

**The Blending of Nonfiction, Screenwriting, and Film: Documentary
Filmmaking 101**

Mara Cregan

The Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts

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Abstract

The Blending of Nonfiction, Screenwriting, and Film: Documentary Filmmaking 101 will allow students the opportunity to work as developing, collaborative artists bending the traditional definition of art by experimenting and connecting the genres of writing and film. Working as both writers and filmmakers, students will be expected to create a short documentary based on an original creative nonfiction essay. Students will explore social and historical contexts of the genre of documentary film as they begin to explore, discover, perceive, interpret and create for themselves within the medium of film. This course will allow students to understand the considerations both a writer and a filmmaker must make as they create films as well as the opportunity to understand firsthand the historical implications of documentary film and its purposes in our society as a medium of art. The course will culminate in a showcase of the student made documentaries for the entire school community.

Overview

The unit has been created specifically for literary artists at CAPA High School, but can easily be adapted for other high school students with some minor tweaking of the course's scope and sequence as well as instruction in creative nonfiction and script writing.

The Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts instills a sense of appreciation towards all art forms in its developing artists, whether they are dancers, writers, musicians, or painters. The school encourages students to be curious about art forms other than their chosen major and provides experiences for its students to observe and experiment as collaborative artists during their development. As these developing artists gain foundations in their chosen art form, an emphasis is thrust upon the blending of these art forms with each other

and in of themselves. Examining and engaging with the ideas behind collaboration and the blending of art forms in the artistic process is key for any developing artist; thus allowing them to imagine the possibilities that exist in and outside of art. Contemporary art in our society echoes collaboration and the blending of art, stretching and changing the definition of performance art with each passing day.

As a teacher of writing, I would be negligent were I not to develop experiences for my writers that also bend the definition of the word *writer*. At every turn, in my students' development as writers, opportunities are offered that require my students to engage themselves in art beyond writing words on the page. Most recently, my writers worked with classical Indian dancers in the Odissi style and explored the connections between the Indian mythology of Shiva, Ganesha, and Vishnu and the dances of each god. This collaborative culminated in a demonstration for an audience at the end of the workshop showcasing our dance skills.

The Blending of Nonfiction, Screenwriting, and Film: Documentary Filmmaking 101 will examine such intersections and blending between art forms—writing and filmmaking for literary artists by allowing the literary artists' words to move beyond the page and into another fresh venue—the big screen. Often times, in a school for the performing arts, writers' words find it hard to compete against the backdrop of an all-school musical or a symphony concert, and this experience will allow literary artists to hold a screening of their films to showcase their efforts in a unique, innovation manner.

Students in the literary arts program spend four years, five days a week for three hours studying the craft of writing in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and dramatic writing, and it is the goal of this unit to allow students who exhibit a mastery in essay and screen writing the opportunity to explore, interpret, perceive, and create documentary films. Students enrolled in this course will ultimately possess an intimate knowledge of documentary films from both historical and social contexts during the last sixty years, experience the blending of writing and film with an emphasis upon visual representations of scripts, and create a thirty-minute documentary film adapted from an original creative nonfiction essay.

This course will meet yearlong, once a week for three hours. During the first semester students will meet formally in a classroom setting, while the second semester will be a studio environment with students working independently on their documentary films. A viewing of the documentaries will be scheduled at the end of the year to celebrate the students' efforts and showcase the films for the school community.

Rationale

Brief Historical Context of Genre

In a 1926 newspaper review of Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* the term documentary was first coined and referenced to his film that examines the Samoan Pacific inhabitants. The genre of film reached out beyond the fictional story and grasped at telling an audience a story, but this time a true, realistic story. Flaherty is often regarded as the father of documentary film, best known for his 1922 film, *Nanook of the North*, an examination of the Canadian Inuit tribe and his 1948 controversial film *Louisiana Story*.

Since this reference to Flaherty's film, cinema that depicts nonfiction themes or events is regarded as a documentary, and since the early experimentations of the Lumiere Brothers, the genre has evolved to produce greats as Spike Lee's *4 Girls* and the films of Michael Moore. Such films allow the viewer to obtain a unique perspective through the transfer of knowledge that is presented in the film. From its humble beginnings documentary film still holds true to showing its origins by showing viewers a piece or aspect of society through a myriad of subject matter on the big screen. The key is truth—it tells the audience a story based on truth.

These films of reality began as filmmakers such as the Lumiere Brothers filming events of no great importance and showing them on the big screen. The appeal of the big screen was so great that audiences would pay to see just about any moving picture show available. These early documentaries lacked a point of view, a story or any creative thought. The films captured everyday happenings and found form in the shape of current events, travelogues, educational contexts, and newsreels.

As documentaries evolved, so did the styles and approaches to conveying stories of truth to an audience. The later works of Flaherty as well as the work of Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack, and many European documentary filmmakers in the 20s and 30s began to include sound and became more controversial in nature with the addition of interviews, plot, and a story line. Documentary film began to make statements about society and not always in a favorable light. These films provided audiences with images and narration about such diverse subjects as the Siamese jungle, indigenous tribes in Persia, 1920s Berlin, and the Soviet Union.

The 30s and 40s brought many depression and war documentaries for American audiences and such films as *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, *The River*, *Triumph of Will*, *Olympia*, *The Memphis Belle* and *In Which We Serve* all found their way to the big screen. This time period in film documented America's darkness in society and spirit.

