Whether you’re an educator, administrator, parent, student or just someone who wants to learn more about media literacy, you can use this guide as a way to discuss the themes in the film. Lessons are aligned with time-coded video modules, and ‘Resources for Students and Teachers’ offers further reading, further watching and a list of local and national arts organizations. Above all, we understand that educators are multifaceted artists in their own right, so we encourage you to utilize your own artistic experiences to spark dialogue.

A PDF of this and other creative, incisive Tribeca Film Institute® Educator Guides can be found at TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG

ABOUT THE FILM

Monica & David explores the marriage of two adults with Down Syndrome and the family who strives to support their needs. Monica and David are blissfully in love and want what other adults have—an independent life. Full of humor, romance and everyday family drama, the film uses intimate fly-on-the-wall footage to reveal the complexity of their story. While Monica and David are capable beyond expectations, their parents, aware of mainstream rejection of adults with intellectual disabilities, have trouble letting go.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

ALEXANDRA CODINA  DIRECTOR

Monica & David marks Alexandra Codina’s directorial and producing debut. She was named one of the “10 Filmmakers to Watch in 2009” by The Independent. Monica & David had its world premiere in the First Appearance Competition at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam and won 2nd place for the Audience Award. Although she never studied film, Ali spent over four years supporting the work of filmmakers as Programmer & Outreach Manager for the Miami International Film Festival. Codina worked closely with Festival director, Nicole Guillemet, and ran year-round programming. Parallel to her work at the Film Festival, Alexandra brought Cinema Tropical—the lead alternative distributor for Latin American cinema in the United States - in Miami.

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM WRITER

CAIT’S MEISSNER  is an award-winning poet, educator and vibrant creative force dedicated to transformation and healing through storytelling. For over ten years, Caits has extensively facilitated multimedia expression with youth and adults in schools, prisons and community centers. She has worked long-term instituting innovative arts education programming at cultural hubs such as Tribeca Film Institute, Urban Arts Partnership, The Facing History School and the Lower Eastside Girls Club. Caits has worked in the field of disability advocacy with The Arc’s Community Inclusion Project, Job Path NYC and Capacity Works. With a shared family commitment to disability advocacy, in 2012 Caits co-edited her father’s book on organizational development in the disability field, Creating Blue Space by Hanns Meissner.
Historically, people with developmental and intellectual disabilities have experienced a life characterized by invisibility, exclusion from community, prescribed activities and severely diminished roles in society. Until recently, normal practice involved placing people with disabilities into institutions (“State Schools”) - massive clinical group homes, which subjected residents to various levels of over-medication, physical and emotional abuse, absence of stimulation and profound neglect. Lack of knowledge about disabilities propelled a generalized public fear of pronounced difference and created misinformation about what people with disabilities both desire and are capable of.

Over the past 40 years, increased efforts have been made, often through the work of small groups, families and individuals, to shift the culture from one of deficit to one of capacity - celebrating people’s unique gifts as contributions akin to the everyday person. Monica & David introduces us to two highly capable individuals with disabilities and their forward thinking families who support their inspiring quest for a whole, fulfilling life. In understanding the magnitude of this tremendous shift, it is important to start at the beginning. In Pre-Lesson 1, students are introduced to this important historical context.

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

**NORMALITY AS HUMAN RIGHT**

Monica and David, like many people with disabilities, long for a normal and fulfilling life inclusive of all the markers of typical American reality. A fulfilling life can be framed as access to meaningful relationships with friends and family, contributions to community through employment or volunteer work, support to pursue dreams, passions and hobbies and the right to be seen as a person with gifts and capacities. Beyond basic survival, what fuels and supports our claimed identities? What elements are needed for lasting fulfillment and success in all areas of life?

**DISABILITY, DIFFERENCE AND FEAR**

While spaces of learning move towards increased comfort in talking about perceived differences in our society such as, race, class, gender and sexuality, often people with developmental disabilities are left out of the conversation. Because people with disabilities have long been excluded from the large community, interactions with the public often garner concern, sympathy or fear of the difference. In what ways are people with disabilities kept out of view for our own comfort? Why do we find ourselves nervous and unsure of how to interact?

**QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS**

Assumptions are a normal and healthy biological process of understanding and creating order in a chaotic world. Our personal experiences, family values, peer influences and the media help to shape our orientation and worldviews. What assumptions do we carry about people with differences? Where did those messages stem from? Where do our unchecked assumptions surpass our need to understand and become dangerous in interpersonal interactions?

