

Films with a Conscience

 zinnedproject.org/materials/films-with-a-conscience



We post this during the COVID-19 crisis, with our schools closed, our students at home, and our curricula thrown into disarray. It has always been a good idea to use “films with a conscience” with our students, but films may now be an even more valuable and accessible “text” we can use to help young people think deeply and critically about the world.

Films help “story” the world visually for students. They can bring social realities into a classroom in a way that the printed word cannot. Through follow-up discussion, role play, interior monologue, and poetry, students can dive deeper into people’s lives and the issues they struggle with, or into their relationships with distant — and sometimes not so distant — others. But like any “text,” film needs to be read critically. Educators need to encourage students not to be mere spectators, but to raise questions about how a film frames social reality: Whose story is featured, who speaks and who does not, what factors are highlighted to explain a given problem, what alternatives are explored or ignored?

The films listed below are ones that can help students gain insights into how the world works. Many of these also alert students to how individuals and social movements have tried to make life better. Of course, there are many more that are not included here. One criterion for selection was that the resources be relatively easily accessed by U.S. teachers, and that we know that teachers have had success using them with students. However, teachers should be aware that this requirement biases these “Films with a Conscience” in favor of filmmakers and videographers from so-called developed countries, who have more access to distribution channels here. We are sure that we’ve missed countless other worthy films, and we hope Zinn

Education Project supporters bring some of these to our attention. Not only are we interested in suggestions for films not included here, but for strategies for how to use them — in the classroom as well as in the era of the pandemic, when we attempt social justice teaching at a distance.

Note: Some of the films here are drawn from descriptions written by Zinn Education Project staff members, and are found at the ZEP website. Others are taken from the Resources section of *Rethinking Schools* magazine and other *Rethinking Schools* articles. Still others come from “Videos with a Global Conscience,” by Bill Bigelow, in *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*; “Videos with a Conscience,” by Bill Bigelow, in *The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration*; and “Videos,” and “Video Teaching Strategies,” by Bill Bigelow and Linda Christensen, in *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice, Volume 1*, all published by Rethinking Schools. An asterisk by a particular film indicates that additional information about the film can be found at the Zinn Education Project website.

And a final note. Once upon a time, when we listed recommended “films with a conscience,” we indicated which distributor carried which film. These days, it seems that a new streaming service emerges weekly. With multiple ways to access films online, it makes more sense to leave it to you find the most appropriate way to locate these resources.

The films are listed in these sections. (Many of these films could have been listed in multiple categories, so it is worth perusing the full list.)

- Civil Rights Movement
- Coal: The Dirtiest Fossil Fuel
- Colonialism
- Criminal Justice
- Economics
- Education and Schooling
- Environmental Justice
- Immigration
- Labor Organizing
- LGBTQ
- Native Americans
- U.S. History
- Vietnam War
- War

Civil Rights Movement

Dirt & Deeds in Mississippi *

Dirt & Deeds tells the little-known story of the land-owning Black farmers who were the backbone of the modern Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. Most stories of 1960s organizing highlight the role of young activists. Missing from the picture is their relationship with Black farmers who risked their lives and livelihood by putting up their land as collateral

to get voting rights workers out of jail. In addition, most freedom schools and voter registration workshops were on Black-owned land.

Dirt & Deeds highlights the community of Mileston in the Mississippi Delta, where most Black farmers obtained their land from an all-too-rare New Deal initiative. This is one of the most important documentaries on the Civil Rights Movement in many years.

Directed by David Shulman. California Newsreel. 2015. 82 min.



Eyes on the Prize: 1954–1985 *

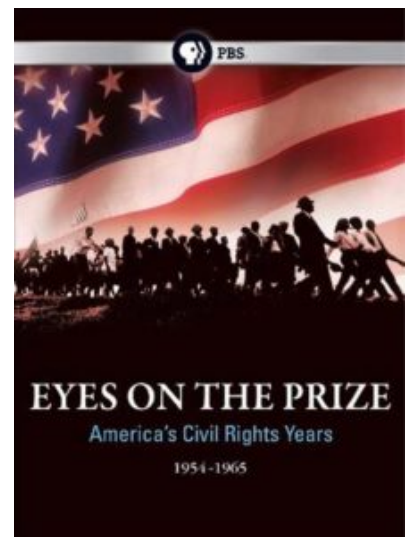
The entire PBS *Eyes on the Prize* series on the history of the Civil Rights Movement is worthwhile. Two episodes are especially dramatic ones: “Fighting Back: 1957–1962” and “A Nation of Law?: 1968–1971.”

The first recounts the struggle to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the University of Mississippi. The second covers the police murder of Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton and the Attica Prison uprising in New York state.

Fighting Back is a compelling mixture of documentary footage and candid interviews with participants. Students we’ve worked with are particularly moved by the stories of the youngsters who volunteered to integrate Central High and are amazed and outraged at the vicious resistance they encountered.

In 1969, FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover labeled the Black Panther Party the number-one threat to the internal security of the United States. The FBI called the Panthers’ free breakfast for children program a “nefarious activity.” *A Nation of Law?* is a troubling film about established authority’s concept of “order” and the measures it will take to preserve that order.

Produced by Henry Hampton. Blackside. 1987. 14 hours.



Freedom on My Mind *

A mesmerizing film, distinguished by its willingness to delve into complicated issues. *Freedom on My Mind* puts the Civil Rights Movement into the context of the daily lives of Mississippians and Black and white activists.

Activists discuss the joys of struggle and the community it creates, as well as the implications of difficult decisions like the one to bring white northerners to Mississippi to increase media and government attention. In the *Washington Post*, long-time film critic Hal Hinson wrote:

This moving, enlightening documentary on the Mississippi Voter Registration Project conveys the human dimensions of the fight with such a powerful combination of sensitivity and intelligence and pure emotional insight that it seems as if the facts were being set down for the very first time. As political history, this is superlative stuff.

Directed by Connie Field and Marilyn Mulford. Clarity Films. 1994. 110 min.

Freedom Riders *

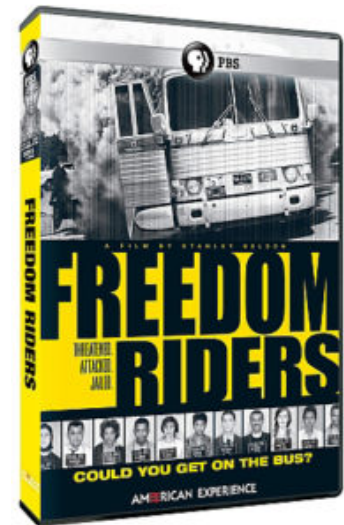
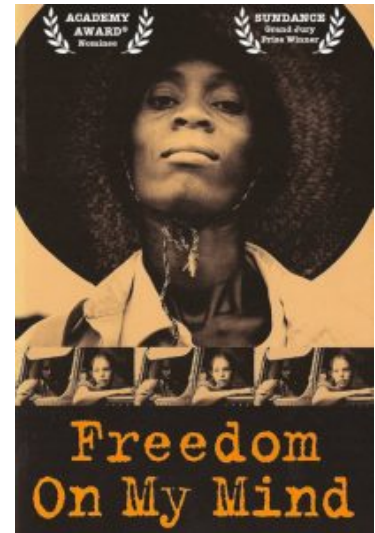
Freedom Riders is a documentary film based on Raymond Arsenault's book *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. Durham, North Carolina, high school teacher Tracey Barrett writes,

I love using *Freedom Riders* because it powerfully demonstrates to students the personal risk that everyday individuals took on to be a part of this action. Students can see themselves in John Lewis, Diane Nash, and Jim Zwerg, who put their bodies, education, and futures on the line to confront Jim Crow.

In my high school classroom, this film sparks debate about civil disobedience as a tactic, the power of music as resistance, everyday people as agents of social change, and more. Plus, it's absolutely riveting — students hang on every word of the narration and the archival footage interspersed with contemporary interviews.

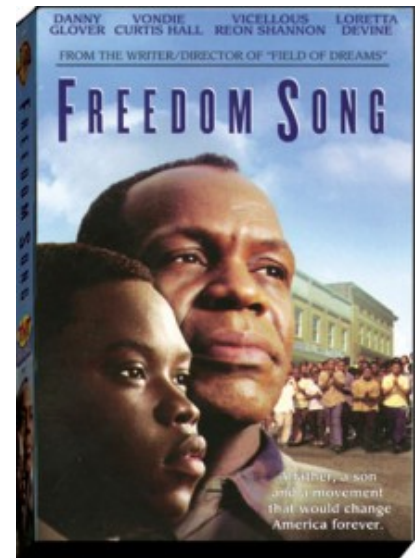
Directed by Stanley Nelson. Firelight Media. 2011. 120 minutes.

Freedom Song *



Inspired by accounts of the women and men on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, this feature film chronicles a family nearly torn apart by the impact of the movement on a small town.

Based on the true story of McComb, Mississippi, *Freedom Song* introduces young people to the grassroots history of the Civil Rights Movement that is generally missing from textbooks. It starts with the activism of Black World War II veterans and the bitter reprisals they faced from white supremacists, the arrival of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s, high school student activism (including a school walkout), brutal repression by the sheriff and police, inaction on the part of the federal government, debates over tactics, armed self-defense in the Black community, voter registration education, and much more.



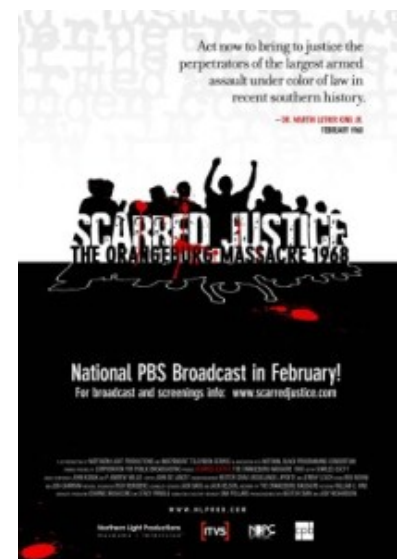
Freedom Song is especially effective for young people since the story is seen through the eyes of a grade-school student.

Directed by Phil Alden Robinson. TNT Productions. 2006. 117 min.

Scarred Justice: The Orangeburg Massacre 1968 *

Although most people know that students were killed at Kent State in 1970, very few know about the murder of students at Jackson State and even fewer know about South Carolina State College in Orangeburg. In Orangeburg, two years before the Kent State murders, 28 students were injured and three were killed — most shot in the back by the state police while students were involved in a peaceful protest.

One of the by-standers, Cleveland Sellers, was arrested for inciting a riot and sentenced to a year in prison. Later becoming president of Voorhees College, he was the only person to do time. *Scarred Justice: The Orangeburg Massacre 1968* is an excellent documentary which brings to light this less-known story of the Civil Rights Movement including candid interviews with many of those involved in the event: students, journalists, officers on the scene, and the then-governor. The film also provides students with a good understanding of the concept of Black Power in the context of the Civil Rights Movement.

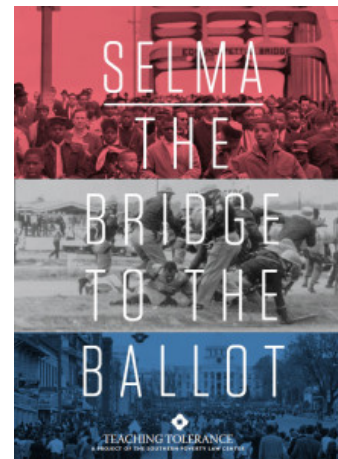


Produced by Judy Richardson and Bestor Cram. California Newsreel. 2009. 57 min.

Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot *

Teachers and high school students are front and center in this short documentary on the 1960s freedom movement in Selma, Alabama. The film uses an effective combination of historic footage, interviews, photos, and graphic novel-like dramatic drawings — all to a freedom song soundtrack.

Many of the key points referenced in the Zinn Education Project article by Emilye Crosby, “Ten Things You Should Know About Selma Before You See the Film,” are included in this middle and high school classroom-friendly documentary. As with all Teaching Tolerance films, it is free for teachers.



Produced by Bill Brummel. Teaching Tolerance. 2015. 40 min.

More Recommendations on the Civil Rights Movement

The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution *

Feature length documentary on the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense by filmmaker Stanley Nelson.

