MAMA AFRICA
A FILM BY MIKA KAURISMÄKI

STUDY GUIDE

TRIBECAYOUTH SCREENING SERIES
ABOUT THE FILM

Packed with five decades of rare archival footage and captivating melodies, *Mama Africa* tells the incredible story of Miriam Makeba. First introduced to American audiences by Harry Belafonte, Makeba’s songs exposed the injustice of Apartheid in South Africa to the world—resulting in a 30-year exile from her home country. Throughout her life, Makeba inspired millions through her powerful songs of joy, love, and revolution.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

**MIKA KAURISMÄKI, DIRECTOR**

Kaurismäki had his first hit with *The Liar* in 1980. He then co-founded the production company Villealfa Filmproductions. His films include *Rosso, Helsinki Napolia—All Night Long, The Amazon, Zombie and the Ghost Train, LA Without a Map, Moro No Brasil, Honey Baby, Sonic Mirror, Three Wise Men*, and *The House of Branching Love*.

THINKING AHEAD

**Q:** A song can be more than just music and lyrics. At the same time it can be entertaining and informative or persuasive. Has a song ever “spoken” to you or taught you anything?

**Q:** Have you ever heard South African music? If yes, what makes it different than other kinds of music? If no, how do you think it may be different than the music one would hear on the radio everyday in New York City?

**Q:** Do you know what Apartheid was? Where and when did it happen? If you don’t know, what do you think it might be?

**Q:** Miriam Makeba’s music has been referred to as the soundtrack of a movement. What do you think this means?
THE FILM IN CONTEXT

A BRIEF HISTORY OF APARTHEID

- During the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), Britain annexed the Cape Colony in South Africa. Previously colonized by the Dutch to capitalize on its convenient location for trade ships, Britain continued the tradition of selling the indigenous people into slave labor.

- Although slavery later became illegal, the British colonists wanted to keep power so they began Apartheid—a system of legal racial segregation enforced by the National Party government of South Africa.

- Between 1948 and 1993, rights of the majority “non-white” inhabitants of South Africa were diminished and the minority of British colonists maintained rule.

- The government segregated everything from education to healthcare and gave beneficial treatment to white people.

- In 1990, President Frederik Willem de Klerk began the process to end Apartheid.

- In 1994, the Presidential election of Nelson Mandela was the definitive sign that Apartheid was over.

WHO’S WHO IN MIRIAM MAKEBA’S LIFE

These people deeply affected and guided Miriam Makeba through her life. Get to know them a little to enhance your experience with the film.

**Harry Belafonte**

Although Miriam Makeba was very popular in Africa already, it was Harry Belafonte (the “King of Calypso”) who introduced her to American audiences for the first time. At the time, Harry Belafonte was already quite popular as a singer and actor and was beginning to use his fame to address the social injustices happening all over the world, and to promote other black artists.

**Stokely Carmichael**


**Black Panthers**

Originally named the “Black Panther Party for Self-Defense,” the Black Panthers were an African-American Leftist Organization that was active in the United States from 1966 until 1982. The movement was founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton. Deeply involved in the Black Power movement, The Black Panthers’ most influential and widely known programs were its armed citizens’ patrols to evaluate behavior of police officers and its Free Breakfast for Children program. However, the group’s political goals were often overshadowed by their confrontational, militant, and sometimes violent tactics against police.

**Nelson Mandela**

After being held in prison for 27 years for his anti-apartheid activist actions, Nelson Mandela went on to be elected President of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. As a political leader, he invited Miriam Makeba to return to South Africa, after she had been exiled from the country for almost thirty years.
HOW TO BE A CRITICAL VIEWER

Being a critical viewer is different than simply watching a movie. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a movie, commercial, music video or TV show is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. Media makers create work for many reasons: to inform, persuade, entertain, shock, sell, etc. A critical viewer asks, “What goal is the media maker trying to achieve, and what impact do they want to have on me?”