**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

In Monica and David’s story, we intimately meet the parents. While Monica and David live in deep connection with their families, what ways do we naturally vie for independence and separation from our parents in order to form our own identity in the world? What are ways we love and support others in our own families? In what ways do family connections, expressions and needs differ? In our society, family can assemble into many varying formations of relational community. Where do we see these unique families? How do they contribute to understanding our own family and what family can be?
PERSONAL FREEDOM, DETERMINATION AND RESILIENCE

Freedom on a personal level encompasses spiritual, mental and physical realms. What kinds of unique freedoms exist in our society? What methods inhibit full expressions of freedom? In what ways do our personal resilience, ethics and independence of choice lend to freedom? Where is our freedom restricted by parents, societal norms and institutions? Monica and David show us determination in proving capability, a deep interest in growing capacity, and resilience in the face of a society that holds a limited view of people with disabilities. Where does this internal resilience come from?

FREEDOM TO LOVE

Across the world, we witness ways in which freedom to love is limited by laws—for example same sex marriage, arranged romance, and restrictions on who we can choose to love based on religious and cultural values. Monica and David defy the norms in their romantic journey, creating a new vision and possibility for what love can hold for people with disabilities. What are our own biases about love? Where do we witness love stories that portray an alternative to Hollywood’s vision?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS (CONT.)

PERSONAL FREEDOM, DETERMINATION AND RESILIENCE

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VIDEO MODULES

HANDICAP (24:52 – 26:52)

UP TO US (29:06 – 31:30)

FEAR OF DIFFERENCE (31:35 – 33:40)

DIABETES (52:20 – 54:00)

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS (10:40 – 12:45)

AUTHENTIC SUPPORT (36:31 – 39:00)
UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF DISABILITY ADVOCACY

**Time:** 60 Minutes

**Materials:** Film trailer, News Clip, Collage Materials (Magazines, Paper), Scissors, Glue, Large Poster Board

**SUMMARY**

In *Monica & David*, we are introduced to a couple with developmental disabilities striving to live a life of determination, independence and normality. Before viewing the film, students are provided with context for why their story is extraordinary, framed by the troubling history faced by people with disabilities.

**PART A: Contextualizing Monica and David’s Story**

As a class, view the film trailer for *Monica & David*. View news clip from Geraldo Rivera’s Willowbrook exposé and share context: [10 min]

Bernard Carabello, a man with the physical disability of Cerebral Palsy, was institutionalized at a “State School” at the age of three and misdiagnosed as also having a cognitive disability. In 1972, Bernard became a hero when he contacted Geraldo Rivera’s television show and the public was introduced to the hidden horrors of institutionalization. The Willowbrook exposé became a turning point in examining support structures for people with disabilities and led to a mass dismantling of these spaces. This process is known as “deinstitutionalization.” Though the field had a long way to go, it marked the beginning of a new era where people were introduced to small group living environments. They were often employed with simple jobs such as resembling factory work (“Sheltered Workshops”) and reunited with family. This created a shift towards meaningful engagement in their community.

**DISCUSS:**

1. What struck you when viewing these materials? How do they make you feel?
2. How does the trailer for *Monica & David* differ from the exposé?
3. Why don’t we know about this history of people with disabilities, though we learn about other human rights issues through school and community programs?
4. Should disability rights be seen as a larger human rights issue? In what ways?

**PART B: Shifting Towards Capacity and Contribution**

[40 min]

Where Is the Field Now?

*Note to teachers and students:* Organizations that support people with disabilities are increasingly shifting into a mode that values the entire person by working towards unique and individualized plans to create lives of distinction and meaning. Though this practice is significantly more expensive due to its tailoring to an individually expressed need rather than a group’s assumed need, it has been both subject to criticism by stakeholders in social welfare and celebrated by families and advocates of people with disabilities. Throughout this study guide, students will find entry points to connect their own life experience to those with differences and examine and advocate for what human rights look like for all people.

Claiming Our Unique Contributions Through Community Collage

Preparing to view Monica and David’s story through the lens of contribution and ability, students create a class contribution collage. Task each student with creating three images that symbolize their own personal contributions and gifts to the classroom community via collaged magazine images or drawings.

As each student approaches the poster board, sharing their contribution aloud, they determine the collage’s growth and creation by placing their symbols in relationship to their peers’ choices.