Boycott *

Dramatization of the Montgomery Bus Boycott with noted actors and newsreel footage.

Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock *

Documentary on the life of Daisy Bates, best known for her role with the Little Rock Nine at Central High School in Arkansas.

Mighty Times: The Children's March *

This Academy Award-winning documentary film tells the story of the young people in Birmingham, Alabama, who challenged segregation by bravely filling the jails.

Standing on My Sisters' Shoulders *

Documentary film on women in the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.

Coal: The Dirtiest Fossil Fuel

Burning the Future: Coal in America

Jim Hecker, of Trial Lawyers for Public Justice, offers this summary near the opening of *Burning the Future*:

What we're witnessing in Appalachia is probably the single most environmentally destructive activity in the United States today. Whole mountains are being chewed up and their waste is being dumped into nearby streams.

Burning the Future shows us how this affects people living in the mountains of West Virginia without presenting them simply as victims. The film could be subtitled "The Birth of a Community Organizer": We watch the remarkable Maria Gunnoe, as she turns her anger into activism. Chapter 4, which profiles the work of scientist Ben Stout, presents a wonderful example of science-for-society in action and could be used in biology or chemistry classes to show how "doing science" can make a real difference in people's lives.

In chapter 6, coal country residents come to realize that their drinking water is killing them, and they commit themselves to do something about it. *Burning the Future* does not have much to say about climate change, and it waxes a bit nostalgic about "real" underground coal mining. Nonetheless, this is a rich classroom resource that prompts students to think about where our electricity comes from. Each chapter is roughly 12 minutes long.

Directed by David Novack. Video Project. 2008. 88 min.

Deep Down: A Story from the Heart of Coal Country

Deep Down offers an intimate look at what happens as neighbors are pitted against each other when a coal company proposes to strip-mine in the hills above Maytown, Kentucky. The film is built around Beverly May, who is determined to resist the coal company; and Terry Ratliff, who could sorely use the money the coal company is offering to lease some of his land for coal mining. The filmmakers present Ratliff's indecision with sympathy, even as we cheer May's tireless efforts to save her community. At a hearing, May addresses the miners, whose livelihoods depend on continued mining: "I would like you to know that I work in a small clinic that takes care of people who are poor and who don't have insurance. I see every day many of your brothers. You are not my enemy. And I'm not yours. We are all victims of the same coal companies. It's just that you're on the top of the mountain and I'm down at the bottom. We are not enemies." As an antidote to cynicism, every student in the country should meet the dedicated and compassionate Beverly May.

Deep Down may be too slow, too “small” a story to hold some students’ attention, but this is a rare and remarkable teaching resource that shows the nitty-gritty process of organizing: the meetings, petitions, one-on-one conversations, phone calls, and demonstrations. The courage of Maytown residents is palpable. As one resident testifies late in the film: “Just imagine a society that is dependent on blowing up mountain after mountain after mountain. That there is a group of people that decided to stand up against it, that is exceptional.”

Directed by Jen Gilomen and Sally Rubin. New Day Films. 2010. 57 min.

Dirty Business: “Clean Coal” and the Battle for Our Energy Future *

Dirty Business is a long film for classroom use, but it is also the best and most comprehensive look at global dependence on coal, and explores some promising alternatives. The film is built around the work of Jeff Goodell, who wrote the important book *Big Coal*. Goodell begins with the devastating impact of coal mining in Appalachia. He remembers when he first saw the impact of mountaintop removal mining: “It was like the first time you look into a slaughterhouse after you’ve spent a lifetime of eating hamburgers.”



The film travels to Mesquite, Nevada, where residents are fighting a coal-fired plant, and also to China to explore the health impact of coal there — an important piece of the story not included in many films about coal. The film’s strength is its exploration of alternatives to coal — wind, solar thermal, increased energy efficiency through recycling “waste heat” — which makes this a valuable resource for science as well as social studies classes. The treatment of carbon dioxide sequestration may confuse students; the film simultaneously suggests that this is a terrible idea in North America but a good one in China. But, on the whole, *Dirty Business* is a fine and lively overview of a complicated issue.

Produced by Peter Bull, Justin Weinstein, Alex Gibney, and the Center for Investigative Reporting. 2010. 88 min.

The Last Mountain *

The Last Mountain refers to Coal River Mountain, slated for destruction by Massey Energy Co. through the process known as mountaintop removal — blasting and scraping off an entire mountain to get at coal seams buried within.

The film “introduces us to the brave folks, the heroic people who are rising up and saying we aren’t going to take this anymore — we’re going to save our community,” in the words of singer-songwriter Emmylou Harris in a promotional clip for the film. And that’s a key contribution of *The Last Mountain* to the fine collection of mountaintop removal films. It exhibits and celebrates a tapestry of resistance to mountaintop removal mining — from the eloquent opposition of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who “stars” in the film; to homegrown activists like Bo Webb, Ed Wiley, and Maria Gunnoe; to the courageous young people from around the country who commit civil disobedience to prevent this environmental devastation.

Directed by Bill Haney. DADA Films. 2011. 95 min.



On Coal River *

In an emotional scene in *On Coal River*, Ed Wiley drops his granddaughter off at Marsh Fork Elementary School. As he drives away from the school, he says: “I tell you what, it’s hard to let your child off at this place, knowing the dangers that’s here. It’s not right.” Tears roll down his cheeks. The dangers at Marsh Fork are manifold: a 2.8 billion-gallon lake of toxic coal slurry sits above the school, held back by an earthen dam; coal dust from a nearby coal processing plant coats the playground and sidewalks around the school; the community’s water is poisoned by mountaintop removal coal mining in the region and the “cleaning” of the coal in preparation for its shipment to coal-fired power plants; mountaintop removal explosions are nerve-jarring and put the earthen dam at continuous risk.



But *On Coal River* is not just an exposition of the problems associated with mountaintop removal: We learn about the breadth of the problems through the work of the activists who tenaciously challenge the coal industry. One of the “stars” of *On Coal River* is Judy Bonds, the passionate organizer who became one of the most outspoken mountaintop removal opponents; she died at age 58. The film is long and may be too slow for some classes. But in its attention to the details of one struggle in one small community, it tells a gigantic story. Late in the film, it dawns on one of the community activists, Bo Webb, that “we’re on a mission to save the planet.” It’s no exaggeration. Struggles like *On Coal River* allow us to explore with students how local environmental justice work connects to the fight for planetary survival.

Directed by Francine Cavanaugh and Adams Wood. Downriver Media. 2010. 81 minutes.

Colonialism

Battle of Algiers *

This is a troubling film that describes the Algerian struggle against French colonialism. Made just a few years after independence, the film features many of the actual participants of the war and only one professional actor, in the role of a French military official in Algiers. Although it would be a mistake to view the film as a celebration of terrorism, the film does demand that the audience consider the causes of terrorism. *Battle of Algiers* has now been released as a box set of DVDs that includes several helpful background documentaries on the making of the film, its social context, and the impact the film had after its release.

Directed by Gillo Pontecorvo. Rialto Pictures. 1966. 121 min.

Columbus in America *

Columbus in America is the best and most comprehensive film on the history of Columbus — and the uses and abuses of the so-called discovery of America.

It is a story of racist violence and unspeakable cruelty. But it is also the strange story of how this mission of colonial conquest was appropriated as a day of Italian pride, a defiant yet sad assertion that “We’re American, too.”



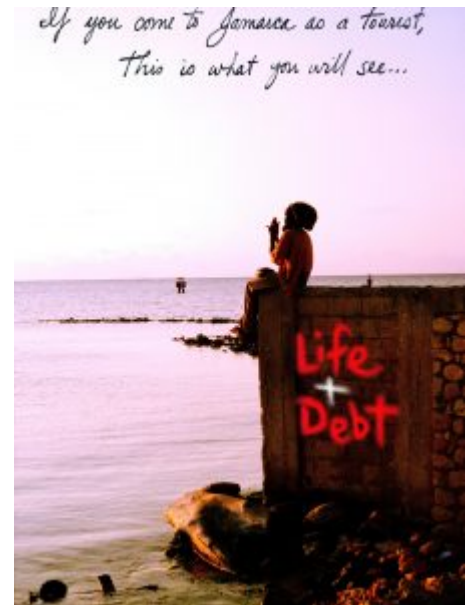
Columbus in America explores the history of what transpired in 1492 and after, and how “Columbus” has been used throughout U.S. history to legitimate the marginalization of Indigenous peoples. However, the film is ultimately hopeful, as it focuses on how the victims of Columbus, and those who came after, have themselves targeted “Columbus in America” to assert their humanity, their history, and their rights.

The film is too long for most classroom uses, but there are lots of excerpts that could be used effectively.

Directed by Paul Puglisi. Pug Media. 2017. 89 min.

Life and Debt

This may be the best film overview of the effects of globalization on one society — in this instance, Jamaica. *Life and Debt* focuses on the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Jamaica, but it's much more than that. It weaves together interviews with the IMF deputy director, farmers, workers, scholars, a former Prime Minister (Michael Manley); a narration based on Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*; Jamaican music; life in a tourist hotel; and a kind of Greek chorus of Rastafarian men who comment on Jamaica's neocolonial plight. The conclusion: Jamaican society has been devastated by high interest payments on its external debt (52 percent of the entire national budget), cheap imports (potatoes, peanuts, carrots, milk powder, chicken), the WTO ruling forcing Jamaica's bananas into direct competition with much cheaper bananas from Central and South America, and exploitative practices in Jamaica's World Bank-pushed "free zone." (Of course, there are some economic winners: Because of high crime, one security firm featured has gone from 120 guards employed to between 1800 and 1900 guards and over 300 dogs.) It's this relatively comprehensive film walk through Jamaica's economy that can help students see the relationship between farm conditions and sweatshops, and provides a partial answer to the sweatshop defense: "Well, no one is forcing people to go to work in these places."



The film returns periodically to the tourist delights of Montego Bay, with Kincaid's incisive and sardonic narrative:

Every native of every place is a potential tourist. And every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native would like to find a way out. Every native would like a rest. Every native would like a tour. But some natives — most natives in the world — cannot go anywhere. They're too poor to escape the realities of their lives. And they're too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place that you, the tourist, want to go. So when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you. They envy your own ability to leave your own banality and boredom. They envy your ability to turn their banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself.

Life and Debt is so issue-rich that it could be the centerpiece of a unit that looked at the transition from colonialism to "freedom," and the character of that freedom.

As with many examinations of globalization, *Life and Debt* is stronger on critique than it is on alternatives. Former Prime Minister Michael Manley describes Jamaica's helplessness in the face of the IMF/World Bank juggernaut, but was the Jamaican state entirely without

recourse? The film explores no possibilities. And is Jamaica without recourse now? Toward the film's conclusion, one member of the Rastafarian chorus proclaims that "Our salvation rests in the hands of the Almighty." Unspecified is the nature of that salvation and what responsibilities rest in the hands of Jamaicans, other Third World people, and we in the "developed" countries. This speaks to an important weakness of the film: We don't hear from Jamaicans who are organizing for change. What strategies are being pursued, and who is pursuing them? Indeed, the many interviews with small producers who lament their decline lend the film a nostalgia that may be unwarranted. Nonetheless, this is a clever, patient examination of what the global economy has visited on one corner of the world.

Two films that look specifically at resistance to the World Trade Organization, highlighting the dramatic 1999 demonstrations in Seattle, are *Showdown in Seattle*, and *This is What Democracy Looks Like*.

Directed and produced by Stephanie Black. New Yorker Films. 2001. 90 min.

Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy *

In this film narrated by Edwidge Danticat, five Haitian women describe the impact of globalization on their lives.

Poto Mitan gives an inside perspective on globalization, Haiti's ongoing economic crisis, and the resilient women challenging this system.

Produced by Mary Becker and Renée Bergan. Written and narrated by Edwidge Danticat. Tèt Ansanm Productions. 2009. 50 min.

Rabbit-Proof Fence *

This dramatic film is a powerful true story of hope and survival. Set in 1931, at a time when it was Australian government policy to train Aboriginal children as domestic workers and integrate them into white society, young Molly Craig leads her little sister and cousin in a daring escape from their internment camp. Molly and the girls — part of what would become known as Australia's "Stolen Generations" — must then elude the authorities on a



dangerous 1,500 mile adventure along the rabbit-proof fence that bisects the continent and will lead them home.

