

YOUTH DISCUSSION GUIDE: CIVIC AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Adapted from the 2009 Youth Education & Study Guide

By Maxwell Fletcher & Edited by Julia Queck

Developed for the San Francisco Film Society Education Program

CLASSROOM USE

This discussion guide is intended to facilitate discussion among youth about some of the broader issues addressed in *Trouble the Water*. It can be completed in 2-3 class sessions, or, with the film viewing, in a full day.

In order to enrich the students' experience and take full advantage of the learning opportunities in the film, we recommend both pre- and post-viewing activities. Below are some questions addressing the major issues raised in the film: the role of government, the role of media/news, social and civic responsibility, racism, and the problem of poverty in the United States.



Subjects Kimberly and Scott Roberts after returning with the filmmakers to their flood-damaged home in New Orleans, Sept. 16, 2005. Courtesy Elsewhere Films.

Grade Levels

This film is recommended for high school and advanced/mature middle school students.

Subject Areas

Social Studies/Government

Media Studies

Language Arts

Reading Materials

1. Clarence Page Article <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/chi-clarencepage,0,85496.columnist>. (Sep. 7)
2. Tavis Smiley interview with Dr. Michael Eric Dyson: http://www.pbs.org/kcet/tavissmiley/archive/200602/20060208_dyson.html
3. "Why New Orleans is in Deep Water" by Molly Ivans: <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0901-26.html>
4. Media Emboldened Handout

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. What is the role of government in society?
2. To what extent is government responsible for the well-being of its citizens? Where does government responsibility end and where does personal responsibility take over?
3. Does the role of government change in the face of a disaster, natural or otherwise?
4. What is the role of the media?
5. To whom is media primarily responsible? Whose interests does media serve?
6. Should newscasters be subjective? Is it possible to be objective?
7. What is the role of a documentary filmmaker? To what extent are they simply documenting?
8. Is there inequality in the United States? If so, where does it come from?
9. Are the issues of race and poverty interrelated? Can you talk about one without addressing the other?

Post-Viewing Questions

Civic and Social Responsibility...

1. After viewing the film, to what extent is the government responsible for the losses of Hurricane Katrina?
2. After Mayor Ray Nagin issued a mandatory evacuation of the city, should the city have provided organized transportation?
3. How do the Roberts explain their decision initially to not leave their home? What more do you think they could have done to protect themselves?
4. Leading up to the hurricane, should the government have done more for the Roberts family, their neighbors, and the rest of New Orleans?
5. What was the government's response to incarcerated individuals in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina? Being in jail, have these people sacrificed certain rights that the rest of us enjoy? Are their needs for water and food less important than those who are not imprisoned?
6. What social guarantees should all citizens expect from the government? What is the relationship between individual and government responsibility?
7. Surrounding Hurricane Katrina, what obligations did the citizens have to look after their own safety? To what extent are people responsible for their own well-being?

The San Francisco Film Society's Youth Education program introduces students to the art of filmmaking and celebrates both the differences and the shared values of the many cultural groups that make up the global community. The year-round program aims to develop media literacy, broaden insights into other cultures, enhance foreign language aptitude, develop critical thinking skills, cultivate students' imaginations, facilitate their awareness as filmgoers and empower them as true global citizens. The San Francisco Film Society Youth Education Program is made possible by the generous support of the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, Tin Man Fund, and Nellie Wong Magic of Movies Education Fund <http://www.sffs.org/youth-education.aspx>

Race and Class...

1. Do you think the government would have done more if the people in jeopardy were primarily white?
2. In a poll taken after Katrina, 77% of Whites said they believed the government response would have been the same if the victims were primarily White, while only 27% of Blacks agreed. What is the reason for this breakdown? Does this point to a greater disparity in views on race in America?
3. In his September 7th article from the Chicago Tribune, Clarence Page proposes that Katrina did not raise issues of race, but rather issues of poverty. What is his reasoning for this? Is this an issue of race, or is it about class?
4. At one point in the film, Kimberly's friend in Memphis says "If you don't have money, if you don't have status, you don't have a government." What does she mean by this? Do you agree with this assessment?
5. What does Kimberly say in the film regarding the choices and opportunities she's had in life? Do you believe she has the same opportunities as someone from a more wealthy background? As a low-income African American, does she have the same opportunities as a low-income Caucasian? What can be done to close the disparity between social classes? Between different races?

