Pure Land.' This guide contains information on language, religion and beliefs, culture and society, social etiquette and customs, and business culture and etiquette.

About Pakistani Americans

<https://www.americanpakistan.org/pakistani-americans>

The Immigration Experience

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/858383-the-immigration-experience>

NPR: The Islamic School Experience

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/04/20/524510378/this-islamic-school-teaches-how-to-be-muslim-and-american>

This seven-minute listen features a school that cultivates and nurtures a thriving American Muslim identity that balances religious, academic and cultural knowledge and imparts the importance of civic involvement and charitable work.

Teachers Guide: Beliefs and Daily Lives of Muslims

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/beliefs.html>

ABOUT CAFILM

The nonprofit California Film Institute celebrates and promotes film as art and education through year-round programming at the independent Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, presentation of the acclaimed Mill Valley Film Festival and DocLands Documentary Film Festival, as well as cultivation of the next generation of filmmakers and audiences through CAFILM Education programs.

Follow the California Film Institute on social media



STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards ELA-Literacy

CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

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

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Name: _____



ABOUT THE FILM

It's never easy being a teenager, regardless of where or when you grew up. This is the central truth of *Mustache*, a humorous look at the Pakistani-American immigrant experience. Set in Silicon Valley in the 1990s, *Mustache* follows the travails of 13-year-old Ilyas, already struggling with his Muslim identity when he's forced to switch from a private Islamic school to public school. Suddenly Ilyas is faced with a whole new social hierarchy, a whole new circle of friends, and a wholly unwelcome bit of hair on his upper lip. Finding universality in a specific cultural experience is already challenging, but *Mustache* speaks to our collective insecurities while also acknowledging the many ways these experiences make us stronger.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER IMRAN J. KHAN

Imran J. Khan is an award-winning Pakistani-American writer and filmmaker. His short films, including *Prom*, have screened at major film festivals, been broadcast on national television and have been awarded Vimeo Staff Pick. *Mustache* is his debut feature, which premiered in competition at SXSW in 2023, where it won the Audience Award. Khan has an editing background: on the TV side, *Iwaju* for Disney+ and *Disenchantment* for Netflix; and on the feature side, *Space Jam: A New Legacy*, *Minions: The Rise of Gru*; and the critically acclaimed documentary *Shirkers*. He is a graduate of NYU'S MFA Film Production program and a San Francisco Bay Area native who began his filmmaking journey at the University of California, Davis making viral internet sketch videos in his spare time while pursuing a degree in Biological Systems Engineering.



FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

The idea for this film came about, and specifically to frame it around a mustache, comes from growing up in my family. But I guess what I've learned through making this film is that there are a lot of people who have had similar experiences, especially in the South Asian community, where people or parents don't want their kids to shave too early. Even if they have a full-grown mustache. So I was thinking about that, and I thought it was sort of a funny thing to center a film around. I've never seen anything like that, at least in a film like this. And if an idea sticks with me for a long time, I don't get bored of it, and if I'm still excited to keep writing it and excited to see it come to fruition, then there's probably something there that's worth sharing.

BEFORE VIEWING ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions:

The film you are about to watch is a coming-of-age story that centers around the Pakistani-American immigrant experience. Before watching the film, respond to this anticipation guide to consider some of the themes in the film. Read each statement below. If you agree with the statement, explain why in the left-hand box under the Agree column. If you disagree, explain why in the box under the Disagree column.

AGREE

STATEMENT

DISAGREE

Being a teenager is hard, regardless of where or when you grow up.

Our collective insecurities help connect us as human beings.

Public school is full of corrupt influences.

BEFORE VIEWING ANTICIPATION GUIDE, PART TWO

AGREE

STATEMENT

DISAGREE

Culture influences our thoughts, behaviors, and how we view the world.

Individual cultural values play a role in how we respond to situations or scenarios.

A person's beliefs, values, and practices should be understood based on that person's own culture, rather than be judged against the criteria of another.

DURING VIEWING STORY MAP

Directions:

Use the story map to identify the elements of narrative film. Identify the film's characters, plot, setting, problem, and solution as well as important symbols and themes.