This film can be used to introduce the history of the forced removal of Native American children from their homes in the United States. The DVD also features a documentary on the making of the film, as well as commentary on the social and historical context.

Directed by Phillip Noyce. Roadshow Films. 2002. 79 min.

Some Mother's Son

From start to finish, students are riveted by this poignant dramatization of the hunger strikes initiated by imprisoned Irish Republican Army members in 1981. Based on true events, it explores the anti-colonial struggle in Northern Ireland from the standpoint of two mothers of IRA prisoners, each of whom responds differently to her son's political involvement and incarceration. Although this film was unfairly slapped with an R rating for some harsh language and violence, this should not deter teachers who want to expose students to the complexities of the Irish "Troubles."

Written and directed by Terry George. Castle Rock Entertainment. 1996. 112 min.

This Magnificent African Cake

The title of Basil Davidson's sixth episode from his "Africa" series comes from Belgium's King Leopold, speaking at the 1884 Berlin conference to carve up Africa: "I am determined to get my share of this magnificent African Cake." Tragically, as this film later reveals, Leopold did get a share, which he exploited with unimaginable brutality.

Davidson's film is a good overview of the origins of European colonialism in Africa and some of its effects. He surveys various colonial modes from British settlers in Kenya, to "indirect rule" in Nigeria, to the French attempts at assimilation, to Leopold's "reign of terror" in the Congo, to the forced labor in the mines of Southern Rhodesia — which, Davidson tells us, killed an astonishing 20 people a week for 30 years. But the film's breadth is also its weakness, as we don't really get to know one situation well enough to understand its nuances, or to truly appreciate the effects of colonialism on people's lives.

The material here is presented conventionally as a kind of illustrated lecture that does not engage most students. Still, there are surprisingly few films that deal with European colonialism, and the information that the eminent historian Davidson presents is solid and can be effectively shown and discussed with students in short segments.

Narrated, directed, and produced by Basil Davidson. A co-production by Channel 4, the Nigerian Television Authority and RM Arts. 1984. 57 min.

More Recommendations on Colonialism

Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation *

A comprehensive documentary that focuses on the events surrounding the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893.

Even the Rain/También la lluvia *

As a crew shoots a film about Columbus' genocide, and the dissent of early Dominicans from Spain, in the early 16th century, local people in Cochabamba, Bolivia, rise up against plans to privatize the water supply.

The Insular Empire: America in the Mariana Islands *

Documentary about U.S. colonies in the western Pacific.

Criminal Justice

Just Mercy

Just Mercy is based on a chapter from lawyer Bryan Stevenson's memoir of the same name. Stevenson devotes his life to not only defending people condemned to death, but also raising public awareness about the institutionalized racism in our unjust system of criminal justice. He has done this through his memoir (now also available in a young reader's edition), public speaking, a memorial and museum in Montgomery, Alabama, and now this film.

The film features recent Harvard graduate Stevenson's defense of Walter McMillian (played by Jamie Foxx), an African American man who was sentenced to die in 1987 for the murder of an 18-year-old white girl. Despite the lack of evidence against McMillian, it took a years-long herculean effort (and good luck) on the part of Stevenson and local advocate Eva Ansley (played by Brie Larson). The irony of the trial is that it is set in Monroeville, Alabama — which prides itself on being the town featured in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Local white city officials encourage Stevenson to check out the historic sites from the trial, while at the same time blocking his every step of the way as he tries to address a contemporary racial injustice. This includes threats and attacks against both Stevenson and Ansley.

Some of the most heart-wrenching scenes are on death row — where viewers can see the inhumanity of leaving people for years in that purgatory. There are beautiful, dramatic examples of solidarity among the prisoners.

The film appears to have been made with a sensitivity to younger viewers. For example, when one inmate is sent to death, viewers see every step leading up to his murder, but not the execution itself. The film is based on one of the few chapters in Stevenson's book where there is a relatively happy ending. The extraordinary work by Stevenson and Ansley is successful, and McMillian is released. Of course, he lost years of his life and the case took a toll on his family. But it at least gives students a sense that it is worth challenging the courts. Therefore, we recommend the film *Just Mercy* for high school students. As with any film, teachers or parents should view it first and we encourage everyone to read the book before viewing the film.

Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton. Participant Media. 2020. 136 min.

More Recommendations on the Criminal Justice System

13th

A documentary on mass incarceration and the 13th Amendment by renowned filmmaker Ava DuVernay.

Slavery by Another Name *

Based on Douglas Blackmon's book of the same title, this documentary recounts how in the years following the Civil War, insidious new forms of forced labor (including convict leasing) were designed by white supremacists to keep hundreds of thousands of African Americans in bondage.

Education and Schools

Growing Fairness: Building Community & Resisting the School-to-Prison Pipeline with Restorative Justice in Schools

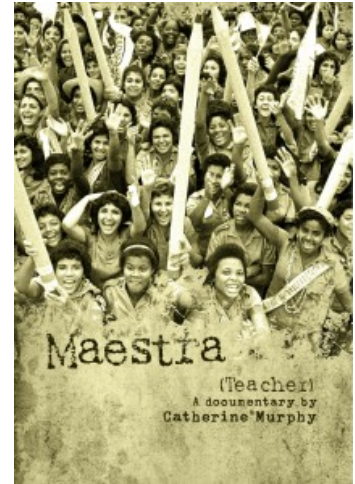
This short documentary film begins with youth, parents, and teachers talking about the need for alternatives to punitive discipline in schools. Because it shows how several different approaches to restorative justice are being developed at schools in New York and California, it would make an excellent discussion starter for a school community thinking about alternatives. Youth, teacher, parent, and administrator voices are all represented.

Produced by Teachers Unite. 2013. 44 min.

Maestra (Teacher) *

This brief and engaging documentary tells the story of 100,000 Cuban teenagers, most of them girls, who participated in Cuba's 1961 literacy campaign. Historical footage and current-day interviews bring the campaign to life. Most compelling to U.S. students are the stories of the girls themselves, many of them middle school age, who left their families to take on major responsibilities far away.

Fifty years later, the brigadistas reminisce about the independence and self-confidence they gained from the great adventure and the trust the country placed in them — in one year, they taught more than 700,000 people to read and write! (In English with voiceovers.)



And, as long as we're mentioning literacy campaigns, this is an opportunity to pass along a reminder of one of our favorite books: *And Also Teach Them to Read*, by Sheryl Hirshon (Lawrence Hill and Co., 1983), a first-person narrative of the 1980 Nicaraguan literacy campaign — filled with humor, insight, and inspiration.

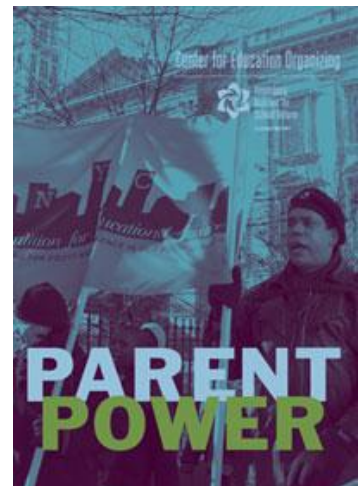
Directed by Catherine Murphy. The Literacy Project. 2011. 32 min.

Parent Power *

This half-hour documentary packs in the history, strategies, and inspiration of 15 years of parent organizing in New York. Starting in one school, the movement grows to a district and then a citywide coalition.

An antidote to the awful anti-public education film, *Waiting for "Superman,"* this film demonstrates the power of parents working collectively for better schools for all children. Charles M. Payne, of the University of Chicago, writes:

Parent Power is about parent ingenuity, persistence, and capacity to outlast a bureaucracy that tried to quash parents' organizing energy.



Produced by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. 2011. 35 min.

Precious Knowledge *

In *Precious Knowledge*, we meet the inspiring educators associated with Tucson's embattled Mexican American Studies program, and a few of the many students whose lives have been transformed by it. And, straight from central casting, we meet the scoundrels trying to shut the program down — politicians who wrap their racism in a language of opportunity, individual rights, and Americanism. The stars of the film are the young people who establish a new relationship to life and learning through their classes and activism.



As one of the students says in class: “I started thinking, ‘Oh, I’m a Chicana, I ain’t going to be able to graduate, I’m going to have kids young’. . . . And then I started coming to these classes and I started seeing, like, why am I believing all this? Instead of believing it I should change it.”

Precious Knowledge raises questions for all educators about how we can more authentically speak to students’ lives in the curriculum. And it confronts us with today’s Klan 2.0 — bigots who cynically quote Martin Luther King Jr. as they shutter Mexican American Studies classes and ban books. This is an essential film for professional development, teacher education, and high school classes addressing racial justice.

Directed by Ari Luis Palos and produced by Eren Isabel McGinnis. Dos Vatos Productions. 2011. 70 min.

Schooling the World: The White Man’s Last Burden

Every teacher and prospective teacher should watch and discuss *Schooling the World*. The film argues that, from its inception, Western education has been part of an imperial, “civilizing” mission — and that fundamentally nothing has changed. Today, schools do not equip people in so-called developing countries to live sustainably and meaningfully; instead they teach contempt for traditional culture and indoctrinate children with Western values that boil down to “How can I make a lot of money?” The film’s chief example is the Buddhist enclave of Ladakh in northern India, where we watch schools brand Ladakhi village culture as backward and train children for mostly nonexistent jobs in the consumer culture. It’s a disturbing and compelling portrait. (And if you’ve never seen it, check out the excellent and high school student-friendly film *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*.)

Produced by Carol Black. Lost People Films. 2010. 65 min.

More Recommendations on Education and Schooling

Ruby Bridges *

The true story of Ruby Bridges, the 6-year-old African American girl who helped to desegregate New Orleans' all-white schools.

Walkout *

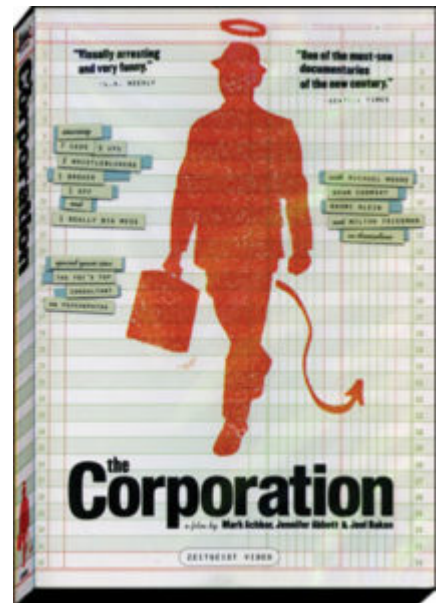
Walkout tells the true story of the Chicano students of East L.A., who in 1968 staged several dramatic walkouts in their high schools to protest academic prejudice and inequitable school conditions.

Economics

The Corporation *

This film is a virtual encyclopedia of the social and ecological consequences of corporate power. Although it would be tough for high school students to watch this long film straight through, *The Corporation* is astute and clever, and can easily be excerpted for classroom use.

The film traces the history of corporate personhood, and then plays on the conceit that corporations are legally people. If they are indeed people, then they are psychopaths, the film proposes. A running psychological profile throughout the film finds that the modern corporation demonstrates an incapacity to maintain enduring relationships, a reckless disregard for the safety of others, deceitfulness, an inability to experience guilt, and the failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors.



This is a rich and entertaining film with something here for high school classes ranging from U.S. history to economics, and from government to chemistry. Interviews with Noam Chomsky, Michael Moore, and Naomi Klein, with extended interviews on a companion DVD.

By Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan. Big Picture Media Corporation & TV ONTARIO. 2004. 145 minutes.

The Flaw: Markets, Money, Mortgages, and the Great American Meltdown

The 2007–08 financial meltdown led to a global recession that the world is still struggling to recover from. *The Flaw* is the best film we know for explaining the financial meltdown, the crises of capitalism, and growing inequality. It provides a deeply critical and comprehensive explanation and is engaging enough to use with high school students. The film’s title comes from Alan Greenspan, one of the chief architects of the global financial meltdown, who admitted to Congress that his belief in the supposed self-correcting power of free markets was flawed. The film includes short clips of some of the world’s leading economists on the crisis and takes viewers on a tour of Wall Street by a former bond trader. The main flaw in *The Flaw* is a somewhat idealized, albeit brief, discussion of capitalism’s alleged “good old days.”