Media Literacy...

1. Does this film have an agenda? If so, what is it?
2. What did you take away from the film? Does this correspond to what the filmmakers were trying to say?
3. What is the representation of African-Americans in this documentary? How is it different/similar from the images that you're used to seeing?
4. What is the representation of Whites in this film? How is it different/similar from images you are used to seeing?
5. Did the filmmakers present an objective view of the events? Give one example from the film to support your claim? Is it possible to present a completely objective point of view?
6. How did the filmmakers frame the footage of woman working the tourism office (i.e. what footage precedes and follows it)? How does this affect the viewer?
7. What was the use of music in the film? How did it affect your perceptions of the subject matter?
8. How did the news media shape the public's view of Katrina? Did the role of the media change in the aftermath of the hurricane?

Personal Reflection...

1. What is your personal background? How does it affect your viewing of the film?
2. Was Hurricane Katrina a tragedy because of the natural disaster itself or because of the human failure surrounding it?
3. What would you do as the victim of a natural disaster? Would you feel compelled to help those less fortunate than you? Or would you primarily look after yourself?

Katrina By the Numbers

Post-Katrina Views of Bush				
<i>In handling relief efforts,</i>				
<i>President Bush...</i>				%
Did all he could				28
Could have done more				67
Don't know				5
				100
<i>Bush job</i>				
<i>as president</i>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Sept</u>
	%	%	%	%
Approve	50	43	44	40
Disapprove	43	50	48	52
Don't know	7	7	8	8
	100	100	100	100
<i>Priority for Bush</i>				
Domestic policy	40	--	--	56
War on terrorism	44	--	--	25
Both/Neither (vol.)	14	--	--	13
Don't know	2	--	--	6
	100			100

Katrina Through the Prism of Race			
<i>Gov't response if most victims had been white?</i>	<u>Total</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
	%	%	%
Faster	26	17	66
The same	68	77	27
Don't know	6	6	7
	100	100	100
<i>Shows racial inequality still a major problem?</i>			
Yes	38	32	71
No	50	56	22
Don't know	12	12	7
	100	100	100
Number of cases	(1,000)	(712)	(211)
<small>In order to gain enough interviews to report on this group accurately, the survey includes an oversample of African Americans. For all results based on the total population, statistical adjustments (weighting) are used to ensure that the correct national racial and ethnic characteristics are met.</small>			

From <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=255>

Media Emboldened Handout

Media Literacy

Our society is becoming increasingly inundated with various forms of media that communicate with us on a multi-sensory level, affecting the way we think, feel, and behave. As such, it is more important than ever to be able to critically engage with the mediated messages we receive on a daily basis in order to foster successful students, responsible citizens, and conscientious consumers. Media literacy education provides the tools to analyze media, allowing us to understand not only what information is being communicated, but why and how it is being communicated. By transforming the process of media consumption into an active and critical process, people gain greater awareness of the potential for misrepresentation and manipulation, and understand the role of media in constructing views of reality.

How to Read Media

1. Recognize the media with which you are engaging...

As technology continues to progress, so will the media to which we are exposed, both in the sheer quantity and also in the sophistication with which it transmits messages.

Just in the last twenty years, the media field has increased exponentially with the advent of the internet. In order to read media, one must first acknowledge its pervasive presence.

THE TERMS

Media refers to all electronic, digital, print and artistic visual tools that are used to transmit messages. This includes everything from television and books, all the way down to pop-up ads and text messages.

Literacy is the ability to encode and decode symbols and to synthesize and analyze messages.

Media literacy is the ability to encode and decode the symbols transmitted via media and the ability to synthesize, analyze, and produce mediated messages.

