

## ***BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE: CREATING A FILM DOCUMENTARY***

### **PURPOSE**

To define the documentary genre, identify purpose and motive in film media, and to create an audio-visual message using the documentary genre.

### **GRADE LEVELS**

Middle and High School

### **CONTENT AREAS**

Technology/Multimedia  
Communications/Journalism  
English Language Arts  
Social Sciences  
Theatre/Film

### **TIME**

6-8 Class periods

### **STUDENT OBJECTIVES**

- Students will define the genre documentary.
- Students will identify purpose and motives in a documentary.
- Students will develop a message and use visuals and audio to support their message.

### **PSAE/ACT SKILLS**

Topic Development in terms of Purpose and Focus  
Author's Approach  
Generalizations and Conclusions

### **STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS**

English Language Arts State Goals 2B, 3B, 3C, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 5C  
Social Sciences State Goals 14D, 16A  
Fine Arts State Goal 27; Visual Arts 25A, 26A, 26B

### **LEARNING STYLES**

Interpersonal  
Musical/Rhythmic  
Bodily/Kinesthetic  
Verbal/Linguistic  
Visual/Spatial

### **MATERIALS**

*Bowling for Columbine* DVD and DVD player  
Video Cameras and equipment  
Audio Recording equipment  
Editing software and computers

### **VOCABULARY**

Documentary

### **ASSESSMENT**

Zero-Tolerance Opinion Paragraph

### **ACTIVITIES**

**Anticipatory Set**

Ask students to list all the words or phrases that come to mind when they think of the **documentary genre**. To get them thinking, you may wish to pose questions such as the following:

- What is the purpose of a documentary?
- Who generally watches documentaries?
- Which television stations are most likely to contain documentaries?
- What are the film qualities (style) of a documentary?

After allowing students to share their responses, ask them to copy down the definition of documentary into their notes (it may be necessary to first review the term **genre**):

**Documentary: the creative interpretation of actual people, places, or events**

### Lesson:

Tell students that they will be viewing a documentary by Michael Moore called *Bowling for Columbine* and that they will be asked to *actively participate* as a viewer.

#### **Part 1: Viewer Interpretation**

- First, show only the first three chapters of the movie (stop before Chris Rock's stand-up).

Ask students to write in response to the film from three different perspectives, choosing from the following hypothetical characters: an elementary student; a poor, minority teenager, a rich, white business-owner, a middle-class single mother, a grandparent, a teacher (feel free to add to this list)

\*This will probably work best if you first have students choose the three perspectives and write them down on a sheet of paper, leaving space to write under each character. Then, give students one minute to write from the perspective of the first before telling them to move on to the next, and then finally the third.

- Debrief about what students noticed about the way various audience members would interpret the information in the documentary

#### **Part 2: Producer Motives**

- Tell students that the next portion of the movie will involve the following sections and have them copy these onto a piece of paper, leaving room next to each: Chris Rock, Michigan Militia, James Nichols, Oscoda Boys, Wonderful World, and Littleton
- Ask students to identify the purpose or goal for each segment and write that down on their sheet. Provide students with words like "to educate," "to entertain," "to inform," and "to persuade." It may also be helpful to pause after the first two sections and identify the purposes together.
- After viewing this section, debrief and allow students to point out that the purpose of a documentary informs the way it is produced. Tell students to remember this for later when they will be asked to create their own documentaries with a purpose in mind.

#### **Part 3: Sounds and Images**

- Since the next portion of the movie is particularly engaging, tell students that their only task while watching is to make note of any images, sounds (or songs) or words that stand out to them as ones that strongly support the message(s) of the filmmaker.
- Play chapters 10-16 of the movie (beginning with "Columbine" and stopping after "We're #1")
- Afterward, compile a list of the students' notes on the board and discuss the importance of using images and sounds other than just voiceover and dialogue in order to effectively make a point.

#### **Part 4: Identifying a "Driving Question"**

- The film is almost over and soon students will begin working on their own documentaries but first, they must select a "Driving Question" to guide their work. This next section begins with Chapter 17 "A Brief History of America," which is a satirical cartoon about the culture of fear in America. Play this section through to the end and ask students to identify the following:
  - What "driving question" is Michael Moore attempting to find an answer for?
  - What is the answer he suggests for this question? Point out to students that is the main idea or thesis statement of his work as a whole.
  - List the evidence Moore uses to support his argument.
  - List the locations (scenes) Moore travels to in order to try to prove this point.
- Debrief and go over the questions above as a class and then generate a list of other hot topics or issues raised by the film (or that came to students' minds throughout the viewing).

- Tell students that they will use this list as a starting point for selecting their hot topic or driving question for their own documentary film projects

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### **Debrief/Assessment: Creating the Documentary**

After watching the film, have students work in groups of 3-4. The goal is to create a 5-7 minute documentary film focusing on a hot topic or answering a driving question. Each group should select a hot topic that they feel impacts them in their communities or personal lives. These hot topics can come from the film, but don't necessarily have to. It is up to the individual teacher to set the parameters and approve each proposed topic.