**REFLECTION:**

1. What did I learn about my peers that I didn’t know before?
2. How do I feel when asked to identify my contributions rather than my faults?
3. Was it hard to locate what I can offer? Where have people told me I can and where have people told me I can’t?
4. In our community, we see a variety of skillsets and offerings. What would the classroom - or the world - be like if we all held the same skills?
“JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE”: THE QUEST FOR NORMALITY AND BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

Time: 60 Minutes
Modules: “Handicap” (24:52 – 26:52) and “Up to Us” (29:06 – 31:30)
Materials: Person Centered Planning Worksheets, Writing Utensils

SUMMARY

In Monica & David, we briefly meet Monica’s support worker who discusses life after her parents. Monica and David’s support structures also appear in their life skills program: the chef who teaches cooking skills and in meeting with a job developer in their new city. These processes of supporting a person with disabilities’ life path is called Person-Centered Planning.

This method for determining the individual needs and desires of people with disabilities was developed and clarified between 1979 to 1992, a formative time in advancing support practices. Due to different levels of ability to clearly communicate needs, Person-Centered Planning brings together the individual’s support networks to co-plan and design a life map that offers a life closer to full contribution, value and normality.

In this module, students lead their peers through their own Person Centered Planning maps, applying the framework to their own lives and determining its value as a tool for success and fulfillment.

PART A: Defining Normality and A Life of Purpose

As a class, view film modules “Handicap” and “Up to Us” and discuss the following questions:

1. Monica says to David that it is their life and decisions are, “up to us.” Are privacy and independence a right for all?
2. Monica’s mother’s and stepfather’s concerns vs. reality - what is true concern and what is fear?
3. Which activities do you engage in without thinking that Monica and David have to learn and practice?
4. Many of us pride ourselves on being unique individuals. In the film clip “Handicap,” Monica and David, in different ways, deny their relationship to the terms handicap and even Down Syndrome. Why might Monica and David want to be seen as “normal” and reject these labels?

Identifying Ingredients For a Fully Expressed Human Life (10 min)

Discuss with students where in the film we are introduced to the elements that offer Monica and David a life of purpose. (Friendships, family, coworkers, Support Coordinator, meaningful work, opportunities to learn, capacity-based engagement with community and household chores, passions and interests and self-developed routines.)

Task students with defining a master list of ingredients for a fully expressed life for all humans. While engaging a group conversation, keep a visible chart of what elements contribute to a meaningful existence (family, relationships, work, passions, etc.)

PART B: Experiencing Person-Centered Planning

In pairs, students lead each other through a Person-Centered Planning assessment, located in the index, and experience the first step in determining the needs of individuals with disabilities. Walk students through each worksheet by reviewing the instructions and giving timed segments for each pair to interview each other and fill in the assessments.

- WORKSHEET ONE: CIRCLES OF SUPPORT
- WORKSHEET TWO: IDENTIFY STRENGTHS AND DESIRE
- WORKSHEET THREE: IDENTIFY NEEDS AND SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

REFLECTION

1. How did it feel to expose your needs, desires and strengths to another person?
2. How might it feel for a person with disabilities, such as Monica and David, to have multiple stakeholders in their life plan and be consistently vulnerable to sharing intimate desires, needs and requests?
3. How would it feel if you were not able to express your needs and have a plan that was pre-determined for you?
4. What did you learn about yourself from this exercise? Did it help to clarify anything?
5. In what ways does creating a circle of support contribute to personal and community resilience?
Worksheet: Person Centered Planning For a Life of Purpose

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

Date: 
Name: 
Partner’s Name: 

INSTRUCTIONS

Build a circle of support: Who are the people in your partner’s life that can support their dreams, wishes, goals and hopes? These are pillars in your partner’s current world who they turn to for guidance, advice, support, fun and meaning - people who make them laugh, help them feel important, understood, heard and loved. These people might help them accomplish tasks or life goals, or they may be people your partner guides.

These supporters might include: parents/guardians, child care providers, grandparents, teachers, foster parents, employers, brothers/sisters, pastors or ministers, relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins), social workers/case managers, neighbors, community leaders, friends of the family, coworkers or friends from school.

Support still needed
Secondary/supplementary support (co-workers, neighbors, etc.)
Closest/most important supports (family, friends, etc.)
Partner’s name

Worksheet: Person Centered Planning For a Life of Purpose

IDENTIFY STRENGTHS AND DESIRES

Identify strengths and desires
This process helps your partner identify what they have, and need to grow and be the most powerful version of themselves.

My partner is good at (list positive personality traits, talents and strengths):

Record your partner’s dreams & wishes:
My partner would really like to try . . .
My partner wants friends who . . .
Family could support my partner if they had . . .
My partner needs an opportunity to . . .
My partner might enjoy work like . . .
My partner needs an opportunity to . . .
My partner could become more independent if . . .
Someday my partner would like to . . .