Directed by David Sington. Bullfrog Films. 2011. 82 min.

Granito de Arena (Grain of Sand) *

This is an ambitious and wonderful film. Jill Freidberg — who also made *This Is What Democracy Looks Like*, about the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle — tackles the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on Mexican education, the history of teachers organizing in Mexico, government and union repression, reform movements within the teachers union and finally reform movements within the reform movements. Without lots of background, this will be tough going for most high school students. But for teachers considering how our work and lives here connect to teachers’ work and lives in Mexico, *Granito de Arena* is unparalleled. As Freidberg chronicles increased privatization, standardized testing, cuts in funding, and curriculum standardization, it’s hard to escape the creepy feeling that here and in Mexico all of us are part of the same scheme to turn education into “human capital” development, in the words of Mexican President Vicente Fox.



Freidberg opens with stunning footage of government attacks on a rural teachers college in the state of Chiapas. As one speaker says at a later rally in Mexico City, “All [the rich and the government] want is for schools to prepare a workforce that they can exploit in sweatshops.” The film layers interviews with scenes of teacher and community resistance that results in a portrait both scary and inspirational.

Toward the end of the film, Eduardo Galeano suggests why in the era of aggressive global capitalism, teachers of conscience must not merely be good classroom practitioners, but also social activists:

There is an old proverb that says it's better to teach someone to fish than to give them fish. But what if they sell the river or what if they poison the river? And what good is it to know how to fish if the owner of the river doesn't let us fish? In other words, education is unavoidably, fatally linked to all other aspects of life.

Granito de Arena concludes with activists calling for a “globalization of solidarity” and for the “radicalization” of the teaching profession. Capping a film where we meet so many dedicated teacher activists but are also confronted with such relentless attacks on public schools, these calls sound more like common sense than rhetoric. As Canadian activist Maude Barlow wonders about today's teachers: “If *they* don't fight for public education, who will?”

Directed by Jill Freidberg. Corrugated Films. 2005. 60 min.

Heist: Who Stole the American Dream?

Heist is a documentary that explains the dramatic shift in the United States in the 1970s to neoliberalism, when corporations increased their power and wealth, and undermined the relative prosperity that developed after the New Deal. The filmmakers show how corporations schemed to deregulate and cut taxes on the wealthy while outsourcing production — culminating in record inequality, financial meltdown, and economic austerity. Analysts examine the long-term strategy of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, wealthy families like the Coors and Kochs, and corporations to influence both political parties, the Supreme Court, universities, and the media. The film ends with ways to fight back through public funding of elections, changes in tax and energy policy, and support for labor unions, worker-owner cooperatives, and grassroots democracy. This film would be a valuable resource in high school history, economics, or government classes.

Directed and produced by Frances Causey and Donald Goldmacher of Bullfrog Films. 2012. 76, 56, and 22 minute versions available.

The Story of Broke: Why There's Still Plenty of Money to Build a Better Future

Short on time to learn and teach about our ongoing economic crises? If your answer is yes, then check out this viewer-friendly animated film. In just eight minutes, the film explains how there really is enough money to fund all the things we need (such as health care, good

schools, a clean environment), but “dumb” choices — choices that benefit the 1 percent at the expense of the 99 percent — are causing the government to say it is broke.



The Story of Broke is one of the *Story of Stuff* series of short films on environmental and economic issues that make complicated issues easy to understand for middle school to adult viewers.

Produced by Annie Leonard and *The Story of Stuff* Project. 2011. 8 min.

Environmental Justice

Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh

Ladakh is located in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, and is so high in the Himalayas that it is snowed under for eight months of the year. In fact, it's the highest place in the world where people live year-round. It's the size of England, but is home to only 130,000 people.

Ancient Futures offers a portrayal of traditional Ladakh, a place where people appear to be deeply content yet lack the material possessions valued in industrial societies. In this harsh land, with only four inches of rainfall a year and very short growing seasons, Ladakhis had worked out an elaborate system of cooperation, environmental care, and economic self-sufficiency. The film details the effects of the area's rapid incorporation into the global economy: In about two decades, cheap grain undermined traditional agriculture, new roads brought buses and trucks that filled the thin air with choking exhaust, and Ladakhis were bombarded with the values and temptations of consumer culture. As the film's narrator points out, "In the short term, cheap imported food might be a real benefit, but the result is that increasingly Ladakhis are being tied to a global economy, putting them at the mercy of market forces far beyond their control." The film's critique is not that new material goods in and of themselves are bad, but that their arrival is on the terms of a profit-oriented global economy and not of the Ladakhi people. Ladakhi poet and Buddhist scholar Tashi Rapkis concludes in the film that Ladakhis are "getting more money, they're having more technology, they are getting very comfortable. But comfort and luxuries don't bring happiness." The film vividly brings this observation to life.

High school teachers around the country who have used *Ancient Futures* find that students respond to the film with both wonder and alarm. [See Bill Bigelow's article on his experiences teaching this film in "Rethinking Primitive Cultures: *Ancient Futures* and

Learning from Ladakh,” in *Rethinking Globalization*. A trial role play on globalization’s negative impact on Ladakhi culture can be found [here](#).]

Produced by the John Page/International Society for Ecology and Culture. 1993. 60 min.

The Atomic States of America

As North Americans begin to wake up to the civilization-threatening scope of the climate crisis, it’s easy to forget the threat posed by nuclear power. These days, nuclear power is being marketed as “clean energy” — free of all those nasty greenhouse gases generated by burning coal, oil, and natural gas. In *The Atomic States of America*, then-President Obama brags that, thanks to \$8 billion in loan guarantees, the United States is about to break ground on the first new nuclear plant in 30 years. This is the best audiovisual overview of nuclear power that we’ve seen — clear, engaging, moving, story-rich. Based on Kelly McMasters’ *Welcome to Shirley: A Memoir from an Atomic Town*, *The Atomic States of America* raises profound questions about our nuclear future. It deserves to be widely viewed, in school and out.

Directed by Don Argott and Sheena M. Joyce. Video Project. 2012. 70 and 90-minute versions available.

Come Hell or High Water: The Battle for Turkey Creek *

Come Hell or High Water: The Battle for Turkey Creek is an intimate portrait of a community’s struggle for survival. We follow Boston teacher Derrick Evans, who moves back to his Mississippi home after his community’s ancestral graves are bulldozed to make way for Gulfport’s “development.” For years, Evans and longtime residents of this historic African American community resist powerful corporate interests and the politicians who do their bidding. And they survive the ravages of Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil catastrophe. This is the perfect classroom resource to introduce concepts of environmental racism and environmental justice. It’s one of those “small films” that tells a gigantic story — about community, resilience, resistance, and hope.



Read a story about teaching with the film in “Looking for Justice at Turkey Creek: Out of the classroom and into the past” by Hardy Thames in *A People’s Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis*.

Directed and produced by Leah Mahan. 2013. 56 min.

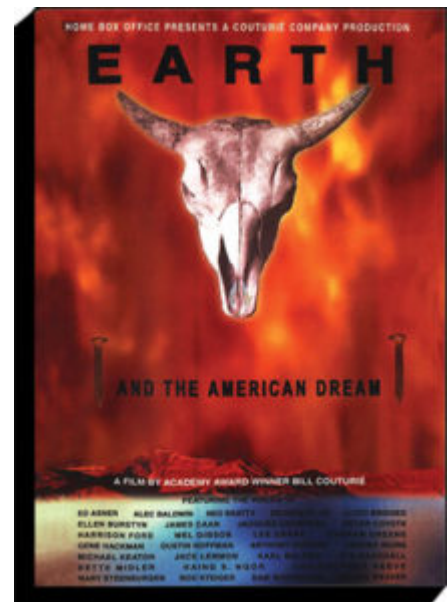
Disobedience

As the fossil fuel industry continues its profit-driven mission to fundamentally alter the climate and, hence, the nature of life on Earth, resistance is growing. One celebration of this resistance is *Disobedience*, a free-to-download film first released online in the lead-up to the May 2016 global actions of civil disobedience. As the causes and consequences of the climate crisis begin to play a more prominent role in the school curriculum, educators need resources that introduce students to the breadth of the movement that is defying business as usual. As Filipina activist Lidy Nacpil says early in the film: “Things are the way they are because we allow it. The moment we do not allow it, we take away our consent, then change happens very, very rapidly.” Like Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein’s film *This Changes Everything*, *Disobedience* allows students to meet activists on the frontlines of the fight for climate justice.

Directed by Kelly Nyks. Disobedient Productions LLC. 2016. 40 min.

Earth and the American Dream *

Compare the six days of the Book of Genesis to the 4 billion years of geologic time. On that scale, one day equals about 666 million years. All day Monday until Tuesday noon Creation was busy getting the earth going. Life began on Tuesday noon and the beautiful organic wholeness developed over the next four days. At 4 pm Sunday, the big reptiles; five hours later when the redwoods appeared there were no more big reptiles. At three minutes before midnight man appeared. One quarter of a second before midnight Christ arrived. At 1/40 of a second before midnight, the Industrial Revolution began. We are surrounded by people who think that what we have been doing for 1/40 of a second can go on indefinitely. They are considered normal. But they are stark raving mad.



These words are from the late renowned environmentalist David Brower, spoken toward the end of the film *Earth and the American Dream*. Loaded with contrasting quotes about humanity’s relationship to nature, *Earth and the American Dream* convinces most students that since the arrival of the first European settlers — whose leaders spoke of the new land as “a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men” — American culture has celebrated ideas and dreams that are fundamentally hostile to the environment. As the film

sweeps through the decades, pairing quotes about nature with images of ecological degradation, students can't help but be overwhelmed by the language of conquest and consumption woven into the fabric of American life. Perhaps too overwhelmed.

The film quotes are so effective in portraying a culture consumed with consuming that students may conclude that if only we “rethought” our attitudes toward the earth, we could chart a course to a more environmentally friendly future. What this notion fails to address is the way that the imperatives of the global capitalist economic system propel us toward ecological ruin. Growth, competition, and consumption are not just ideological constructs, they are systemic requirements. Ideas matter, but so do the economic structures that animate and in turn are nurtured by ideas. An activity in which students can experience classroom doses of the economic pressures felt by competing producers is “Capitalism and the Environment: The Thingamabob Game,” included in *A People's Curriculum for the Earth* and at the Zinn Education Project . When students consider solutions to the environmental crisis, such should be grounded in a fuller appreciation of the roots of that crisis.

Directed and produced by Bill Couterie. 1993. 77 min.

Forces of Nature: Stories from the Brower Youth Awards (Vol. 2)

For those of us concerned that teaching about the enormity of the world's environmental crises might defeat rather than motivate students, here is a tailor-made resource. In short — four- or five-minute — segments, *Forces of Nature* introduces us to Brower Youth Award winners. These inspiring young people are not organizing classroom recycling programs: They fight mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia, work for green corridors and against nature-wrecking hotel development in Puerto Rico, develop organic youth-run farms in north Philadelphia, work on the Menominee reservation in Wisconsin to revitalize the Menominee language and traditional foods, and seek to ban the use of rainforest-destroying palm oil in Girl Scout cookies. These mini-films can be used in class separately or as a whole to show students diverse ways that young people make a difference.

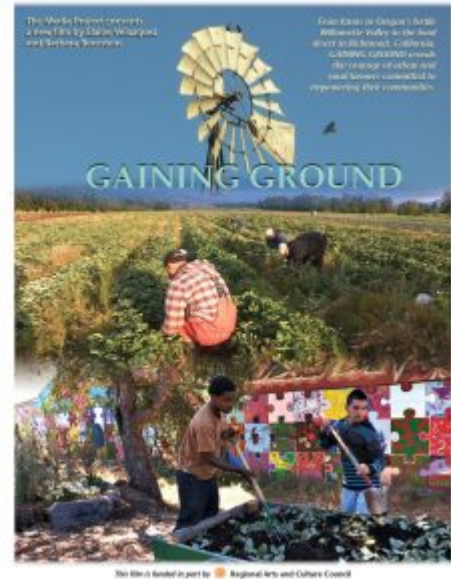
Produced by the New Leaders Initiative of the Earth Island Institute. 2012. 51 min.