PROBLEM

What is the main conflict of the film?

OUTCOME

How is the conflict resolved in the film?

CHARACTERS

Who are the main characters in the film and what is their relationship to each other?

ACTION

What actions do the characters take during the film? How do these actions develop the story?

SETTING

What is the significance of where the story takes place?

SYMBOLS

Are there any important symbolic props used in the film? If so, what are they and how are they significant to the story?

SETTING

What are the main themes of the film? These are broader points about society at large.

DURING VIEWING EMPATHY MAP

Directions: In *Mustache*, we follow the story of 13-year-old Ilyas already struggling with his identity when he's forced to switch from a private Islamic school to public school. Faced with a whole new social hierarchy and a circle of friends, he is culturally conflicted between obedience and self-interest. In this empathy map activity, fill out each quadrant to better understand his experience as both a teen and a Pakistani-American immigrant.

HEAR

Parts of the film include voiceover narration. What does the viewer hear from Ilyas himself about the challenges he is facing as a Muslim teenager and his specific cultural conflicts?

SEE

What does Ilyas's teenage experience look like? What challenges does he face in the Muslim community? In the secular American community?

FEEL

How does Ilyas feel about being a teenager? How does he feel about his Muslim identity? How does he feel about his mustache?

SAY/DO

How do Ilyas's words and actions differ between his private school life, his public school life, his home life, and his recreational life?

AFTER VIEWING RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Directions:

Respond to each question, referring to specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your interpretation.

1. Why do boys and girls in Islamic school have to try and prove their dislike for one another?

2. What happens at Cordoba that causes Ilyas's parents to make the decision to send him to public school?

3. What scandal does Ilyas orchestrate to try to get his parents to reverse their decision and have him return to Cordoba? How does the scheme backfire on him?

4. What role does the acting class Ilyas joins at public school play in the drama that has become his life?

5. What happens at the Silicon Valley Muslim Association fundraiser when Ilyas is handed the microphone to take over as youth speaker? What message does he convey about his identity struggle, and what emotions does he evoke for the audience?

6. How is the recurring symbol of the electric razor in the film connected to specific moments in Ilyas's life? How do you interpret the final scene of the film of Ilyas looking in the mirror with the electric razor in his hand?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

CREATIVE IDENTITY MIND MAP

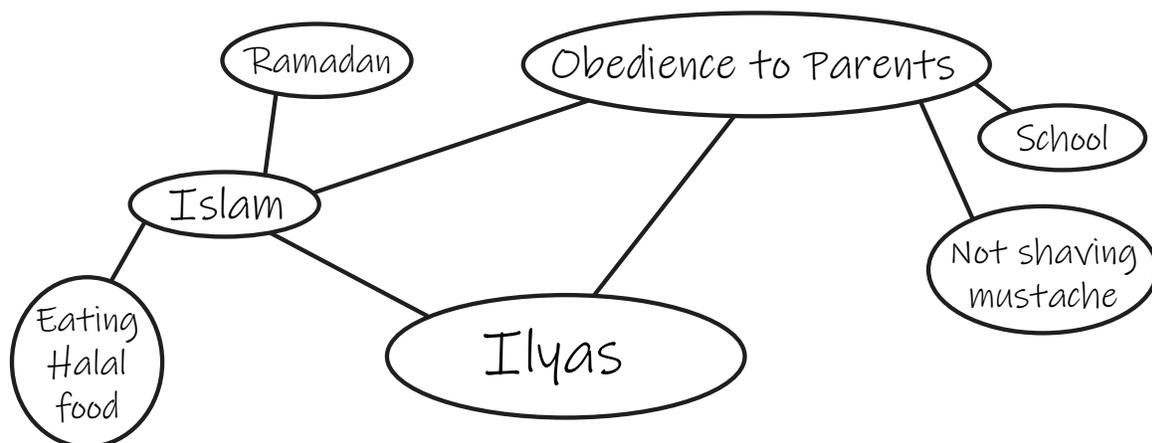
At key moments in the film, we get a glimpse of Ilyas's own identity mind map, as he refers to it, in order to try and navigate his own journey. He says that it's comforting to have a map to help him to understand reality. Otherwise, how would he know what to do?