Worksheet: Person Centered Planning For a Life of Purpose

IDENTIFY NEEDS AND SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Identify strengths and desires
Ask your partner what they struggle with. Perhaps it is homework, or math tests, or communication with parents or friends. Ask them to identify their own shortcomings and areas that need improvement. Transform what they come up with into Person-Centered Planning language by listing the need versus the behavior.

For example:
The problem: My partner struggles with handing in homework on time. He is lazy.

Becomes the need: My partner needs time management strategies to help him balance all of his work.

The problem: My partner is angry in class. She needs an attitude adjustment.

Becomes the need: My partner needs help to control her feelings and find constructive ways to express her anger.

Reflecting On Next Steps: In Person-Centered Planning, this process would continue with action steps and accountability processes determined based on the information mined from interviewing both the individual with disabilities, and their immediate circle of support. Assessing your own map, what would your next steps be towards a purposeful life? List three actionable steps for your own life of fulfillment:

*Adapted from the ND Center for Persons with Disabilities at Minot State University
POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY 1

QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS AND CONFRONTING FEAR OF DIFFERENCE

Time: 60 Minutes
Module: “Fear of Difference” [31:35 – 33:40] and “Diabetes” (52:20 – 54:00)
Materials: Spectrum Of Assumptions Chart, Paper, Markers, Point And Shoot Cameras Or Smartphones

In this module, students address and explore their own assumptions about people with disabilities. Turning the lens on themselves and inspired by Monica and David’s resilience and perseverance, students examine where assumptions have affected their own lives, and creatively respond.

PART A: Questioning Assumptions
As a class, watch film modules “Fear of Difference” and “Diabetes”

Spectrum of Assumptions Chart (Next Page)
Utilizing the “Spectrum of Assumptions” worksheet located in the index, students demarcate which side of the spectrum they land on in their beliefs and assumptions about people with disabilities. Most answers will fall somewhere in the middle, the proposed statements purposefully challenging in their complexities. Encourage students to answer with honesty and an understanding that no answer is “wrong” or “right.”

Discuss:
1. Where in the film did Monica and David disprove the assumptions of their parents?
2. How did Monica and David challenge your personal assumptions about people with disabilities?
3. Why are Monica and David’s parents afraid of the public reaction to their children?
4. On the “Spectrum of Assumption” worksheet, the questions posed are not black and white. Where in your chart are you hovering in the middle? Why is there such tremendous gray area in these questions?
5. Have you ever been afraid of a person with a disability? Why?
6. How can we continue to challenge our assumptions about perceived difference?

PART B: Confronting Fear of Difference

FREE WRITE WARM-UP
Write about a time someone was afraid or ignorant about your difference, judging you based on appearances. What was the identity under attack? What didn’t they know about you?

IDENTITY PHOTO BOOTH
Students create a photo shoot, confronting the negative perception self-perpetuated by others. Using their free write as a springboard, students create a visual declaration about their identity, and illustrate it on poster board. Holding up their signs, students take turns photographing each other with their declarations.

WORKSHEET: Spectrum of Assumptions Chart

Date:
Name:

INSTRUCTIONS
Indicate on the spectrum which statement you feel is more true. The closer you place an x next to either the statement on the right or the left, the more true you feel it is. If your x falls in the middle, it indicates that you feel both are true in different ways.

1. People with a developmental disability are:
   Abnormal/different than most people……………… Normal/the same as most people

2. People with a developmental disability need:
   Special environments to grow and learn ……………………. Local community and natural places to grow and learn

3. Services for people with disabilities need to focus on:
   Resolving the problems of an individual ………… Supporting people at work and in their own home.

4. Plans for people with disabilities must focus on:
   What the person lacks in skills, appropriate behaviors, and personal resources………. The gifts and capacities of the person.

5. Control for decisions should be:
   In the hands of professionals with proper skills to manage complex decisions……. With the individuals receiving services or support.

6. Quality of life for someone with a developmental disability is:
   Achieved with a structured and active treatment program ……. Defined by relationships, involvement in community life and roles ones assumes.

7. How do we keep people safe and avoid abuse? Individuals with a developmental disability:
   Need programs and staff to protect them from a potentially dangerous community…….. Are safest when they have family and friends.

*Adapted from Hanns Meissner’s Creating Blue Space
Using the phrase: I am both __________________________ & __________________________, students declare their ability to be two, perhaps seemingly conflicting, things at once. The final poster should include only the two words, editing out the prompt.

For example, Monica or David may write I am both Downs & smart. The poster then becomes: Downs Smart, creating its own deceptively complex and poetic anthem.