3. Recognize that all media is constructed for someone...

For every media message, there is an intended audience, and recognizing this allows us to better read the message itself. Sometimes the audience is readily apparent, as with children's television shows, but it can also be less obvious. A political candidate's speech on healthcare reform can be geared towards the elderly, or by changing a word here and a word there, the same speech can be aimed at uninsured young adults.

4. Decipher the codes of a given media to read the message...

Each form of media has its own language it uses to produce its message. In film, this is the composition of a shot, how a sequence is edited, the sound design, and so on. In magazines, it's the layout of a page, the graphics and text being used, etc. In order to understand media, one must be able to read these codes and from them, obtain a meaning, whether subversive or overt. A billboard for an iPod, for example, uses bright colors and dancing silhouettes to produce the message that people with iPods have a lot of fun, so you should buy an iPod if you want to have fun.

5. Recognize the reasoning for a given message...

After a message is read, it is important to analyze the media-maker's reason for producing their message. For example, you might watch a Fox news piece that criticizes a democratic politician. You would then ask yourself "why did Fox news make this piece?" This would lead you to the reasoning that Fox news, owned by the notoriously conservative Rupert Murdoch, has a political agenda of criticizing liberalism and promoting conservatives. Oftentimes, the financial producer of a message (in this case, Rupert Murdoch), will determine the meaning of a message.



Subject Scott Roberts speaks with a National Guardsman in New Orleans in a scene from *Trouble the Water*. Courtesy Elsewhere Films.

6. Acknowledge how your personal background and viewpoints affect your reading of a message...

For any interaction with media, there are two parties- the media itself and whoever is reading it. In order to gain a comprehensive view of a message, it is imperative that one takes into account their specific background, and how that might affect their reception of a message. Someone who grew up in a small, Midwestern, Christian town, for example, would have a very different reading of "The Passion of the Christ" than someone who grew up in an urban, Jewish household. Acknowledging these differences is very important to a thorough reading of a message.

7. Reading the greater message...

With all these facts, we are able to look at the message on a grander scale. This means asking a number of important questions that extend beyond the message itself: What are the effects of this message? What is left out of the message? Who benefits from this message, and who loses out? How has this message shaped the media itself?

Put it into Action!

- 1) Pick a piece of media that is transmitting a message.
This can be a blog, a magazine ad, a newspaper clipping, a television show, etc.
- 2) List the producers of this media message.
If it's from a source that's financially funded, look up where that funding comes from.
- 3) List the intended audiences for this message.
Who is it being produced for?
- 4) Read the message itself.
Taking into account the specific language of the media form, what is this message saying?
- 5) Ask why the producer of the message (from step #2), has created it.
What was their motivation? Financial benefit? Personal vindication? Promoting a belief?
- 6) Determine how your background affects your reading of the message.
Do you find it appealing? Do you approve or disapprove of the message? Why?
- 7) Look at the bigger picture.
What is left out of the message? What are the consequences, unintended or otherwise? Who benefits? How might this message shape society

Further Readings

ON HURRICANE KATRINA

<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/>
<http://www.teachingthelevees.org/>
<http://www.nola.com/katrina/>
<http://www.katrinaaction.org/>

On Media Cover or Hurricane Katrina

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/blog/2005/09/09/BL2005090900567.html>
http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2005/09/09/ktr_aft.html
http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dynes_Rodriguez/

Katrina Fatalities

Total Records:	1889
Number of Missing:	595
Number of Deceased:	1294

Breakdown of Race

African American:	830
Caucasian:	553
Hispanic:	36
Native American:	6
Asian / Pacific Islander:	14
No Race Specified:	445

From <http://www.katrinelist.columbia.edu/stats.php>

Population of New Orleans in 2000

67% African American/Black
 28% White
 3% Latino/Hispanic
 2% Asian

From www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000html

Financial Impact

Cost to Repair Levees:	\$10 billion
Economic Losses:	\$150 billion