It was not until the coming of the 60s did the genre truly begin to take the shape that audiences are familiar with today. Cinema Verite found shape in the 60s in France and was an experimental form that pushed the limits of the genre. These filmmakers spent little money on production and attempted to capture the real life events much as the Lumiere Brothers did but now the films had sound that included interviews and personal opinions of individuals.

Robert McConnell believes:

Cinema verite is part of the broader artistic tradition of realism and the cinematic tradition of documentary filmmaking. These realistic traditions in are aimed at showing man's real situation in life rather than at providing him with an escapist fantasy experience which and audience will enjoy watching and will pay for by coming out to the movies in very large numbers. Realism and cinema verite try to show man as he is and the world as it is because the filmmaker often has a social conscience and sometimes a political agenda. His purpose is to enlighten his audience, to show them the truth as he sees it, so they will have the information they need to live better lives or to, in some cases, to take political action to right the wrongs the film maker often exposes.

(McConnell, <http://www.parlez-vous.com/misc/realism.htm>)

The influences from Cinema Verite are still evident today in documentary films. As our society pushes forward aiming to find comfort with diversity and tolerance within our country and across the globe, documentary films are a testament to our history. Today, documentaries are being produced on diverse subject matter. The website filmsite.org categories documentary films as following being based on:

- a biography.
- a famous event.
- a cultural event, a concert or dance show.
- a close up look at a sect of a culture.
- an expose.
- a sports related event.
- an in-depth look at a specific subject.

The subject matter is endless for documentary films and society is fortunate enough to have such filmmakers as Errol Morris, Barbara Kopple, Ken Burns, Michael Moore, Stacy Peralta, Richard Kaplan, Terry Zwigoff, and others forging new territory, seeking out fresh subject matter that will engage its viewers. It has only been recently that documentary film as a genre is receiving the attention that it deserves with the release of such movies as *Roger & Me*, *Bowling for*

Columbine, and *Super Size Me*. The website filmsite.org provides its readers a comprehensive list of documentary films both of historical significance and recent trends. I highly suggest referring to the website: www.filmsite.org when approaching the subject of documentary film. The list is the most comprehensive list of documentaries that I have found.

Throughout my examination of documentary films and its resources I have found the following websites promising. Each of the sites will provide readers links, free and pay documentary films to download, reviews, and the latest industry news. I believe as one approaches academic research in any field the need to take in as much information about the subject in general before narrowing one's subject.

The following links will provide many aspect of documentary film for a novice.

- www.cineflix.com provides downloadable documentary films for a small fee. The site has an extensive collection of films that are representative of the genre.
- www.netflix.com offers a great collection of hard to find documentary films. Subscriptions are available for a monthly fee and DVDs are mailed to your home.
- www.brightlightfilmjournal.com has a great section on documentary films. Each issue includes several articles about contemporary documentary filmmaking as well as reviews of American and foreign films.
- www.teachingmatter.org/digidocs provides teachers about the ins and outs of digital documentary making. Workshops in all aspects of documentary making are available for fees in your school. Also, a great site to find current trends in documentary making.
- www.documentary.org is another great site that promotes documentary filmmaking by providing great research from the genre.
- <http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/mlr/archIve/V01N02/> is a media online project sponsored by the University of Oregon. The site hosts many great articles about the genre as well as ways to teach and create documentary films.

Making Documentary Films

Whereas the potential for finding subject matter is endless for documentary films, it is not as easy as one would imagine. Granted, the Zapruder movie capturing the assassination of JFK made it look easy; the reality of documentary filmmaking goes far beyond merely capturing footage and showing it to an audience. As in the production of any art form, a process must be followed in order to create a logical coherent piece of art, in this case, film. Pinpointing a subject matter is only the first step.

Once a subject is captured for a documentary film, the filmmaker must begin to think about the story that rests within the subject matter. Finding the story within any factual story that is worthy of telling is often the most difficult part. What is appealing about the subject matter, what story really need to be told, whose story is it are often questions that filmmakers find themselves contemplating as they approach making a film. What angle is unique when approaching the subject matter that will engage viewers and leave them with thought at the end of the film?

Equally important is the footage or visuals that the filmmaker captures. What visuals will you use to tell your story so that it will be aesthetically pleasing to the viewer's eye? A documentary film cannot find success without well thought out footage and visuals. Merely relying on interviews is not enough, nor is capturing hours of general footage or still imagery of your subject matter. Filmmakers make deliberate planned decisions as they plan the visuals or imagery for any documentary. Many images will need no narration. Ken Burns shows viewers just this in his movie *Civil War*.

The camera moves slowly across each photo, letting you know that in this documentary much of what you will see will come from still photos, and you will be given time to see what is there. On the sound track we hear a violin—no speech—as the documentation shows us that the pictures can speak for themselves. (Hampe, 4.)

Planning not only the story to be told within your subject matter but the visual representation of this story is essential to create a worthy documentary. In addition, a filmmaker must contemplate reality and its definition in relation to the film's subject matter. What is the film's reality? The camera will not lie. As a filmmaker, it is crucial that you examine your film's message? Is what you intend to say what the film's message echoes? How do we ensure that the real life we capture is true?