A critical viewer is someone who:

• Listens carefully to what is being said in the movie
• Pays attention to the details used by the filmmaker to convey the message of the film
• Asks meaningful questions

Being a critical viewer will help you understand:

• The themes and issues that the filmmaker is addressing
• The reasons why the filmmaker chose to make the movie
• The message of the movie

In this study guide you will find background information, activities, and questions that will help you practice being a critical viewer.
Now that you've watched the film and worked through the Study Guide, take some time to reflect on the following questions. These worksheets are an important step in practicing your critical viewing skills. Write down your answers and compare with your friends and classmates.

Every film has a MESSAGE that the filmmaker wants to communicate. There are a few key questions you can ask yourself to help figure out a film’s message.

What do you think the film is about?

What is the filmmaker trying to say about the subject? What evidence is used?

Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?

PRODUCTION describes the process of making a film and includes writing the script, choosing different types of shots while filming, editing the final footage, and choosing music. The choices made during production affect how we experience the movie.

How is the story of the film told? Does it remind you of other films you have seen? If so, which ones and how? If not, how was it unique?

How does the way the film is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)
When you **CRITIQUE** a film as a critical viewer you are doing more than saying whether you like it or not, you are forming your own opinions about the quality of the film, clearly explaining your thoughts, and using evidence from the film to support these opinions.

**CRITIQUE: WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

What did you find interesting about the film? Why?

Why is the film interesting to other viewers (even if it wasn’t interesting to you)?

Why do you think the filmmaker took the time to make this film?

What would you have done differently if you were the director?

What kind of audience is the film targeting? (Remember, one film can target many different kinds of audiences!)
FURTHER READING

If you’re interested in learning more about some of the issues presented in the film, check out these books.

Makeba: My Story
By Miriam Makeba with James Hall
Through Makeba’s own words, this book gives a deeper and more personal insight into the life of this fascinating activist.

Apartheid: A Graphic Guide
Written by Donald Woods and illustrated by Mike Bostwick
Activist Donald Woods tells the history of Apartheid in South Africa through this graphic novel, richly detailing the atrocities of the government-enforced segregation.

By Kenneth O’Reilly
A secret peek behind the curtain of the FBI’s activity as they investigated the actions of Miriam Makeba along with many other Civil Rights leaders, Stokely Carmichael, Sidney Poitier and Martin Luther King Jr.

Cry, the Beloved Country
by Alan Paton
Set in South Africa shortly before the start of Apartheid, this fictional story follows a pastor who travels to Johannesburg to help the sister of a young priest who has fallen into the life of prostitution.

FURTHER WATCHING

If you liked this film, you might also like some of these other films.

Medium Cool (1969)
This film mixes a fictional story with cinema-verite documentary filmmaking, and chronicles the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago—an event that has come to represent the political and social unrest of the time.

District 9 (2009)
Set in Johannesburg, this science-fiction film is an allegory for Apartheid, and sure to spark debate among viewers for its controversial depiction of different nationalities and social classes.

In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid (1993)
A documentary film focusing on three aspects of Apartheid in cinema: the impact of Hollywood on South Africa, the depiction of South Africa in Hollywood films, and the indigenous film industry of South Africa.

Invictus (2009)
Clint Eastwood directs Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela in this true story of the 1995 Rugby World Cup, which was hosted in South Africa after the dismantling of Apartheid.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Discover more information on the web about this film and related topics.

New World Buzz
newworldbuzz.com
A detailed timeline of Miriam Makeba’s life that highlights both her success as a singer and her long career as an activist.

Rdio
rdio.com
Search for Miriam Makeba and listen to every album she ever released for free, then begin the endless search of the artists who influenced her and those who credit her as their inspiration.

Ibiblio
ibiblio.org/sncc/
Dedicated to the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, this site is a wealth of information on the influential six years that Stokely Carmichael ran SNCC.

BBC News:Africa
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/afrika
BBC News breaks down the entire history of South Africa in an extremely detailed timeline.
ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
This program provides NYC public school students and teachers with access to free, educationally-relevant and challenging films. Each screening is followed by a Q&A, study guides and supplemental educator materials are provided, and teachers are strongly encouraged to utilize films as part of their curriculum. This monthly-series strives to expose New York City students to independent films and help educators and students incorporate film-viewing into their classroom work. For more information about TFI's youth programs, please visit www.tribecafilminstitute.org/youth or email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org

“Good Audience” music by: Teddy Blanks
Tribeca Youth trailer music by: The Budos Band

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