About Darius Goes West:

Where would you go if you’d never been away from home? What would you do if you didn’t have much time left? DARIUS WENT WEST!

Meet 15-year-old Darius Weems from Athens, Georgia, who was born with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), the most common fatal genetic disorder to affect children worldwide. In 1999, he watched his beloved older brother, Mario, pass away from the same disease at age 19. Soon after, Darius lost use of the muscles in his legs and had to use a wheelchair to get around.

A group of Darius’s college-age friends decided there was no need for his quality of life to disintegrate along with his muscles. In the summer of 2005, they rented a wheelchair-accessible RV and took Darius, who had never seen mountains, the ocean or even crossed a state line, on the adventure of a lifetime. The ultimate goal of their 7,000-mile cross-country journey was to reach Los Angeles and convince MTV’s hit show “Pimp My Ride” to customize Darius’s wheelchair. Along the way, they evaluated wheelchair accessibility in America, celebrated the 15th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and raised awareness of DMD—particularly among a generation not familiar with Jerry Lewis. They also found joy, brotherhood and the knowledge that life, even when imperfect, is always worth the ride.
ABOUT DUCHENNE MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY (DMD):

Duchenne is the most common and most severe form of muscular dystrophy. It has a 100% fatality rate, with most children dying in their late teens or early twenties. Approximately one in 3,500 boys is born with DMD. One hundred percent eventually lose mobility and must use a wheelchair—most between 10 and 12 years old. DMD is associated with respiratory failure, heart failure and debilitating orthopedic complications. One-third of all DMD cases are the result of random in utero mutation, with no warning before the affected baby is born.

WHY DARIUS GOES WEST IS IMPORTANT:

This documentary is designed to entertain as well as educate the masses about DMD by telling a story through the lens of friendship. In addition to hilarious footage from this all-male road trip, *Darius Goes West* features personal stories from two other families affected by DMD, as well as an in-depth interview with a medical expert discussing promising new research that offers hope for treatment and possibly even a cure.

This film focuses on ability, not disability. Darius Weems is no DMD poster child. He’s a typical teenager who wakes up grouchy and curses on occasion. But audiences will love his sense of humor and his megawatt smile. And instead of feeling sorry for Darius because he is terminally ill, viewers will share his excitement as he discovers America.

We know—and Darius knows—that DMD won’t be cured in his lifetime. Nevertheless, Darius took a road trip to raise awareness of his disease in hopes of benefiting those with DMD who follow in his footsteps—and to prove that life has no limits, even for those in a wheelchair.
DARIUS GOES WEST IN THE CLASSROOM:

As part of this special in-school/all-school screening—classrooms are asked to prep students for the screening by having them do a creative project that helps them spread the word about causes that are important to them using art.

Students should create a painting, poem, song, dance, etc. that refers to something that they thing is important (i.e. teenage pregnancy, getting into college, etc.). These projects will be shared at a special assembly following screenings of Darius Goes West.

All students do not have to publicly share their work, but a small amount from each class must as the presentations themselves will make up the assembly.

PREPARATION:

- Students should be introduced to the subject matter of the film preceding their viewing of it. (See synopses and information about DMD above.)

- Students should watch the provided “Rapping at Fear” DVD—as a way to further illustrate the ways that art and music can be used to spread the word about social causes and personal issues that are important.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Take a look at some definitions of the word Activism:
  - Action to achieve a desired goal
  - A policy of taking direct and militant action to achieve a political or social goal
  - Activism, in a general sense, can be described as intentional action to bring about social or political change. This action is in support of, or opposition to, one side of an often controversial argument.

- What are some of your own definitions of the word “activism”?

- What are traditional forms of activism? Name three examples of people who approached the concept of “activism” non-traditionally (i.e. what type of action did they

- How do you think media, documentaries or films can be of help when one wants to spread information about an important cause? Why?

- What are some problems that you feel that most young people your age deal with?

- What are some art forms that you feel you could personally use to get the word out about these issues?