It must be also noted that even though documentary film deals with truth, the viewers will not all hold the same perceptions as the filmmaker—therefore not always will all viewers believe the film as a truth. So, how does a documentary filmmaker ethically deal with such varying and differing perceptions among its viewers? Using fictional techniques, as verisimilitude, successful documentary filmmakers make their films not only true, but also believable. This skill requires precise planning and thought even for the versed filmmaker.

Barry Hampe sets forth these basic rules for making a documentary film.

- *A documentary film is made to communicate to an audience.*
- *A documentary film communicates through strong visual images organized in sequence to make a statement.*
- *Visual images can only be described with concrete nouns and action verbs.*
- *Editing is the heart of the process of communicating in a documentary.*
- *It's the documentary you show, not the footage you shot, that counts.*

(Hampe, 53.)

Creative Nonfiction

Coined the literature of reality creative nonfiction allows writers to utilize the fictional storytelling devices such as dialogue, description, and point of view to engage readers in a subject matter that is true. Lee Gutkind is often referred to as the father of the genre and his book *The Art of Creative Nonfiction* simply states the rules of the genre for its readers. Gutkind outlines the steps writers must use when approaching creative nonfiction. He emphasizes the importance of knowing your subject intimately and stresses the importance of research. To capture a slice of life a writer must first and foremost have a working intimacy within the subject matter. Unlike, traditional nonfiction, this genre uses scenes as found in fiction as the building blocks to creating worthwhile essays that transfer knowledge about a subject matter to its readers. Put together these scenes become the creative nonfiction essay. Readers are allowed to imagine the subject matter through the use of dialogue, point of view, description, and frame. The genre allows the readers to engage with the text far beyond the depth of traditional nonfiction essays.

Ethics in Creative Nonfiction and Documentary Films

Just as a journalist is tied to a code of ethics, creative nonfiction essayists and documentary filmmakers are also held accountable to ethical decisions in their work. The blending of these genres calls for ethical decisions from the get go. It first and foremost holds the creator to the ultimate test of truthfulness. How does one craft a film or an essay that is true to life but yet engaging in its depiction of a real life event without bending the truth? Numerous ethical concerns should be understood within the context of both these genres. Maintaining a truthful approach that does not compromise the integrity of the medium, ensuring the reliability of sources, maintaining a subjective view as the creator, remaining true to the purposes of the medium and transferring knowledge are all ethical decisions that filmmakers must concern themselves with in the blending of creative nonfiction and documentary films.

Objectives

Students who will participate in this curricular unit will be expected to discover, interpret, perceive, and respond to the film genre known as the documentary from intrinsic, historical and social contexts.

Ultimately, as a teacher, I want the students to experience the blending of art forms as they continue their development as writers and to have the opportunity to create an original documentary film that utilizes skill sets that have been set forth in the literary arts core curricula in prior years. Providing developing artist writers the opportunities to bend the definition of a writer is essential in order for students to grasp the meaning of a disciplined contemporary artist in the year 2005.

At the end of this curriculum unit the students will be able to:

- Discover, interpret, perceive, and respond to the intrinsic, historical, and social contexts of documentary films.
- View and analyze documentary films from the perspective of a screenwriter and filmmaker rather than a viewer.
- Exhibit characteristics of a student who is comfortable moving between art forms and experimenting in their own development as artist writers.
- Show mastery level of writing in creative nonfiction and screenwriting.
- Examine adaptations of film scripts based on literature, and apply this knowledge to the adaptation an original creative nonfiction essay into a working screenplay, paying particular attention to the visual representation.
- Examine the visual elements of filmmaking, as a means of creating an aesthetically pleasing documentary film that transfers knowledge to the viewer, is poetic and visually kind to the viewer's eye.
- Engage in scholarly, academic research that will add a level of depth to the student made documentary.
- Propose, develop, create, and produce a thirty-minute documentary film.
- Understand the ideas behind using a digital camcorder to capture footage for documentary films.
- Comprehend, engage, and utilize the computer software *I Movie* to edit documentary films.
- Showcase the documentary films for the school community.

Strategies

The strategies I suggest for this curriculum project have been proven effective when working with artists from CAPA High School. The students are writers, dancers, actors, artists, vocalists, and musicians who spend three hours a day devoted to their art form. Each individual student brings a world of artistic perceptions to the table based on their focused study of art whether it is writing,

painting, or singing. Many of the strategies presented are designed to allow artistic freedom but yet adhere to a strict disciplined process for the groups of artists to follow. Teaching developing artist students' discipline is key to promoting the development of the craft. Although, this curriculum project is specifically designed for a unique arts environment, I believe that if the specificity of the arts student were taken from the equation, groups of students in traditional schools and their teachers could easily accomplish the project goals. I will first discuss my ideas toward creating a classroom that pushes its students to discover, interpret, perceive, and respond to their own learning, and then I will elaborate on the design and the implementation of this curriculum project.

Discover, Interpret, Perceive, and Respond

Allowing students the opportunity to discover, interpret, perceive and respond moves away from the traditional image of a classroom and allows students to engage in their own learning. The days of quiet orderly classroom no longer take precedence in classroom where teachers engage their students actively in learning. Students demonstrate added enthusiasm in active classrooms and are more likely to retain knowledge when the learning has engaged them in its acquisition. The students become stakeholders in their education and this drive for knowledge impacts the classroom with positive results.