Gaining Ground

Gaining Ground is a warm and wonderful film that journeys into the future of food and agriculture. We meet the young people who power the Richmond, California, urban agriculture project Urban Tilth. And we visit Oregon farmers who only reluctantly embraced organic agriculture, farmers markets, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects. Late in the film, we see how precarious alternatives can be: The Urban Tilth gardens are invaded by a toxic cloud from a fire at the nearby Chevron refinery and farmers in Oregon

battle Monsanto's GMO pollution. This is the kind of media we need as we help students — and ourselves — imagine local, organic food systems and a future free of fossil fuels.

Directed by Elaine Velazquez and Barbara Bernstein.
The Media Project. 2016. 66 min.



Gasland II

High-volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas — more commonly known as “fracking” — is one of the scariest technologies on the planet. A recent open letter from Pennsylvania residents described the effects of fracking: “In short, water contamination has been widespread; our air has been polluted; countless individuals and families have been sickened; farms have been devastated, cattle have died, and our pristine streams and rivers have turned up dead fish . . . and our communities have been transformed into toxic industrial zones with 24/7 noise, flares, thousands of trucks, and increased crime.” Josh Fox’s film *Gasland II* illuminates this grim reality.

With a blend of storytelling, outrage, science, and, yes, humor, Fox offers a student-friendly look at this technology from hell. The first *Gasland* film — which featured the now infamous images of residents lighting their kitchen tap water on fire — was nominated for an Academy Award. As Julie Treick O’Neill writes in her *Rethinking Schools* article on teaching this earlier film (and included in *A People’s Curriculum for the Earth*), “Fox was a hit with my students: He was real enough, cool enough, and smart enough to take on fracking.” *Gasland II* is an important resource to help our students navigate the world’s disturbing new fossil fuel terrain. For middle school and high schools classrooms.

Directed by Josh Fox. International WOW Company. 2013. 125 min.

The Hungry Tide

The Hungry Tide focuses on the life and work of Maria Tiimon, a climate activist living in Australia. Tiimon is from Kiribati, a chain of small islands in the Pacific that is already suffering from the effects of global warming. *The Hungry Tide* is many films at once, which makes this an especially valuable classroom resource. It's an intimate story of how climate change is affecting Kiribati, a place we visit with Tiimon after her mother dies and, later, when her father becomes ill. It's the story of climate conferences in Copenhagen and Cancun, and the attempt of island nation activists like Tiimon to speak truth to wealth and power. And it is about the choices being made daily by climate victims — to stay and move farther inland, to relocate to another island, or to flee to a so-called developed country. Throughout, Tiimon is a warm and open guide, inviting viewers into her family, her culture, and her struggles.

Directed by Tom Zubrycki. Video Project. 2012. 53 min.

Into Eternity

In the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Obama administration declared its continued confidence in nuclear power. But nuclear waste will remain terrifyingly poisonous for tens of thousands of years, and that fact is rarely addressed in the media or in the curriculum. *Into Eternity*, a disturbing film about ONKALO, the “permanent” nuclear waste facility in Finland, asks how it is possible to bury poisons and keep them safe for 100,000 years. This haunting — one might say, creepy — film may be too slow for some students, but it raises profound questions about our responsibility to future generations that should be asked in high school science, global studies, economics, and government classes.

Directed by Michael Madsen. Video Project. 2009. 58 and 75-minute versions available.

La Vía Campesina in Movement . . . Food Sovereignty Now!

The global peasant movement, La Vía Campesina, with about 200 million people in its affiliated organizations, is arguably the largest social movement in the world. But it's missing from our textbooks. This straightforward and unpretentious classroom resource introduces students to La Vía Campesina activists from around the world, all of whom discuss what the concept of food sovereignty means to them. Now, more than ever, we need a curriculum that alerts students to the central role that social movements have played — and will continue to play — in making the world a better place. Here's one resource that will help introduce students to the global movement that is challenging the corporate strategy of industrial food production, which includes more GMOs, more pesticides, more giant plantations, more peasant dispossession, more globalized food. La Vía Campesina offers an alternative to this toxic future.

Directed by Antonio Pacor, Bettina Gozzano, and Focuspuller. La Via Campesina. 2011. 20 min.

Necessity: Oil, Water, and Climate Resistance *

Necessity: Oil, Water, and Climate

Resistance takes up gripping questions at the heart of the fight to save the planet. As activists increasingly call for acts of civil disobedience and federal and state laws impose criminal penalties for pipeline activism, how do concerned citizens decide whether to join the resisters? What are the legal considerations and consequences of engaging in direct

actions to stop the pipelines and oil trains? And how do regional activists form alliances across potential divisions, including race, gender, nationality, and class, in responding to the climate emergency?



Grounded in people and places at the heart of the climate crisis, *Necessity* traces the fight in Minnesota against the expansion of pipelines carrying toxic tar sands oil through North America. The film is structured around two stories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists engaged in civil disobedience and using the necessity defense, making a moral case for acts of civil disobedience.

This stand-alone film is a pilot for a series on direct action for the climate, the film explores the work of attorneys, valve turners, and other water protectors in Minnesota.

Directed by Jan Haaken and Samantha Praus. The Fledgling Fund Call for Projects on Climate Change. 2019. 58 minutes.

Nuclear Savage: The Islands of Secret Project 4.1 *

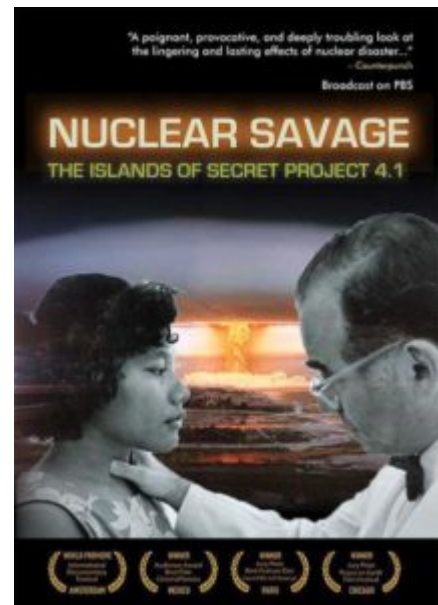
This is a disturbing film that helps students grasp how U.S. nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands, beginning in 1946, “terrorized and traumatized” people there, in the words of a Marshallese government official. It’s hard to overstate the racism and depravity of U.S. officials who intentionally treated Marshallese — especially those from the island of Rongelap — as human guinea pigs.

In 1956, Merrill Eisenbud, director of the U.S. Atomic Energy Agency’s health and safety laboratory, described the government’s plans for sending Marshallese back to Rongelap, just three years after the largest nuclear test in history: “That island is by far the most

contaminated place on Earth and it will be very interesting to get a measure of human uptake when people live in a contaminated environment.” Eisenbud added, “While it is true that these people do not live the way Westerners do, civilized people, it is nevertheless also true that these people are more like us than the mice.”

Nuclear Savage not only chronicles the experimentation on the Marshallese but also introduces us to individuals who continue to work for justice. It’s a film that needs to be a staple in U.S. and modern world history curricula.

By Adam Jonas Horowitz. Video Project. 2012. 60 and 87-minute versions available.



Pretty Slick

Pretty Slick explores an often-overlooked aspect of the 2010 BP Gulf Oil Spill: the massive use of the toxic dispersant Corexit. BP sought to hide the terrible impact of the oil spill by dispersing and sinking oil, rather than cleaning it up. This is more than an historical footnote. The film highlights the fundamental contradiction between environmental health and the search for increasingly hard-to-find fossil fuel deposits. *Pretty Slick* is an excellent film for science, environmental studies, government, and economics classes. And it would make a valuable addition to Brady Bennon’s role play “Environmental Crime on Trial” about the BP oil disaster, included in *A People’s Curriculum for the Earth*.

Directed by James Fox. Video Project. 2016. 71 min.

Trinkets and Beads *

Trinkets and Beads is a haunting film about international oil companies versus the Indigenous people of the rainforests of eastern Ecuador. There’s a billion and a half dollar’s worth of oil in Ecuador’s Oriente, enough to power U.S. cars for 13 days, and in order to get it, oil companies are willing to destroy Indigenous cultures and the land they live on. One oil company consultant in the film expresses contempt for the very idea of a rainforest: “The jungle is the jungle is the jungle kind of thing.” It’s a small film about big issues, and it fascinates and outrages students.

A major theme of *Trinkets and Beads* is the role of evangelical missionaries who, in the words of one of them, view the Bible as a tool to “cut through a culture where they never had it.” In the film we see missionaries attempt to groom the Indigenous Huaorani people for

“civilization” and the arrival of oil companies.

But we also meet Moi, a Huaorani leader whose eloquence will stay with students long after the film ends: “We must all be concerned because this is the heart of the world and here we can breathe.” *Trinkets and Beads* features Moi’s stories of Huaorani resistance and includes scenes of Indigenous people’s raucous demonstrations in Quito. Its images of environmental violence are indelible, and infuriate students, but images of defiance also inspire them. Teachers who use the film early in the school year report that by the end of the year, it is still vivid for students, and they use it as a conceptual touchstone in ongoing conversations about “development” and “progress.”



Directed and produced by Christopher Walker. Icarus Films. 1996. 52 min.

More Recommendations on Environmental Justice

A Message from the Future with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez *

Narrated by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and illustrated by Molly Crabapple, the film flips the script on our future by illustrating one where we survive climate change and thrive because we took action today.

Coronavirus Capitalism

Naomi Klein explains how President Trump’s plan is a pandemic shock doctrine, based on pro-capitalist, unjust policies that predated the crisis.

The Story of Bottled Water *

A viewer-friendly, informative, animated critique of the bottled water industry.

This Changes Everything (Film) *

Seven portraits of communities on the front lines of the climate crisis.

Immigration

Everyone Their Grain of Sand

Years ago, poor people moved onto the dusty hillsides east of Tijuana and established the community of Maclovio Rojas. They paid for the land, but never received formal title. Since then, as Tijuana inexorably sprawled eastward, the Maclovio real estate became more desirable. The Baja government sought to evict this community and set its sights on “development.” *Everyone Their Grain of Sand* tells the story of Maclovio residents’ difficult but inspiring struggle for land and dignity. The government refuses permission to build a school; the community builds it anyway. The government refuses to pay the teachers; the community organizes to demand full recognition for the school and that teachers be paid. The government refuses to connect electricity or water; the community strings its own power lines and taps into the local aqueduct. The community’s leaders are imprisoned or driven underground; the community protests and rallies for charges to be dropped.

At 87 minutes, the video may be too long for most high school classes, although it offers rich teaching possibilities. Producer/director Beth Bird presents the kind of intimate portrait of daily life that a filmmaker can offer only after spending long hours gaining people’s trust. Through her camera, we’re in people’s homes, in their meetings, with them visiting loved ones in prison, watching parents care for their children. It’s spontaneous and authentic.

As one resident explains, “I’m active here — this is a community of resistance, and when you’re involved, you come to love your community.” The entire film brings these words to life.

Directed by Beth Bird. Women Make Movies. 2004. 87 min.

Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary

On the day that California voters approved Proposition 187 — denying “illegal” immigrants public education and access to health care — one of Laura Angelica Simón’s students asked her if she was now a “cop” and was going to kick them out of school. *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary* is Simón’s intimate look at the emotional pain caused by Prop. 187 in one California school: hers. Hoover is the largest elementary school in Los Angeles, enrolling 2,700 kids, 90 percent of them from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The film “stars” Mayra, a precocious Salvadoran 5th grader, who takes us on a tour of the school and invites us into her home — a one-room apartment that she shares with her mother, uncle, and sister, across from crime-plagued McArthur Park. Mayra and other students we meet represent

living criticisms of the dehumanizing term “illegal alien,” and their humor and intelligence offer viewers an opportunity to rethink lingering stereotypes. But the film is not content to confront anti-immigrant attitudes simply by introducing us to sweet kids.