Make a creative identity mind map of your own. You can choose to craft it on paper or do it digitally. The goal is to get down as many ideas as possible and present them in a personal, creative way.

Directions:

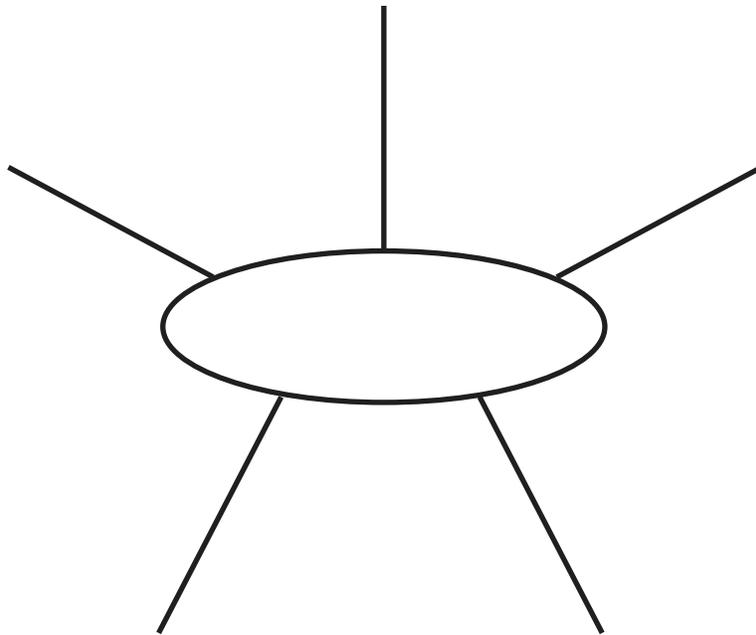
1. Draw a circle in the center of the page and write your name in it (or use the provided template).
2. Add spokes that extend off the center circle. At the end of each spoke, write a word or phrase that captures some aspect of your identity. Examples might include family relationships, ethnic/racial identity, sports/activity groups you are a part of, religious affiliation, personal values that you hold, the place you live/are from, places you have traveled, objects that represent you or are special to you, belongings that you carry on you, mood/mental health, personality traits, pets, favorite song lyrics, favorite literary quotes, memories, beliefs, opinions, hobbies/interests, your ambitions and dreams, etc.
3. Continue adding spokes and words until the page is full of words that capture the variety of your personality and identity. Feel free to add color, images, and symbols.
4. After completing your map, look for a unique aspect of your identity reflected in the map to explore further in an identity monologue, as described in the next Extension Activity.

Example:



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

CREATIVE IDENTITY MIND MAP



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

IDENTITY MONOLOGUE

One of the most powerful scenes in the film is when Ilyas performs a monologue at the Silicon Valley Association fundraiser. His monologue expresses part of his personal identity and reveals something about the Pakistani-American immigrant experience. Craft a monologue that expresses something about your personal identity. Use the guide below to help you choose material and transform a moment of your own life into a monologue.

Directions:

Use the following questions to help you choose monologue-worthy material from your life and transform your selected moment into a monologue that expresses, at least in part, your personal identity.

Part I:

Complete the following statements.

1. Something that makes me angry:
2. An experience that transformed me:
3. Something that confuses me about my identity:
4. A funny story connected to how I view myself and the world:
5. Something I've always wanted to be able to tell someone or talk about, but haven't:
6. What I'd like people to know about who I am and where I come from:
7. Something else important:

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

Directions:

After watching the film *Mustache*, write a review of the film.

While a film review is an evaluation of a movie, it is not simply a viewer-response expressing the writer's feelings about the film. Instead, a film review attempts to do three things for the reader:

1. **Summarize** what the film is about (the story)
2. **Interpret** the film/filmmakers' intended meaning (the themes and claims)
3. **Evaluate** whether the film is successful in expressing the intended meaning (its effectiveness in conveying the themes and claims)

A review will support its perspective with evidence from the film, such as descriptions of important moments, characters, and scenes.