Discover

Students must be actively involved in the discovery of knowledge. Actively engage them in their own learning. Move away from the traditional mode of lecturing to your students. Begin to hold your students accountable for engaging in classroom discussions. Hold students responsible for presenting information to the class. Begin to think of yourself as the resource person. You are there to guide your students to learning. Discovery can occur during lectures, discussions, independent readings, writing assignments or in casual conversation. Once students become involved in their learning, the results are incredible. It changes the atmosphere of your classroom.

Interpret/Perceive

With discovery comes interpretation and perception as children become engaged in their own learning. Allowing your students the opportunity to interpret and perceive means to make meaning of this newly found discovery, the knowledge. Students need to explore new concepts or ideas before they can truly take ownership. Merely reading or hearing about them once in class will not suffice. Students must be provided opportunities that they can process knowledge in terms of their own life or experiences. Each student may bring some special or unique to the class when students are interpreting and perceiving knowledge on a daily basis. Class discussions, journal entries, reaction papers, conferences all allow students to interpret knowledge. Processing the information and sharing their

ideas will allow students to better grasp new ideas or concepts that they have discovered in the classroom. Encourage your students to interpret and perceive knowledge daily. It will create informed thinkers with a life long enthusiasm for learning.

Respond

Given the opportunity to discover, interpret, and perceive students will amaze you when it is time to respond. Hold the students up to high expectations and clearly state your expectations! The student work will surpass your wildest expectations. Students are much more inclined to produce when they have a vested interest in this work. Hidden talents or skill are likely to surface and your students will think learning is enjoyable.

Implementation of Curriculum Project

As this project is implemented in the classroom, I will utilize the concept of discover, interpret, perceive, and respond from the get go. The nature of phase one of the project will require students to attend a three-hour weekly seminar. During this phase students will engage themselves into the discovery of documentary films. I will guide the students through the art of discovery and then students will engage themselves in the dissemination of this newly gained knowledge of documentary films as a means of taking ownership of these concepts and ideas surrounding documentary films. We will examine the intrinsic, historical, and social contexts of documentary films during the last sixty years as well as view many films that fit into the genre of documentary. All the while the students will be actively engaged in this process: leading discussions, completing research, presenting ideas and perceptions to the group, and beginning to plan their own documentary film adapted from an original creative nonfiction essay. Once the students have a common knowledge of the genre of documentary film, the seminar will begin phase two. Phase two will be devoted to the production of a documentary film adapted from an original creative nonfiction essay. The nature of the student project is to allow artistic freedom. Students design the project and are held accountable to their goals. The culmination of this curriculum unit will be a viewing of the films for the school community. Much of the time in phase two of the project will be devoted to studio time, allowing individual students the time necessary to complete their film and for my role to morph from a facilitator of information to one of a coach or mentor for students.

Classroom Activities

Week One

The first class is quite important in that it is here that the connection between creative nonfiction essays and documentary films must be made clear to the students. The students should begin to craft an essay or re-visit an essay that has

already been crafted to be used as the basis for their own short documentary film immediately following the first class.

Introduce the ideas of documentary film and pull on students' prior knowledge of this genre of film. Compile a list of this knowledge on the chalkboard to be visited later in the class. Additionally, a list of documentary films should also begin to be compiled on the chalkboard representing the class's experiences with documentaries. Engage the students in a large group discussion. If the students are finding difficulty recalling documentary films such films are: *Fahrenheit 9-11*, *Winged Migration*, *Supersize Me*, *Spellbound*, and *Meet the Friedmans* as well as any history or nature show or biographies.

Show clips of selected documentaries. It is suggested that the clips represent the full spectrum of the film genre. The web site: www.modove.edu is a great place to look for a documentary film timeline. Discuss the commonalities between each of the clips. What does the purpose of this film genre seem to represent? Begin to make connections between documentaries and creative nonfiction essays. Discuss the commonalities between these two mediums.

Have students read a creative nonfiction essay and jot down ideas that could be developed from this essay into ideas for a documentary film. Share responses with the class. Promote a classroom discussion that allows students to explore connections between their own writing and filmmaking. How can we take our writing and begin to think about it visually, so that we can begin to imagine making films based on our writing?

Introduce the scope and sequence for the entire course making clear the students' responsibility throughout the course and the culminating event, an evening of student made documentary films. Allow ample time for students to ask questions. The scope of this course is overwhelming and students must be clear as to what the expectations is for this course.

Students will view and analyze the documentary: Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). This film is often considered to be one of the first documentary films and takes a look at the culture of the Canadian Inuit Eskimos.

Week Two

Finish viewing the film and engage students in a discussion of the documentary film *Nanook of the North*. What is the story behind the film? Whose story is it? What is visually pleasing about the film? How does the narration compliment the visual imagery and vice versa? What types of decisions did Robert Flaherty make when filming?

Begin documentary film history lecture. Engage students in the exploration of the history of documentary films. Assign students to small groups and allow time to research the history and report back to the class. Group topics can be assigned by era or subject matter. I have found that if your students are versed in serious academic research, assigning group research by era works by allowing students to critically analyze through found knowledge, but if your students lack sound researching skills assign students specific subject matter to explore. Allow students ample time to research subjects. Each small group will present its finding to the class the following week. At the end of the presentations, the students should have a sound understanding of an overview of the history of documentary films. If, as the teacher you notice gaps of missing information, you should present the material so that the students have a logical complete history of documentary films.