We also meet Dianne Lee, a seven-year teaching veteran whose grandparents immigrated from Russia; Carmen Arcote, a conservative Mexican American parent who voted for 187; and Mr. Peakmeyer, the Anglo librarian who engages Hoover students in an impromptu debate about the causes of the neighborhood’s decline, and with help from these astute youngsters, trips over his own contradictions. Even many years after the Proposition 187 struggle, students enjoy this personal film essay about immigration issues, and find lots to talk and write about. However, the film can’t stand on its own. Although early on, Simón, the narrator, labels the students “economic and political refugees,” that’s the only hint of the forces that propel so many Latin Americans to move north.

It was beyond the film’s scope, but unless students explore the broader economic factors hurting poor countries — in large measure Made in the USA and other industrialized nations — they won’t be able to think deeply about the wrongheadedness of anti-immigrant crusades. Without this broader context, students may be left sympathetic to immigrants’ plights but unaware of how economic and political choices made here create social dislocations throughout Latin America. Limitations notwithstanding, the film is provocative and useful.

To engage students in the ordeal of immigrating to the United States from Central America or Mexico, many teachers use *El Norte*. Although it focuses on immigrants fleeing military repression in 1980s Guatemala, aspects of this film still resonate, and it’s been a favorite with students.

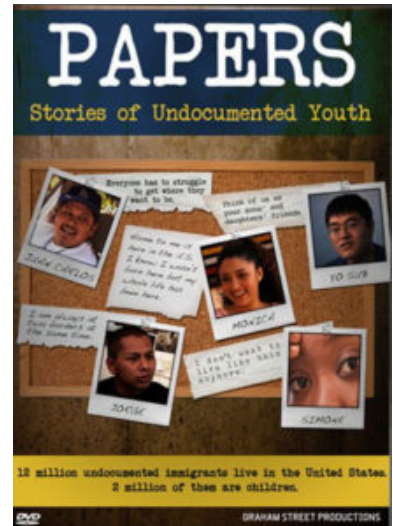
Directed by Laura Angelica Simón. Transit Media. 1996. 53 min.

Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth *

Throughout the Obama years, deportations continued at a rate exceeding that of the Bush administration, and Trump has made contempt for immigrants the foundation of his presidency. Thus, the stories of undocumented high school students included in *Papers* become even more urgent. The young people in the film discuss their lives with extraordinary honesty and insight, and their teachers and administrators show how educators can express solidarity, not merely sympathy.

At 88 minutes, *Papers* is long, but it’s a magnificent resource for a faculty meeting or for professional development. By the end of the film, it’s impossible not to recognize the lunacy of an immigration policy that criminalizes people who are simply trying to live decent lives.

Directed by Anne Galisky. Graham Street Productions. 2009. 88 min.



Una Vida, Dos Países

Between 2009 and 2014, 1 million Mexicans — including U.S.-born children — left the United States for Mexico. This bilingual documentary, available online, documents stories of young people who returned to Mexico after growing up in the United States. It captures the tough choices their families had to make, often going back to their home country because of ill or aging parents or due to the harsh realities of immigrant life in the United States. Young people share the complexities of being caught between cultures, languages, and countries, providing a powerful counter-narrative to current anti-immigrant stereotypes and misconceptions.

Just 30 minutes long, this documentary is perfect for sharing with students, and accompanying curriculum materials are available on the website.

Directed by Tatyana Kleyn. Produced by Tatyana Kleyn, William Perez, and Rafael Vásquez. 2016. 30 min.

More Recommendations on Immigration

Echando Raíces/Taking Root

The struggles of immigrants through the personal stories of families in communities in California, Texas, and Iowa.

Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America *

Documentary that examines the direct connection between the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America and the immigration crisis we face today.

Labor

Bread and Roses *

This is the fictionalized account of episodes in the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles. The film opens with Maya's harrowing illegal entrance into the United States from Mexico and follows her travails as she secures a cleaning job in a large downtown office building. Perez, the on-site manager for the cleaning contractor, keeps workers in line through incessant badgering. Maya bristles at this treatment, and is receptive to overtures from the cocky white union organizer Sam, but her sister Rosa has learned hard lessons in self-preservation, and wants no part of a risky union struggle, especially one led by this guy. "We, we,' when was the last time you got a cleaning job?" she demands of Sam early in the film.



The best scenes in *Bread and Roses* are the tense conversations between workers about whether or not organizing is worth the risk. Maya's would-be boyfriend, Ruben, has a law school scholarship waiting, if only he plays it safe and keeps his job. Why would Maya want to endanger her job, Ruben wants to know. She snaps back:

What was it that you said when they fired Teresa [an older woman who worked with them cleaning the office building]? "She looks like my mother." That's why I'm doing it. I'm doing it because my sister has been working 16 hours a day since she got here. Because her husband can't pay for the hospital bills. He doesn't have medical insurance.... I'm doing it because I have to give Perez two months of my salary and I have to beg him for a job. I'm doing it because we feed those bastards, we wipe their asses, we do everything for them. We raise their children, and they still look right through us.

Bread and Roses is engaging start to finish and can generate lots of excellent writing and discussion about treatment of immigrant workers, tensions between immigrant and non-immigrant workers, risks and benefits of organizing, and many others. But it's not without its flaws. This is supposed to be a struggle to reclaim workers' lost dignity, but every union tactic is decided upon by the organizer, not by the workers. They may be in meetings together, but Sam does virtually all the talking — deciding every move, making pronouncements about how he is going to "personally embarrass" the new part owners of the office building. (Someone in *Bread and Roses* should have criticized him the way that

Ramón criticized the organizer in the classic film, *Salt of the Earth*.) And the romance between Sam and Maya was a needless and inappropriate — if predictable — insertion by writer/director Ken Loach. But these are not fatal flaws, and this is a valuable film.

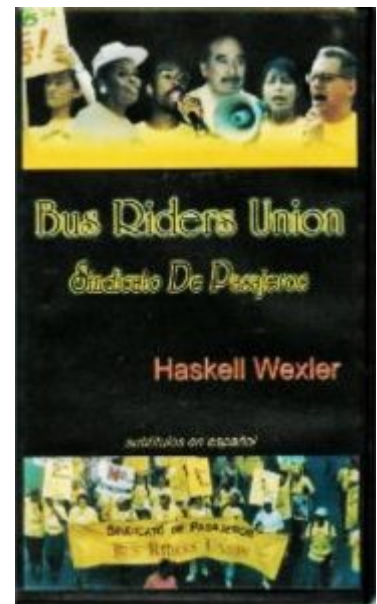
By the way, Loach is a prolific filmmaker, underappreciated in the United States. Two of his films that would make excellent additions to a global studies curriculum are *Hidden Agenda*, about British repression in Northern Ireland and *Land and Freedom*, about the Spanish Civil War.

This film is rated ‘R’ for some sexual references, and a fair amount of harsh language.

Directed by Ken Loach. Lions Gate Films. 2001. 106 min.

Bus Riders Union *

In this extraordinary film, Academy Award-winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler records the several-year-long struggle of the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union (BRU) to win better service and to challenge the race and class bias in city spending priorities. Sure, at 86 minutes, it’s long for classroom use and drags in a few places for many high school students, but what a rich documentary this is. At the outset, Kikanza Ramsey, a young BRU organizer, explains that the union is “a political, social experiment to see if we can build a multiracial, bilingual, gender-balanced mass movement of working-class people that is willing to fight for a set of demands that challenges corporate capital.” And this is not mere rhetoric. The remainder of the film brings her words to life, revealing the twists and turns, highs and lows of this struggle, as seen through the eyes of participants.



We desperately need more classroom resources like this one. First, because in many respects the union is victorious; in the end, they win lots more buses — and less polluting ones, at that — to ease overcrowding for their mostly immigrant, poor, people of color, working-class constituency. And students need to learn that struggle matters.

But it’s how the BRU organizes — especially across lines of race, nationality, and language; with humor; with song; with determination; with an eye on the bigger systemic picture — that will leave a lasting impression. Hope is scarce in many “films with a conscience;” in *Bus Riders Union* it plays a starring role.

Directed by Haskell Wexler. The Strategy Center. 2000. 86 min.

The Killing Floor *

Two African American men migrate from the rural South to Chicago during World War I and find jobs in a packinghouse. They respond differently to the challenges presented. One leaves to fight in the war; the other, Frank Custer, stays in Chicago. *The Killing Floor* centers on Custer's story; he works to organize African American, Polish, Lithuanian, Irish, and German workers in the stockyards. It's a dramatic film, but depicts the stories of real people and actual events. It deals forthrightly with racism in the workplace and the union and ends with the 1919 race riots and their aftermath. We have found this to be a rich teaching resource in U.S. History classes. The film premiered on PBS's *American Playhouse* in 1984, but was restored digitally in 2019 by the UCLA Film & Television Archive.



Directed by Bill Duke. American Playhouse. 1984. 118 min.

Made in L.A. *

This is the moving story of immigrant women's participation in a three-year strike and boycott against the apparel retailer Forever 21. It's an intimate film that focuses on three women to reveal how their involvement in strike activities transforms their lives.

As is the case in so many industries, Forever 21 pressured suppliers to provide products at low prices but then professed ignorance when it was revealed that their suppliers kept workers in sweatshop conditions. This is a rich film, full of insights about immigration, conditions in the apparel industry, labor organizing, women's lives — and the intersection of the personal and the political.



Directed by Almudena Carracedo. Semilla Verde Productions and ITVS. 2007. 70 minutes.

Maquilapolis (City of Factories) *

Push, assemble, remove, push, assemble, remove. A line of women dressed alike in blue smocks indicate their respective positions in one of Tijuana, Mexico's 4,000 factories. They are the manufacturing "machines" corporations so desire in the global economy. Silently, they push, assemble, remove, push, assemble, remove.

But as the film continues, the power of *Maquilapolis*, (City of Factories) is evident — the women come alive, sharing their dilemmas, resistance, and hope. The film follows two former maquiladora workers, Lourdes Lujan and Carmen Duran, as they take on the multinational corporations harming their community and infringing on workers' rights. The women are promotoras, members of a social justice group organized to educate and empower the thousands of Tijuana maquiladora workers.



Tijuana has a long history of multinational corporations exploiting Mexican women. As the film's narrator explains: "They said we would make a good workforce because we had agile hands and would be cheap and docile." A 1960s treaty between the United States and Mexico created some of the first assembly centers and then this model — imported U.S. goods, assembled in Mexico and then exported back to the United States and the world — exploded in 1994 as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA.

Maquilapolis has been used in high school classes as part of a larger unit on Mexico and the history and current issues impacting the border. (See the Rethinking Schools book *The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration*.) Although a subtitled film — "You mean we have to read while we watch?" — teachers report students being totally engrossed. *Maquilapolis*, in its video diary style, allow students to travel to Tijuana with Lourdes and Carmen and offers an intimate view of the women's lives: their neighborhoods, their factories, their homes, watching their children play. Lourdes and Carmen bring the border — and issues of toxic contamination, workers' rights, and resistance — alive for students. It brings an abstract concept like "Free Trade" to ground level. (See more on teaching *Maquilapolis* in "Our Dignity Can Defeat Anyone" by Julie Treick O'Neill in *Rethinking Schools*.)

Directed and produced by Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre. California Newsreel. 2006. 68 min.

Matewan *

Matewan is John Sayles's feature film about a strike in a mining town in Appalachia. Mine owners bring in Black workers in an attempt to break the strike. Can Italian immigrants, white Appalachians, and African Americans work together? Should they even bother to try?

It's an engaging and well-crafted film. (The short essay "Why Matewan?" from John Sayles's book *Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan* can also be used in class.)

Written and directed by John Sayles. Cinecom Pictures. 1987. 132 minutes.



Roger and Me *

"First, close 11 plants in the U.S., then open 11 in Mexico where you pay the workers 70 cents an hour. Then use the money you've saved building cars in Mexico to take over other companies — preferably high-tech firms and weapons manufacturers. Next, tell the union you're broke and they happily agree to give back a couple billion dollars in wage cuts. You then take that money from the workers and eliminate their jobs by building more foreign factories. Roger Smith was a true genius." This is filmmaker Michael Moore describing the business strategy of General Motors' then-chairman, Roger Smith.

