

# MVFF EDUCATION



## SHORTS: Back to the Roots

**CURRICULUM GUIDE**  
GRADES: 7-12

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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 46th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival screening of the shorts collection *Back to the Roots*.

This year, our MVFF Education film selections continue to focus on increasingly relevant issues of global empathy and active citizenship, and we believe the films will be powerful and engaging texts 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. Of all the documentaries in this collection of shorts, which story was the most impactful for you? Why?
2. Can documentaries be just as powerful as a Hollywood blockbuster? How or why?
3. How did each of these filmmakers evoke a feeling of identity and pride through their subjects' personal stories?
4. How do the films give the viewer access to important information about social, cultural, political, or even global issues they might not otherwise be exposed to?
5. Did any of these films challenge your own perspective on what it means to be strong and resilient?
6. Could any of these films be used as a tool to effect social change and make the world a better place? How?

## INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. Select one of the six films and analyze how the individual(s) featured in the film exemplify the ability to find the strength and resilience to thrive.
2. Select one of the six films and analyze how the story can provide inspiration for us all.

# 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.RI.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.RI.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

### 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.



# SHORTS: Back to the Roots

## ABOUT THE FILMS

Bravely delving deep into the roots of their subjects' lives, these documentary short films with strong Bay Area ties follow the exceptional stories of individuals who are learning what defines them, while refining the motivation they need to thrive.

**Note:** One of the films in this program contains descriptions of trauma and sexual abuse.

**Key Themes:** History, Visual Arts, Music, LatinX Culture, Asian American Culture, Psychology, LGBTQIA+, SEL

## ABOUT THE FILMS

### **Tracing History**

Jalena Keane-Lee | US 2023 | 13 min

A Chinese American filmmaker and her mother contemplate loss, legacy, and the stories that get left out of history while visiting sites where their Chinese ancestors labored to build the transcontinental railroad six generations ago.

### **Strawberry Picker**

Eugenia Renteria | US 2023 | 20 min

From a little boy growing up in labor camps to a world-class artist, San Francisco print maker and social activist Juan R. Fuentes reflects on generations of struggle and resilience in the Chicano art community.

### **Swimming the Rock**

Nicolas Collins, Alex Zajicek | US 2023 | 7 min

Joshua Kerns overcomes his grief by taking the plunge and swimming to shore from Alcatraz. Shot around the San Francisco waterfront, *Swimming the Rock* follows one man's determination to fulfill his grandmother's last wish.

### **Between Earth & Sky**

Andrew Nadkarni | US 2023 | 25 min

For her entire professional life, renowned ecologist Nalini Nadkarni pioneered climbing techniques to study "what grows back" after an ecological disturbance in the rainforest canopy. Now, after surviving a life-threatening fall from a tree, she must turn her research question onto herself in order to understand the effects of disturbance and recovery throughout her life.

### **From the Shadow of a Mountain**

Alex Massey | US 2022 | 6 min

Markelle Taylor started running as a way to turn his life around. Today, he runs free in America's oldest trail race, the Dipsea, on a mountain which was once unreachable.

### **No More Longing**

Connor Lee O'Keefe | US 2023 | 16 min

Seven years after moving from Brazil to California to pursue his love of music and four years after starting testosterone, Jaime Jobim searches for his new voice.



# DURING VIEWING NOTEATCHER

**Directions:**

Use this notecatcher to keep track of the films you will see so you will be able to dig a little deeper later with some interpretive analysis work. After each film, write a one-sentence summary of the story in your own words. Then, use six words to record your personal review of the film.

Title	Director(s)	One Sentence Summary	Six Word Review
Tracing History	Jalena Keane-Lee		
Strawberry Picker	Eugenia Renteria		
Swimming the Rock	Nicolas Collins, Alex Zajicek		

# DURING VIEWING NOTECATCHER

Title	Director(s)	One Sentence Summary	Six Word Review
Between Earth & Sky	Andrew Nadkarni		
From the Shadow of a Mountain	Alex Massey		
No More Longing	Connor Lee O'Keefe		

# AFTER VIEWING MIRRORS & WINDOWS

**Directions:** A unique way of connecting to the stories told in film is to think of them as mirrors or windows. **Mirrors** are those stories that reflect your own identity, world, or a lived experience that is familiar or relatable, even while providing a fresh perspective. **Windows** are those stories that lead us into a new and unfamiliar world beyond our own lived experience. Think about these terms in relation to the films you've just watched and respond to the following prompts using evidence from the film to support your writing.

1. Of the documentary films in this program, which one was the best mirror: a story that reflected your own life, and gave you a way to see your own lived experience from a new perspective? What was relatable about the story and what was unique about the way the filmmaker chose to tell it?

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2. Of the documentary films in this program, which one was the best window: a story with insight into a world, identity, or lived experience you were unfamiliar with? What was different about the story and what was unique about the way the filmmaker chose to tell it?

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3. Of the six short documentary films in the program, which story was the most inspirational for you? How or why?

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# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

## ELEMENTS OF DOCUMENTARY

The elements of documentary are the different types of sound and image used to explore the subject of the film. There are six basic elements that can be found in all documentaries, though a film might not use all of them.

### Directions:

1. Select one of the films from this shorts program and analyze the elements of the documentary.
2. Read or review the elements of a documentary.
3. This could be done during viewing, or immediately after viewing, by recalling the types of sound and image used to explore the subject of the film.

NARRATION	ACTUALITY FOOTAGE	ARCHIVAL MATERIALS
Narration is the spoken word heard throughout a film. Sometimes the narrator is a person in the film, and sometimes it is a disconnected observer.	Actuality footage refers to the unscripted footage recorded in the making of the documentary.	Archival materials are the pieces of film, video, photographs, documents, and sound recordings that were created for other uses, prior to the documentary.
ON-SCREEN TEXT	INTERVIEWS	ANIMATIONS/REENACTMENTS
Text is often used throughout a documentary to provide important facts, identify people, and present additional information.	Interviews are the recorded conversations with a person who has some connection to, or knowledge about the subject of the film.	Documentaries will sometimes use animation or staged recreations of situations and events in order to tell a story.

A Thinking Routine from CAFILM. For Slide Deck go to:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ik4-Julc7Su0W9DD1KHZHPML4tbUWH87urFs0cYV6W8/>

# EXTENSION ACTIVITY ELEMENTS OF DOCUMENTARY NOTECATCHER

**Directions:** Record impactful moments and scenes from the film in the appropriate box based on what element of documentary film-making is used.

NARRATION	ACTUALITY FOOTAGE	ARCHIVAL MATERIALS
ON-SCREEN TEXT	INTERVIEWS	ANIMATIONS/REENACTMENTS

# ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

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## 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.

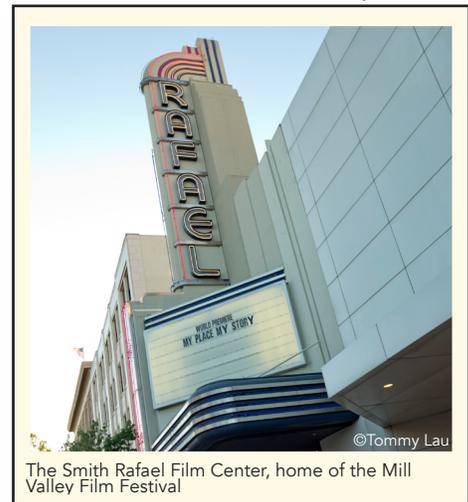
## History of the Mill Valley Film Festival

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

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## 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](http://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/>.