Equally as important to obtaining knowledge about documentary films, is for the students to understand how to use digital camcorders and editing software. Be sure that you begin allowing students ample opportunities to use the film equipment and software each week in order to allow for a thorough understanding of the equipment when it comes time to make their own films. I suggest allotting at least 45 minutes a week for equipment training. Do not fear if you are less than an expert yourself in digital recording equipment. Often times, the students are more competent with technology than we will ever be as adults. The first time students use the equipment allow each group to merely open the box and explore the equipment without any formal training. This will allow you to assess what the students know and need to know about the equipment. Observe each group and take notes about their failures and successes with the digital camcorders. It is often helpful to create a checklist of basic tasks to be used as a pre-test of sorts when working with technology and students. This pre-test will truly allow you to assess the students' strengths and weaknesses with virtually any type of equipment and software. However, you choose to approach teaching students how to use equipment, make sure that you have a sound assessment of the students' skills after the first exposure to the equipment and software.

Week Three

Small group presentations will use most of the time during this week. Each group should present the history researched during the week to the class. The teacher should fill in any missed material so that students walk away with a sound understanding of the history of the documentary film.

Once the presentations are complete, introduce the subgenres of documentary film for the students. For the ease of categorization, I will group the documentary films into the following categories: cinema verite, documentary drama, family

documentary and historical documentary. Provide students with a brief overview of each subgenre as well as movies that would fall into each category.

Allow time for digital recording and movie editing software training. The following website: <http://home.gwi.net/brhs/vid.html> is a great place to find tutorials for many movie editing software. Adobe also has a good manual book that clearly sets forth instructions for the software.

Week Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine

Beginning with cinema verite, provide students a sound understanding of the subgenre by providing the opportunity to discover, interpret, perceive and respond. Engage students in the active art of viewing films from each subgenre: cinema verite, documentary drama, family documentary, and historical documentary. Students will be encouraged to view as many movies that fall into each category as possible outside of class to complement the students' understanding of each subgenres and the classification of movies within each. Within the context of these classes, students will be asked to analyze films, engage in current research, work individually and in small and large groups, and most importantly they will be asked to begin to think visually as filmmakers. Remember key to the implementation of this project is to allow students to discover, interpret, perceive, and respond to documentary films. Students will not take ownership of ideas and concepts if they are not actively engaged in obtaining the information.

I have viewed the following movies and suggest these titles for each sub-genre. I also recommend viewing as many documentaries as possible. With each new film, I see yet another perspective that I can bring to the classroom. Keep current with your films. Scout out new documentary films; the Internet is a great place to find films that do not come to Pittsburgh and where to obtain such films. Many independent film companies will give discounts when you inform them that you are using a film from their company in the classroom. PBS also has a lending system. The Carnegie Library also can lend a hand in finding hard to find films. Netflix is another great option for finding worthwhile documentaries for the classroom. Ultimately, the movies that you choose for this section of the course depend upon your students. As the teacher, you know what kinds of movies will work with your students. Use this knowledge when planning the movies specifically for your class.

Cinema Verite:	<i>Paris Is Burning, Chronicle of Summer, Breathless, High School, Salesman, Gimme Shelter</i>
Documentary Drama	<i>Before Night Falls, Kandahar, Meet the Friedmans, Supersize Me, any Michael Moore film</i>

Family Documentary	<i>Winged Migration, What the Bleep Do We Know, Exploring our Underworld, Alaska Spirit of the Wild</i> , PBS Nature Programs
Historical Documentary	Any PBS History Program, <i>Ansel Adams: A Documentary, Fog of War, The Source</i> , biographies of influential people.

Allow time for digital recording and movie editing software training.

Week Ten

At this point in the course the students have had ample opportunities to explore and interact in the discovery of documentary films through viewing, speaking, writing, and researching topics within the genre. During this class, students are to discuss how their perception of documentary films has changed since the beginning of the course. What is appealing about documentary films? What is not? Encourage the students to showcase their newly gained knowledge as a bridge to phase two of this course. The first ten weeks of this course is aimed at providing students a common knowledge of documentary films. The joy of this approach is that all members of the learning community benefit from each other. As a community of learners this class sets off on a journey to explore, interpret, perceive, and respond to documentaries. Allow this discussion to continue until the momentum seems to die and then make a bridge to phase two of this course.

Begin to discuss the implementation of phase two with the students. It is essential that students understand that much of phase two will surround learning how to make a movie with the technology available to the students and school and the creation of a short documentary film based on a original piece of writing. The format of the classes will begin to morph into a studio environment with occasional formal lectures along the way to teach technology skills and set project goals. The individual students will begin the process of creating an original documentary.

Introduce the total project to the students. Allow students to ask questions and ensure that all students are clear as to the requirements for the documentary film. Each student will be required to write a project proposal that outlines the following.

- What is your **overall proposed project**? How will you incorporate aspects of film, writing, and research? Think about the connections between art (film), writing, and research. Be certain that you enjoy your subject

matter. It is not pleasant to work on a project for a year and not find meaning in your work.