### **BRAINSTORMING**

The students should meet and discuss their hot topic. They should break down the topic and ask each member of the group to be responsible for some research surrounding their topic that they can bring to class the next day. They should decide on a DRIVING QUESTION for their project, and this will guide the outcome of their film. For example, if the students are looking at the issue of drugs on campus, they might decide that the overall question they want to answer is "Why do some students refuse the offer of drugs whereas other students go as far as to carry drug use to school?" They need to decide on this driving question before they start interviewing and build smaller mini-questions related to it to guide their inquiry. (Mini-questions are 4-5 offshoots, more specific questions that help define the driving question.) Before proceeding, students should submit the following for approval by the teacher:

- What is the program concept? (stated as a thesis statement or main idea that answers the driving question)
- List the sources (experts, interviews) the group plans to use in constructing the program.
- List the locations (places, scenes) the group plans to use in constructing the program.

### **INTERVIEWING**

Each group should create a list of 6-8 possible people to interview for their documentary and create a list of questions to ask these people. In the final film, they should include at least four interviews with a diverse interviewing group (i.e., don't just interview other students, but have students, teachers, community members, the principal, etc.)

### **STORYBOARDING**

Each group should make some fingernail sketches of what they want the specific sections of their film to look like, but place each desired scene on a separate sheet of paper, so that they can decide later where they want the scenes to fall in their film. They will have a better understanding of the order in which they want their scenes the closer they get to filming.

### **SCRIPTWRITING (TREATMENT/OUTLINE)**

Students should first write an outline (the Treatment) of each interview. Next the student should write the text (voice-over that will surround each of their interviews as well as the lead-in to the film (like Michael Moore's first voice-over) and a closing voice-over at the end of the film. The script will be a breathing thing as they move along in the process. They will add to it with each interview they decide to use.

As the film showed, images and sounds work together to effectively support the message so require students to submit, along with their storyboards, a list of images and sounds or songs that will be used in their project.

### **FILMING**

If filming is not available, the students can act their scripts out live using actors to fill in for the people they interviewed; in this case, a script based on the actual interviews is essential. If filming is a possibility, advise students to film in order as much as possible, unless they have good editing programs to work with at home or at school.

### **EDITING**

Allow students time for editing, focusing on adding images, sounds, and voiceover to support their message and connect the individual interviews and segments they previously filmed.

## PRESENTATION

It is critical for students to have an audience for their work so set aside a day for them to present to the rest of the class and if possible, invite other classes, administrators, and family members for the viewing as well.

## RESOURCES:

This lesson plan was adapted from the material available at <http://www.bowlingforcolumbine.com/library/teachers/page.php?content=17> as part of a larger set of lessons surrounding Michael Moore's film.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM RUBRIC

### Concept and Purpose

- 4 The video has a clear and interesting purpose and is creatively produced.
- 3 The video's purpose is somewhat unclear, but the video is interesting and somewhat creative.
- 2 The video's purpose is somewhat unclear, and the video is not very interesting or creative.
- 1 The video has no apparent purpose and shows very little creativity.

### Content

- 4 Information is accurate and well-written. Subject knowledge is excellent. Includes at least 4 interviews.
- 3 Most of the information is accurate and well-written. Subject knowledge is very good. Includes less than 4 interviews.
- 2 The information is somewhat accurate and there are some grammatical and spelling errors. Includes very weak or too few interviews.
- 1 Subject knowledge is fair at best. Much of the information is inaccurate and not well-written. Subject knowledge is poor. Includes extremely weak or no interviews.

### Continuity

- 4 The documentary is extremely easy to follow and understand throughout the presentation. The flow of the video makes sense.
- 3 The documentary is easy to follow and understand throughout the presentation. The flow of the video makes sense for the majority of the documentary.
- 2 The documentary is hard to follow and understand throughout the presentation. The flow of the video makes sense somewhat for about half of the documentary.
- 1 The documentary is hard to follow. The flow of the video makes sense somewhat for the less than half of the documentary.

### Visual Interest Level

- 4 Outstanding visual interest. Excellent blend of pictures, facts, and voice-overs enhance the entire production.
- 3 Good visual interest. Fine blend of pictures, facts, and voice-overs enhance the entire production.
- 2 Average visual interest. Intermittent blend of pictures, facts, and voice-overs that enhance the entire production.
- 1 Poor visual interest. Little or no blending of pictures, facts, and voice-overs to enhance the entire production.

### Overall Presentation

- 4 Video flowed logically and smoothly from one scene to the next. Information and organization is complete and engaging.
- 3 For the most part, the video flowed logically and smoothly from one scene to the next. Information and organization is complete and interesting.
- 2 Video seemed out of sequence or confusing in some places. Information and organization is adequate and somewhat interesting.
- 1 The video lacked purpose, with little information and organization.