Roger and Me chronicles Michael Moore's long quest to confront Smith with the human consequences of his business decisions in Moore's hometown of Flint, Michigan, where GM eliminated 30,000 jobs. It is a comedy, with a Detective Columbo-like Moore relentlessly pursuing Smith and encountering one ludicrous GM evasion after another. But the film's laughs are squeezed from the sorrow and outrage we also experience as Moore juxtaposes the deterioration of workers' lives with the empty-headed patter of Flint's elite, and the Pat Boones, Anita Bryants, and assorted hucksters who troop through town. Moore interviews a GM spokesman who is indignant that Moore would dare suggest that GM owes anything to the workers who built the company. General Motors is in business solely to make a profit, he insists, plain and simple. Capitalism 101. (In the credits we learn that the PR man also loses his job.)



The film ends with Moore cutting back and forth between Roger Smith offering pious-sounding platitudes at a GM Christmas party and the wrenching eviction of a Flint family on Christmas eve. To the extent that a key goal of teaching about social studies is to lay bare the

human dimensions of the “issues,” this is a valuable classroom resource. However, an equally important goal is to encourage students to reflect on alternatives. The film’s nostalgia for an American society based on the mass production of automobiles reveals a key limitation of *Roger and Me*. A British film that complements *Roger and Me* is *Brassed Off*, starring the brilliant Pete Postlethwaite. It may be a bit too slow or simply odd for most high school students, but at least find it for yourself. Like *Roger and Me*, it’s a humorous, if heartbreaking, look at the consequences of “downsizing,” in this case, Margaret Thatcher’s Tory government closing profitable, and heavily unionized, coal pits in Yorkshire. The film explores the miners’ travails through the fortunes of the town’s brass band.

Note that this film was awarded an absurd ‘R’ rating, apparently for a bit of foul language and the on-camera butchering of a rabbit.

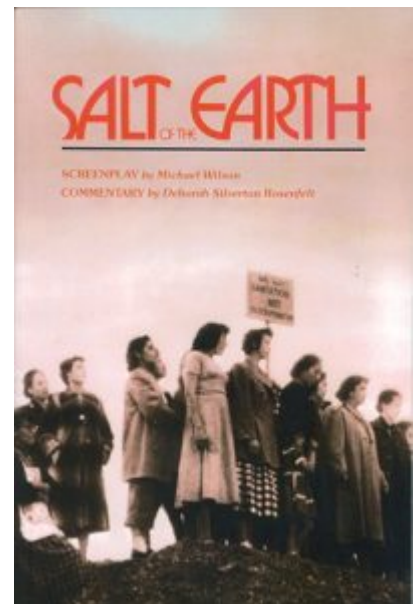
Directed and produced by Michael Moore. Dog Eat Dog Films. 1989. 91 min.

Salt of the Earth *

Set in “Zinctown, New Mexico,” *Salt of the Earth* uses a combination of actors and non-professional community people to tell its story. And a great story it is. Sparked by a mine accident, the workers, mostly Mexican Americans, go on strike. Safety is the issue but is inextricably linked with racial discrimination, as Anglo miners work in pairs, while Mexican Americans are forced to work alone. The film consistently highlights the racial dimension to the class struggle. As one of the white managers says about the workers: “They’re like children in many ways. Sometimes you have to humor them. Sometimes you have to spank them. And sometimes you have to take their food away.”

And the film also addresses racism within the union. The white organizer from the international union is committed to the workers’ cause and to union democracy, but his paternalism still creeps in. He is criticized by one of the workers, Ramón Quintero: “When you figure everything the rank and file’s to do down to the last detail, you don’t give us anything to think about. Are you afraid we’re too lazy to take initiative?”

This is especially a feminist story, as women insist that their issues for indoor plumbing and hot water in the company-owned housing also be included as a demand of the all-male union. This is the women’s story at least as much as the men’s, and they continue to push for equality the more they participate in strike activities. This struggle comes to a head as Esperanza confronts her husband, Ramon, about his determination to keep her in her place:



Have you learned nothing from this strike? Why are you afraid to have me at your side? Do you still think you can have dignity only if I have none?... Do you feel better having someone lower than you?

Whose neck shall I stand on to make me feel superior?...

I want to rise and push everything up as I go.

Comforting Esperanza a bit later, one of the women says, “Anything worth learning is a hurt. These changes come with pain.” As effectively as any other film we are aware of, *Salt of the Earth* celebrates the possibility of people being able to create a very different, very much better society through solidarity and collective action.

Some teachers may be concerned that students would be put off by *Salt of the Earth* being a black-and-white film, with some amateurish acting, and melodramatic music. But what the film lacks in polish it more than makes up for in substance. And most students recognize that.

Directed by Herbert Biberman. Independent Productions. 1954. 94 min.

Union Maids * and Seeing Red

Two documentaries, both nominated for Academy Awards, from filmmakers Julia Reichert and Jim Klein. With interviews, music, and archival footage, *Union Maids* tells the story of three women who helped build industrial unions in the 1930s and 1940s. The three are great storytellers. It's lively history, a must-use. With more characters, but with the same humor and drama, *Seeing Red* chronicles the rise and fall of the U.S. Communist Party. It's hard to imagine teaching about the McCarthy period without using this film. See the lesson about teaching *Union Maids* in *The Power in Our Hands: A Curriculum on the History of Work and Workers in the United States*.

Union Maids is by Jim Klein, Julia Reichert, Miles Mogulescu. New Day Films. 1976. 55 min.

Seeing Red is by Jim Klein and Julia Reichert. New Day Films. 1983. 102 min.

More Recommendations on Labor

10,000 Black Men Named George *

Docudrama about A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black labor union in the United States.

At the River I Stand *

An invaluable documentary film on the African American sanitation workers' 1968 fight for human dignity and a living wage in Memphis.

LGBTQ

How to Survive a Plague *

The 2012 documentary *How to Survive a Plague* tells the riveting and heartbreaking story of the founding and growth of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), a central player in the struggle to pressure drug companies and the U.S. government to aggressively pursue a treatment and cure for AIDS. Through rich and intimate archival material — home videos made by the activists themselves, news broadcasts, footage of protests — viewers learn about the men and women who comprised ACT UP, many of whom were sick with the virus themselves, and see, in real time, how their bold civil disobedience was born, cultivated, honed, and mobilized at key moments in the struggle. The filmmakers do not reveal, until the end, who among the original cadre of activists lived to benefit from the discovery of an effective treatment for AIDS; this strategy both makes for incredibly powerful viewing and serves to remind us that the political fight for these activists was literally a matter of life and death.



For those using this film in the current moment of the coronavirus pandemic, there are lots of rich connections to be made. First, educators might ask students to think about how marginalized groups' experience of disease is affected by oppressive structures like racism and homophobia. It is fair to say that the homophobia of men like Jesse Helms, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush killed millions of people as these politicians dragged their feet in addressing a disease that, at first, seemed to be killing mostly gay men. Just as AIDS became inextricably tied to homosexuality, so too did President Trump label coronavirus a Chinese virus, stirring up anti-Asian hatred and spreading misinformation. And just as the poorest people on the globe have been disproportionately killed by AIDS, so too are we seeing outsized numbers of coronavirus infections and deaths among Black and Brown people in the United States. Second, the ACT UP activists sought to democratize the biomedical bureaucracy — drug research, trials, the FDA approval process — so that the people most affected by its decisions could have a seat at the table. Students might think

about to what extent working people today in the United States have a voice in determining the priorities of the health care system. One imagines that were nurses and hospital aides given real voice in government, there would be no shortage of PPE. Finally, the film raises a key question for the current moment: What kind of activism do we need for this plague, coronavirus? *How to Survive a Plague* reveals the nitty-gritty process of organizers hatching actions that match the moment; for students, it might serve as inspiration to consider what actions they might hatch today.

Appropriate for high school classrooms — history, science, language arts.

Directed by David France. Public Square Films. 2012. 109 minutes.

The Times of Harvey Milk *

A sad but inspirational look at the life and death of San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk and at the gay rights movement. Milk was the first openly gay elected official in the United States. This is a good film to introduce the political struggle for gay rights. It's personal, funny, sad, and infuriating.

Directed by Rob Epstein. Produced by Richard Schmiechen. TC Films International. 1984. 90 minutes.



The Year We Thought About Love

This award-winning documentary highlights the work of True Colors, an LGBTQ youth theater troupe in Boston, as they write, rehearse, and perform a play based on their own experiences. In the beginning of the film (and the school year) they set themselves a challenge: How do we create a story about queer love for middle and high school students, for counselors, and for our families and friends? As the project evolves, we get to know several of the youth individually. Their thoughtfulness, exuberance, and honesty serves as an entry point for important class and/or staff discussions. Middle school, high school, and staff development.

Directed and produced by Ellen Brodsky. Filmmakers Collaborative, Inc. 2015. 68 min.

More Recommendations on LGBTQ

Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin *

Documentary about the life of peace, labor, and civil rights activist Bayard Rustin.

Bullied: A Student, a School, and a Case That Made History *

This documentary shows the devastating impact of bullying on students, in this case a gay student who works with lawyers to win a precedent-setting case to create a safe place for students in school.

Native American

Beyond Recognition

There is a lack of teaching materials about the struggles and resistance of Native Americans who live in urban areas. *Beyond Recognition* helps fill that gap. This brief documentary is centered on the work of Corrina Gould, an Ohlone elder trying to save the culture and sacred spaces of her people in the San Francisco Bay Area. Along the way, we see her teaching young students the history of the land they live on, and learn about the difficulties faced by the 80,000 Native Americans who belong to tribes without federal recognition. We follow Gould's participation in a series of campaigns to save Native American sacred ground and the beginning stages of a new idea: a women-led urban Indigenous land trust.

Directed by Michelle Grace Steinberg. Underexposed Films. 2014. 24 min.

Dawnland

During the 20th century, Indigenous children throughout the United States and Canada were stolen from their homes and communities and placed with white families. It is an ugly history. *Dawnland* tells the story of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, organized to collect the stories of Indigenous people in Maine who were the victims — and survivors — of this practice of what one commissioner in the film describes as cultural genocide. As one Indigenous woman taken from her family remembers: “My baby sister and I sat in a tub of bleach one time, tried to convince each other that we’re getting white. And then we knew they would accept us. The [white] boys in our school, they said we were dirt and we were used for one thing.” It’s a remarkable film — disturbing, poignant, infuriating, and at times, poetic. But *Dawnland* also asks whether truth is automatically accompanied by reconciliation, and the commission itself wrestles with the legacy of white supremacy and privilege. It’s a long film, but worth it.

Directed by Adam Mazo and Ben Pender-Cudlip. The Upstander Project. 2018. 86 and 54-min. versions available.

First Light *

First Light tells the horrific story of Native American children being forcibly removed from their homes in Maine. The close-up look at Maine gives this film its personal and poignant feel, but the film emphasizes that this was a national phenomenon. As Col. Richard H. Pratt, founder in 1879 of the genocidal Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, said: “Transfer the savage-born infant to the surroundings of civilization, and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit.” *First Light* is a painful but hopeful film, as it focuses on the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an effort to encourage victims of forcible removal to tell the truth about their experiences and to gain support. Background and teaching materials are included at the website.



Directed by Adam Mazo and Ben Pender-Cudlip. The Upstander Project. 2015. 13 min.

More Recommendations on Native Americans

Incident at Oglala *

Documentary about the conviction of Native American activist Leonard Peltier.

We Shall Remain: America Through Native Eyes *

Three hundred years of Native American history.

U.S. History

Almost every section in Films with a Conscience includes titles on U.S. history (such as Civil Rights Movement, labor organizing, criminal justice, Native American). Therefore, in addition to the films below, we encourage you to peruse the full list.

Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution *

Crip Camp is a documentary that will enrich any educator's teaching of the Civil Rights Movement. The film traces the birth of the disability rights movement from the late 1960s to today. It opens with an examination of Camp Jened, a summer camp for people with disabilities that one of the directors, Jim LeBrecht, born with spina bifida, attended as a youth. The camp gave attendees what the outside world could not — a chance to simply be teenagers. Campers played games, discussed troubles at home and, like most teenagers, explored their sexuality. This opening segment is both funny and poignant.