- What do you want to gain from this project? What are your **goals**? Think about each element of the project. You should have art (film), writing, and research goals. Think about what you wish to achieve by doing this project, and please do not write a goal that states the obvious, passing grade routine.
- What kind of **documentary film** will you create? Describe your idea and rationale for this decision. How does it connect to the writing and art? Describe its final form.
- What form will your **writing** morph into and why? How will your writing be presented in the context of the film? How will you take this creative nonfiction essay and turn it into a visual film? Attach a copy of the essay to this proposal that you are adapting to film.
- **Research**. Discuss your areas of research. Where will you start?
- How does your project **connect** writing, film, and research?

This project proposal should be completed by week eleven of the course. Students must be held accountable to strict deadlines at this point of the course. Students who fall behind during the implementation of the projects will find it difficult to complete the creation of a documentary film. Make it clear to students that it is their responsibility to keep up with work and meet all of the assigned deadlines to ensure success with this project.

Allow time for digital recording and movie editing software training.

Week Eleven

Students should come to class with a completed project proposal and a copy of the creative nonfiction essay that the documentary film will be adapted from for the project. In small groups allow students to explore the ideas for the projects. Allow students the opportunity to discuss their ideas with their peers. Remember that you want to encourage the idea of artistic process and that the first step is brainstorming and coming up with ideas for artistic endeavors.

Once the students have been provided time to share their ideas for projects, each individual student should present their documentary idea to the class. It is important that students share their ideas with their classmates frequently and consistently during phase two of this course. As developing artists, it is equally important that students have the opportunity to engage in dialogues about decisions in artistic choices. It allows for a deeper understanding of the artistic

process. As students develop as artists it is necessary for opportunities to experiment and explore approaches to creating art, regardless to the medium.

At the end of week eleven students should have a sound idea as to the subject matter of their documentary film and the essay on which the film will be loosely based.

Allow time for digital recording and movie editing software training.

Week Twelve

Once students have decided upon topics for their documentary films, they will be introduced to the particulars of documenting this project. Students will be held accountable for the following elements as they engage in this project.

1. Weekly Journal

Each week students are to turn in a journal entry that addresses the following topics:

- *What work have you done on your project? Be specific in describing the actions and steps that you have taken?*
 - *What decisions did you make about your project and activities? Explain why you made the choices that you did.*
 - *What do you think went well about your project and activities? Explain why you felt it went well.*
 - *What difficulties or problems did you encounter? How did you solve those problems or how might you solve these problems?*
 - *What can you do to improve your work?*
 - *What are your next steps? What help do you need at this stage? What people or resources do you need in order to continue your work?*
- From PPS Graduation Project Booklet, page 32*

2. Weekly Conference Topics

Each week the day before your scheduled conference you are to provide the teacher a copy of the following information. These topics should be typed. Be sure to include:

- **Weekly Accomplishments.** Provide a detailed assessment of your achievements during this week. Also, provide a list of shortcomings during the week.
- **Film Progress.** What is the status of your visual art? Are you on track or are you concerned with the progress?
- **Writing Progress.** How is your writing shaping and what concerns you regarding your writing?
- **What are the next steps?**

- Include any other areas that you feel should be addressed in your weekly conference.

3. Research Requirements

Documenting research is vital to this project. Students are to follow MLA guidelines.

Students are required to utilize the following resources for this project.

Books

- One-full length book on your subject.
- 200 pages of information from various texts on your subject.

Periodical/Magazines/Journals

- Five complete articles on your subject.

Internet Resources

- Ten reputable on-line web sites.

Interviews

- Three personal, on-line, or phone interviews.

Multi-media

- One Video, DVD on subject.

4. Documenting Research

Students will keep a research notebook. These notebooks will be collected and graded. I suggest a three ring binder.

For each source students are to take notes while they read the text. Once students are done reading each source they are to type a response that addresses the following issues:

- Brief summary of knowledge gained from text.
- How the information relates to your project.
- Insight gained from reading text.
- Further areas of research or next direction of research

Label each source in the following manner in your notebook:

1. Title of source
2. Bibliography information
3. Typed response.
4. Notes, visual aids, interview questions and notes.

When the research and documentation of each of the required sources is done students will write a 3-5 page discovery paper exploring their findings as they look at all of the research, Student are to analyze all of the research and report their discoveries.

5. Project Notebook

At the end of this semester you will be required to turn in one notebook that includes the following items in the following order:

- Proposal
- Timeline
- Weekly Journal Entries
- Weekly Conference Entries
- Research Notebook
- Final Art and Writing Documentation
- Presentation Outline
- Project Final Reflection

6. Timeline

Students will be developing a timeline as they work on this project. Each week during conference they will create goals for the week. These goals will develop into student timelines for the projects. These timelines should reflect research, art, and writing goals for each week.

7. Project Presentation

Each student will be required to give a fifteen-minute presentation about their project as well as show their documentary film to the class. Additionally, the class will plan a viewing of all student made films for the entire school community.

8. Reflective Essay:

Each student will write a reflective essay about the entire documentary film experience during this school year. When beginning to write these essays students will be asked to consider the following:

- Overall idea of project
- Goals for the project
- Research element
- Writing element
- Art (film) element
- Discoveries about yourself as a result of this project.

By the end of week twelve students should be ready to engage in their individual journey to make a short documentary film adapted from an original creative nonfiction essay.