Suggested Structure

Introduction

- Introduce the film: title, director, and any relevant credentials (award wins for the film, other films by the director, origins for the film's story, etc.).
- Summarize what the film is about - briefly, and without any "spoilers" that give away plot twists and surprises.

Body

- Offer an interpretation of what the film/director is trying to say through this story. In other words, what is the film's theme, message, or primary claim?

Conclusion

- Evaluate whether the film is successful or not in conveying its intended message.
- Identify who the intended audience is and how effective the film is in meeting their needs. Is the film for a particular age group or social group?

Final Tip: Make sure to include some critical appraisal of the film in the first and last sentence, but try to weave it throughout the review as well.

ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

©Tommy Lau

What is a film festival?

A film festival is an event in which multiple movies are presented over the course of one or several days. Depending on the size of the festival, all of the screenings may take place in a single theater or may involve multiple venues throughout a city. Festivals also include special events like panel discussions with filmmakers and actors. Typically, filmmakers submit their works to a festival, where a team of curators selects the best entries for inclusion in the festival. For independent and international filmmakers, festivals are often an important way to raise awareness of a film, generate an audience, and/or attract a studio to purchase the rights to distribute a film in a wider release. Acceptance into a major festival can add significant prestige to a film, with some festival awards (such as the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or) considered among the highest honors a film can receive.

There are many film festivals through-

out the world, with some focusing on particular themes, such as highlighting LGBTQ films/filmmakers, specific cultural groups, or particular genres. While some of the more famous festivals may be in distant locations, there are hundreds of small festivals spread through every corner of the world and, increasingly, festivals are using streaming access to make it easier for the public to view their curated programs.

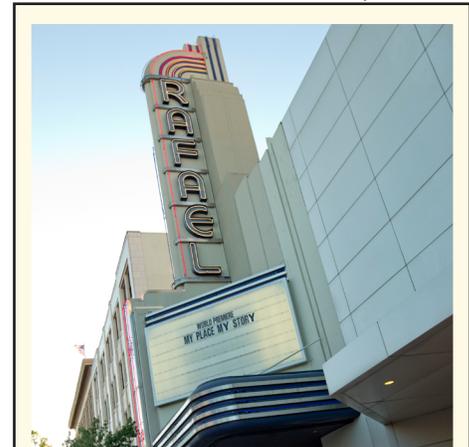
History of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Since founding the Mill Valley Film Festival in 1977, Executive Director Mark Fishkin has shepherded this once small, three-day showcase into an eleven-day, internationally acclaimed cinema event presenting a wide variety of new films from around the world in an engaged, community setting.

The festival has an impressive track record of launching new films and new filmmakers, and has earned a reputation as a filmmakers' festival

by celebrating the best in American independent and foreign films, alongside high-profile and prestigious award contenders. The relaxed and non-competitive atmosphere surrounding MVFF, gives filmmakers and audiences alike the opportunity to share their work and experiences in a collaborative and convivial setting.

Each year the festival welcomes more than 200 filmmakers, representing more than 50 countries. Screening sections include world cinema, US cinema, documentaries, family films, and shorts programs. Annual festival initiatives include Active Cinema, a forum for films that aim to engage audiences and transform ideas into action; Mind the Gap, a platform for inclusion and equity; and ¡Viva el Cine!, a showcase of Latin American and Spanish-language films.. Festival guests also enjoy an exciting selection of Tributes, Spotlights and Galas throughout the program.



The Smith Rafael Film Center, home of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the purpose of a film festival? What are the benefits for filmmakers? For the audience? For the community?
2. How might the films at a festival differ from the films available to watch at your local movie theater?
3. What qualities do you think festival curators might look for in a film? If you are watching a festival film with a class/school group, what aspects of the film do you think made it appealing to the curators?

Get Involved!

Many film festivals, including the Mill Valley Film Festival, have student film categories. If you are a filmmaker, explore FilmFreeway (www.filmfreeway.com) for a database of worldwide film festivals where you can submit your film. The call for entries for MVFF opens in late February and closes in June. Youth filmmakers do not have to pay an entry fee. MVFF also offers many opportunities for volunteering. Find out more at <https://www.cafilm.org/volunteer/>.