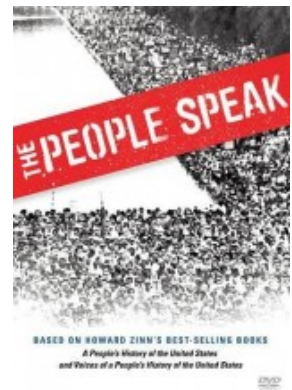
The movie then pivots to the efforts by Judy Heumann and other people with disabilities in their fight for civil rights, first in New York City, then San Francisco, and on to Washington, D.C. The movie inspires viewers by showing the activism of people with disabilities and their struggle to be treated as equals by the wider society. These compelling stories include delightful moments of solidarity, like members of the Black Panther Party feeding demonstrators in San Francisco and the Machinists union providing transportation in D.C. The movie culminates with the 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, but cautions viewers, by way of writer and *Crip Camp* "star," Denise Sherer Jacobson, that "until you change society's attitudes [toward people with disabilities] that law won't mean much."

Directed by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht. Netflix. 2020. 107 minutes.

The People Speak — Extended Edition *

The People Speak offers readings and performances of letters, diary entries, speeches, and songs from throughout U.S. history.

Narrated by Howard Zinn, the readings are by noted actors and musicians, including Matt Damon, Marisa Tomei, Morgan Freeman, Sandra Oh, Bruce Springsteen, Danny Glover, and many more. Based on *A People's History of the United States* and *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, this DVD is an extended version of the film that aired on the History Channel in December 2009. This is an essential resource for every history teacher.



Directed and produced by Howard Zinn, Chris Moore, and Anthony Arnone. A&E Home Video. 2009. 110 min.

Viva La Causa! 500 Years of Chicano History

This is the only film we know of that offers a panoramic history of the Chicano people, stretching from Spanish invasion to the mid-1990s. "All those faces in the past haunt us," offers the narrator. With 500 years of history to cover in an hour, the film is not able to pause long on any one episode. *Viva La Causa's* strength is that it offers a compelling framework of

la raza's resistance to oppression. It's hard to overestimate the enormity of injustice: from the theft of huge swaths of Mexico by the United States after its war against Mexico, to the lynchings of Mexicans in California after the war, to the deportations of Mexicans in the 1930s, to attacks on farmworkers in the 1960s. But this is a profoundly hopeful film that concentrates at least as much on resistance as it does on oppression, surfacing seemingly countless episodes of activism. As the narrator offers late in the film's second half: "The farmworkers taught us a valuable lesson: Progress is made when people mobilize, organize, and demand change; it doesn't come from the goodwill of the government or the upper classes, but from the strength of the people — *la gente*."

Viva La Causa is partisan, even polemical, and students who are accustomed to the lifeless narrator-speak of so many school documentaries may find this jarring. In an important respect, this video is as much an artifact of Chicano struggle as it is a chronicle of it.

By Elizabeth Martínez and Doug Norberg. The Southwest Organizing Project. 1995. 60 min. Limited availability.

More Recommendations on U.S. History

Glory *

The all-Black 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment is brought to the screen in this fine film. [See "Promoting Social Imagination Through Interior Monologue" at the Zinn Education Project.]

Howard Zinn: You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train *

Documentary based on Howard Zinn's autobiography of the same name.

Not Just a Game: Power, Politics & American Sports *

In this documentary, based on *A People's History of Sports in the United States*, Dave Zirin demonstrates that U.S. sports have long been at the center of major political debates and struggles.

Race — The Power of an Illusion *

A three-part documentary series that questions the very idea of race as biology. Includes companion website.

Reconstruction: The Second Civil War *

Through the voices of several historians and dramatic re-enactments by actors, PBS's *Reconstruction: The Second Civil War* uses the stories of ordinary citizens to paint a picture of the Reconstruction era.

Segregated by Design *

Examines the forgotten history of how our federal, state, and local governments unconstitutionally segregated every major metropolitan area in the United States through law and policy.

The Untold History of the United States *

A series that examines various under-reported events of U.S. history since World War II with a focus on myths and facts about elected officials.

You Got to Move: Stories of Change in the South *

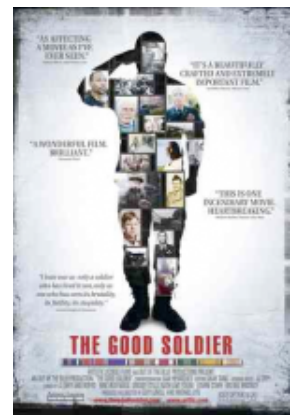
Documentary about the people who have learned to organize, and received peer support, at the Highlander Center.

Vietnam War

The Good Soldier *

As the United States seems embarked on a strategy of war without end, it's worth remembering that, throughout U.S. history, soldiers have resisted attempts to turn them into mindless killing machines. *The Good Soldier* offers examples of these too-often-forgotten "good soldiers" who, in different ways, tried to follow their consciences. It's vital that today's high school students be exposed to individuals like those featured in this important film.

Directed by Lexy Lovell and Michael Uys. Out of the Blue Productions. 2009. 79 min.



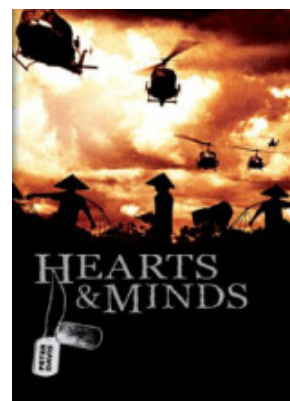
Hearts and Minds *

This powerful Academy Award-winning documentary about the war in Vietnam is a metaphorical collage of interviews, battle footage, and daily life. Students need a good deal of background about the war prior to viewing, but if they're prepared, it can be an

extraordinarily rich resource. Some of the scenes and individuals are unforgettable, as our students, years later, testify.

Note: A scene in a Saigon brothel is sexually explicit. The filmmakers included it in part to explore the war's effect on Vietnamese women, as well as U.S. soldiers' attitudes toward these women.

Directed by Peter Davis. Rialto Pictures. 1974. 112 min.



The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers *

Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's film offers poignant lessons from Vietnam through the words, actions, and life experiences of an American hero, Daniel Ellsberg. *The Most Dangerous Man in America* chronicles Ellsberg's journey from his early days as a Marine officer and then war strategist, to emergence as an activist trying to come to terms with a war he originally supported and helped shape. Ellsberg's experience parallels a journey that many others embarked upon during the 1960s and 1970s. The difference: Ellsberg was an insider, a man with access to top-secret information who decided to risk the many privileges he enjoyed in order to do what he knew in his heart to be the right thing.



The Most Dangerous Man in America Teaching Guide provides eight lessons intended to enhance student understanding of the issues raised in this acclaimed documentary film. Using a variety of teaching strategies, including role play, critical reading, discussion, mock trial, small group imaginative writing, and personal narrative, the curriculum provides students with an opportunity to consider some of Vietnam's lessons. One key lesson of *The Most Dangerous Man in America* is that we all have the potential to be "truth-tellers" — to make important decisions in the name of justice.

Directed and produced by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith. A co-production of Independent Television Service, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and ZDF/Arte. 2009. 94 min.

Regret to Inform *

Barbara Sonneborn made *Regret to Inform* because she wants to end war.

“I want people to look war in the face and ask themselves, ‘Am I going to allow this to happen ever again?’ I want people to so deeply realize the humanity of other human beings that they won’t be able to kill them.”

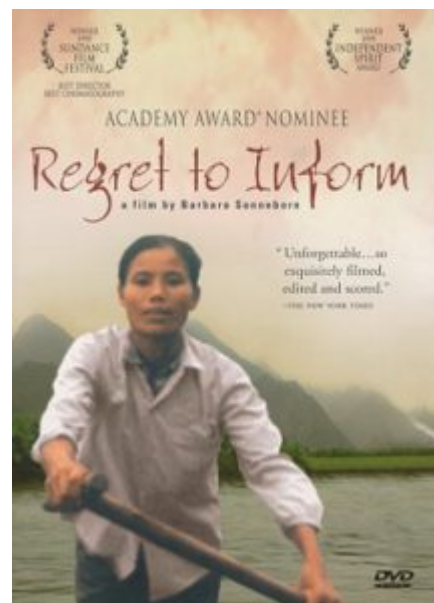
It’s an aim that filmmakers and teachers ought to share. How can we encourage people to consistently attempt to put themselves in the positions of others around the world? How can we help nurture an empathy so profound that war is unthinkable?

Ultimately, this kind of empathy is not merely the product of imagination, but of sweeping social and economic changes. But it can begin anywhere, and everywhere, classrooms included.

At the Zinn Education Project, we post a free teaching guide with lessons for *Regret to Inform* and the chapter of *A People’s History of the United States* on the Vietnam War, “Impossible Victory.”

This first lesson in the *Regret to Inform* teaching guide invites students to “become” many of the women portrayed in the film. These are women whose lives were savaged by the Vietnam War — known more aptly in Vietnam as the American War. Here, students assume the personas of U.S. and Vietnamese women through quotes, and then introduce themselves to one another as they complete questionnaires. It’s a pre-viewing activity that seeks to acquaint students with some of the individuals and issues they will encounter in the film. It leaves them curious and eager to see the women whom they “met” in class.

By Barbara Sonneborn. Sun Fountain Productions. 1998. 72 minutes.



Remember My Lai

This is an extraordinary documentary about the My Lai massacre that first aired as a PBS “Frontline.” This is much more complex and morally riveting than a simple retelling of what happened. Interviewed are participants, both U.S. and Vietnamese. Significantly, and rarely mentioned, some Americans disobeyed orders that day, like the helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson Jr. Who they were and what they did is included here.

PBS Frontline. 1989. 60 min.

Sir! No Sir! *

For years, history teachers who wanted to expose students to the vitality, determination, and courage of the anti-Vietnam War movement were hard-pressed. *The War at Home* described events in Madison, Wisconsin; *Berkeley in the Sixties* looked at a broad array of activism in the Bay Area; *Hearts and Minds* offered bits of anti-war activities in its provocative depiction of the war; and some teachers used Oliver Stone's film version of the Ron Kovic's autobiography, *Born on the Fourth of July*. However, *Sir! No, Sir!*, is the most effective resource in showing the leadership role that defiant soldiers and veterans played in the anti-war movement.

This is a remarkable film that we highly recommend. Even though its focus is soldiers who resisted the war and not the entire anti-war movement, it captures the ethos of the movement.

Directed by David Zeiger. Displaced Films. 2005. 84 min.

War

More in Vietnam War section above.

Barefoot Gen: The Bombing of Hiroshima As Seen Through the Eyes of a Young Boy *

As teachers know, some classroom materials invariably work, no matter the group of students. *Barefoot Gen* is one of them.

Barefoot Gen, a Japanese animated feature film, tells the story of Gen (pronounced with a hard "G"), a young boy who, along with his mother, survives the bombing of Hiroshima.

The story chronicles their struggles as they try to rebuild their lives from the bomb's ashes. It is based on the critically acclaimed, semi-autobiographical Japanese comic book series *Hadashi no Gen*, by Keiji Nakazawa. Both the comic strip and the feature film oppose the Japanese government's actions during World War II and include criticism of the intense poverty and suffering forced onto the Japanese people by their government's war effort.

In the lesson, Haiku and Hiroshima: Teaching About the Atomic Bomb, Rethinking Schools editor Wayne Au describes how he introduces the film to high school students and how he follows up with haiku written by survivors of the bombings and students' own writing.



Directed by Mori Masaki. Geneon. 1992. 170 min.

Breaker Morant

This feature film focuses on the Australian role in the Boer War in South Africa. However, the issues it raises allow us to use it during a unit on Vietnam. Three Australians are tried for war crimes against white Afrikaner civilians. They are “guilty,” but what does that mean? The film poses questions about the culpability of individuals caught in an evil enterprise of “empire building.”

Directed by Bruce Beresford. South Australian Film Corporation. 1980. 107 min.

More Recommendations on War

Conscience and the Constitution *

In World War II, 63 Japanese Americans refused to be drafted from a U.S. concentration camp.

The Good Fight: The Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Spanish Civil War *

Documentary narrated by Studs Terkel on the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

Soldiers of Conscience *

Documentary about war, peace, and U.S. soldiers in Iraq, from active military to conscientious objectors, wrestling with conscience over killing in war.

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