Allow time for digital recording and movie editing software training.

Week Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen, and Sixteen

During these four weeks, students should be focusing on researching the subject matter of their documentary films. Students need to become experts to successfully create a documentary film. Teachers may want to consider planning a trip to a local library for an afternoon of in-depth research. Teachers at this point should serve as reference as individual students dive into their subjects of their films. If students are not well versed in academic research, teachers should devise

one or several workshops that show students how to engage in worthwhile research about a chosen subject matter. By the end of week sixteen students should have a completed research notebook on the subject of choice for the documentary film. It should be noted that students need to engage in the research process outside of class in order to complete this task. Students must understand to complete the amount of research it takes to make a film they have to spend a significant amount of time outside of school to make this project successful.

Week Seventeen, Eighteen, Nineteen, Twenty, and Twenty-one

Once the students have completed the research into their subject matters, it is time to begin to focus on the process of making a documentary film. Students will be held accountable to meeting all the deadlines set forth throughout this phase of the project.

At the beginning of week seventeen each student should have the idea for their documentary pretty solid in their minds. The month of research surrounding this idea should further ensure that the students are experts in terms of their subject matter. At this point in the course students are ready to write the documentary. Using prior knowledge of screenwriting elements each student is to write a screenplay for their documentary film. Depending upon the subgenre of documentary each student chooses individual screenplays will be primarily based upon the elements as presented in their screenwriting class with exceptions based on structure and organization. The structure and organization will vary from student to student; using prior knowledge based upon documentary films and screenwriting each individual student will create a structure and organizational system that best tells the story of their original documentary. Essentially the student will research and plan, visually represent their original words, create an organizational structure for the documentary and write the screenplay for the documentary. This can seem to be a daunting task for the inexperienced student. If your students are not familiar with screenwriting elements, be sure to slowly and clearly present screenwriting techniques to your students. By the end of week twenty-one each student will have a screenplay for their original documentary.

Week Twenty-two

Each individual student should have a screenplay for her proposed documentary. During class twenty-two, students are to continue the process of planning their documentaries by writing a treatment. Treatments further allow for a deeper analysis of visually representing original words. Treatments can be considered synonymous with outlines when working in film. A treatment will require that the student think about the visual components of her film and how as a filmmaker she will shoot the depiction of such events. The treatment should contain three sections: purpose of documentary, approach to documentary, and content of

documentary. Within each section the students should create a numbered list explaining the section.

At the end of week twenty-two each student should have a completed screenplay and treatment upon which to begin filming footage for the documentary.

Week Twenty-three, Twenty-four, Twenty-five, Twenty-six, and Twenty-seven

During these weeks, students are capturing footage for their film. By the end of week twenty-seven students will have captured four hours of footage to potentially use for their documentary film. Students are encouraged to use these four weeks wisely. Allow students to make appointments for filming interviews and capturing footage on location during class time. I have created permission to leave campus slips that are to be completed by students, signed by parents and me, as well as building administrators to allow students to work on such projects in the past. Often times, students find it difficult to set up interviews after school for various reasons. I have found that by allowing students to set up shoots during school hours promotes student success on long-term projects. It is crucial that we allow developing artists' real world experiences and real world filmmakers would utilize studio time to capture footage.

Week Twenty-eight, Twenty-nine, Thirty, Thirty-one, and Thirty-two

Students will focus on the actual creation of the documentary film by using Adobe Premier to edit the documentary film. By the end of week thirty-two, each student will have a short documentary based on an original creative nonfiction essay. During this time students should have both the ability and knowledge from the training workshops throughout the year to use the movie editing software with relatively little or no problems. I suggest setting goals for each of the classes devoted to movie editing. Based on your knowledge of your students and their abilities break the time down into manageable steps for the students. I have allocated 15 in-class hours to putting the student documentaries together and with work from the students at home and after/before school the time allocated seems to work. Your students' knowledge and ability with the movie editing software will drive the production weeks. If your class is not well versed with movie software you may want to allocate more time to the actual production of the documentaries.

Week Thirty-three, Thirty-four, and Thirty-five

Students will present the documentary films to the class and the class will make plans for the showcase of all the films for the entire school community. Each individual student will be responsible for a short presentation before showing his or her documentary film. This presentation should surround the artistic process

used by the filmmaker, allowing the audience to see more clearly why the filmmakers made the choices that they did in this project.

The viewing for the entire school community should be a big deal. Allow the students to roll out the red carpets and showcase their efforts. Throw an after viewing party for the filmmakers and their families.

Annotated Bibliography

Birdwell, David and Thompson, Kristin, editors, *Film Art: An Introduction, Second Edition*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

This book will allow the reader to get into the mindset of an artist as one looks at film. It will provide a great background into the artsy movie and the considerations that go into visual film. I recommend this textbook for supplementary material for the instructor, but there are parts that may be reproduced for students.

Braudy, Leo, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films*. USA: Anchor Press, 1976.

This classic book explores the world of cinema and examines how a viewer interprets what is on screen. It gives the reader a historical and social context for films.

Corrigan, Timothy, *A Short Guide To Writing About Film*. New York: Longman, 1998.

This short text gives the reader a thorough look at ways we can teach our students to write about film.

Eidsvik, Charles, *Cinliteracy Film Among the Arts*. New York: Random House, 1978

This college textbook provides yet another look at the art behind film. It traces the history of visual film and provided the reader a closer look at visual thinking.

Giannetti, Louis and Eyman, Scott, editors, *Flashback a brief history of film, Fourth Edition*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001.

This textbook serves as another great source for background material into the world of film.

Grant, Barry Keith and Sloniowski, Jeannette, editors, *Documenting the Documentary*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998.

This text is a wonderful guide explaining the process of creating documentary films. Teachers will find this book helpful as they begin to approach teaching documentary films to high school students. This book is also appropriate for high school students.

Gutkind, Lee, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction*. New York: John Wiley & Son, Inc., 1997.

This book is a must for anyone who is attempting to teach creative nonfiction to students with little or no experience in the genre. It is simplistic and approachable.

Hampe, Barry, *Making Documentary Films and Reality Videos*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.

This is another perspective into the process of creating documentary films. Teachers and students alike will find great value in reading this book. The process presented is clear and succinct.

Lewis, Jacobs, *The Emergence of Film Art*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977.

This book is a dated but valuable textbook that can be used to gain background knowledge about film.

McConnell, Robert, P.H.D. "French Realism and Cinema Vertite". June 10, 2005. <<http://www.parlez-vous.com/misc/realism.htm>>

O'Brien, Geoffrey, *Castaways of the Image Planet*. USA: Counterpoint, 2002.

This book discusses the considerations of imagery within the genre of film. It presents many valid ideas when thinking about imagery and visually representing this image.

Romney, Jonathan, *Short Orders: Film Writing*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1997.

This book is a series of essays about film. It is a great supplemental text about film. It provides a greater understanding of the genre.

Rosenthal, Alan, *Writing, Directing, and Producing Documentary Films and Videos*, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.

This great guide presents a sound approach to documentary films as well as provides the reader a greater understanding of the history behind the genre.

Ross, Stephen, editor, *Movies and American Society*. United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

This textbook will provide great historical references to film. I do not recommend it for purposes other than gaining background knowledge about film history.

Suggested Documentary Films

32 Short Films About Glenn Gould. Dir. Francois Girard. 2001. DVD, Columbia Tri-Star, 2001.

Before Night Falls

Breathless

Bowling for Columbine. Dir. Michael Moore. 2004. DVD. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2004.

Chronicle of Summer

Capturing the Friedmans. Dir. Andrew Jarecki. 2004. DVD. HBO Home Video, 2004.

Control Room. Dir. Jehame Noujaim. 2004. DVD. Lions Gate Home Entertainment, 2004. DVD. Columbia Tristar Horn, 2003.

Elegant Universe. Dir. Joseph McMaster and Julia Cort. 2004. DVD. Wgbh, 2004.

Fahrenheit 9-11. Dir. Michael Moore. 2004. DVD. Columbia Tristar-Horn, 2004.

High School

Hoop Dreams. Dir. Steve James. DVD. 2000.

Kandahar

Outfoxed. Dir. Robert Greenwald. 2004. DVD. The Disinformation Company, 2004.

Paris Is Burning? Dir. Rene' Clement. 2004. DVD. Paramount Home Video, 2004.

Salesman

Source

Spellbound. Dir. Jeffrey Blitz. 2003. DVD. Columbia Tristar Horn, 2003.

Supersize Me. Dir. Morgan Spurlock. 2005. DVD. Hart Sharp Video Lik, 2005.

The Kid Stays in the Picture. Dir. Brett Morgan and Nanette Burstein. 2004. DVD. Warner Brothers Home Video, 2004.

What The Bleep Do We Know?

Winged Migration. Dir. Jacques Cluzaud and Jacques Perrin. 2003.

Appendix-Content Standards

A. Arts and Humanities

9.1 Production, Performance, and Exhibition of Dance, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts

- A. Elements and Principles in each Art Form
- B. Demonstration of Art Form
- C. Vocabulary Within Each Art Form
- D. Styles in Production, Performance, and Exhibition
- E. Themes in Art Forms
- F. Historical and Cultural Production, Performance, and Exhibition
- G. Function and Analysis of Rehearsals and Practice Sessions
- H. Safety Issues in the Arts
- I. Community Performances and Exhibitions
- J. Technologies in the Arts
- K. Technologies in the Humanities

9.2 Historical and Cultural Context

- A. Context of Works in the Arts
- B. Chronology of Works in the Arts
- C. Styles and Genres in the Arts
- D. Historical and Cultural Perspectives
- E. Historical and Cultural Impact on Works in the Arts
- F. Vocabulary for Historical and Cultural Context
- G. Geographic Regions in the Arts
- H. Philosophical Context in the Arts
- I. Historical Differences in the Arts
- J. Traditions Within the Arts
- K. Common Themes in Work in Art

9.3 Critical Response

- A. Critical Processes
- B. Criteria
- C. Classifications
- D. Vocabulary for Criticisms
- E. Types of Analysis
- F. Comparisons
- G. Critics in the Arts

9.3 Aesthetic Response

- A. Philosophical Studies
- B. Aesthetic Interpretation
- C. Environmental Influences
- D. Artistic Choices

B. Communication Standards

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of techniques to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use this information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes including to narrate, inform, and persuade in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes, bias and recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify the purpose, structure, and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to inform, persuade, and describe.