Other examples might include:

I am both street & eloquent ... Street Eloquent
I am both curly-haired & classy ... Curly Classy
I am both tomboy & pretty ... Tomboy Pretty
I am both dyslexic & a poet ... Dyslexic Poet

**POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY 1**

**POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY 2**

**THE RIGHT TO LOVE**

*Time: 75 Minutes*

*Module: “Relationship Dynamics” [10:40 – 12:45] and “Authentic Support” (36:31 – 39:00)*

*Materials: Articles, Poster Board, Markers*

Monica and David’s journey to freely love connects to greater human rights questions relating to choice and freedom to marry. In our current society, marriage is hindered and restricted by laws, race, religion and cultural norms throughout the world. In this module, students examine ways we still have to fight for our right in freedom to love, and declare their own stance on love as a human right.

**PART A: Viewing a New Kind of Love Story**

As a class, view film modules: “Relationship Dynamics” and “Authentic Support”

**DISCUSS**

1. Monica and David’s love story - in what ways is it relatable to love stories we’ve seen in our lives, and in the movies? In what ways does it differ?
2. Do you believe Monica and David are capable of feeling “true love?” What evidence do we witness in the film modules?
3. Where is love as a right tricky for Monica and David? Will they ever be able to live fully independently? Will they be subject to lifelong unfulfilled desire due to not being able to create their own family?
4. Does everyone have a right to true love? Do you consider it a human right?

**PART B: Exploring The Right to Love Across the World**

Introduce articles and discuss:

**SOURCE ONE**

*Article 16, Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

**SOURCE TWO**

The Guardian Article, Couples with learning disabilities face unfair wedding bar


POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY 2 (CONT.)

Making Connections and Responding
As a group, students will identify where else in the world we see restrictions on the right to love and marry and their causes. How do these stories connect with Monica and David's? How do they connect with our own?

View and discuss The Ethical Agency’s racy poster campaign advocating for people with disabilities to be seen as people who can choose to have engaging sex lives:

[Link]

Task students with creating their own poster for a “Right to Love” campaign, choosing one of the groups or issues from your gathered list.

FURTHER READING
IF YOU LIKED THIS FILM, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE SOME OF THESE OTHER FILMS.

**How's Your News (2009)**
An American television series and also a feature film starring a group of reporters with developmental disabilities who along a cross-country road trip from New Hampshire to California, interview celebrities, politicians, and regular folk. Their journey provides an illuminating look at being “different” in a country that clings too tightly to the security blanket of conformity.

**Rain Man (1988)**
Depicts the story of two brothers – Charlie, an abrasive car salesman, and Raymond, an autistic savant – who discover each other only after their father dies, leaving his multi-million dollar estate to Raymond.

**The Broken Cord**
by Michael Dorris
The controversial national bestseller that received unprecedented media attention, sparked the nation's interest in the plight of children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

**Retarded Isn't Stupid, Mom!**
by Sandra Kaufman
In a fast-paced, engaging story, mother Sandra Kaufman frankly reveals the feelings of denial, guilt, frustration, and eventual acceptance that result in a determination to help her child live an independent life.

**Count Us In: Growing Up with Down Syndrome**
by Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levitz
At ages nineteen and twenty-two, respectively, Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levitz shared their innermost thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams, their lifelong friendship—and their experiences growing up with Down syndrome.

**I Am Sam (2002)**
A father with a developmental disability enlists the aid of a high-powered attorney to help him regain custody of his seven-year-old daughter.

**Forrest Gump (1994)**
Forrest Gump is an exceptional man, possessing an IQ of 70, yet athletically remarkable, who witnesses some of the defining moments of the latter half of the 20th century in the US. From the 60's generation, to fighting in the Vietnam War, to the Civil Rights Movement, to the first days of HIV, Forrest relates the moments that shaped US history through a voice all his own.

FURTHER WATCHING
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**Life As We Know It: A Father, Family, and an Exceptional Child**
by Michael Baratz
In this wrenching yet ultimately inspiring book, a father describes not only the challenges of raising his son but the challenge of seeing him as a person rather than as a medical, genetic, or social problem.

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GET INVOLVED
CRAVING MORE HANDS ON EXPERIENCE? CHECK OUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS.

TASH
An international leader in disability advocacy, founded in 1975, TASH advocates for human rights and inclusion for people with significant disabilities and support needs – those most vulnerable to segregation, abuse, neglect and institutionalization. TASH works to advance inclusive communities through advocacy, research, professional development and policy, as well as information and resources for parents, families and self-advocates.

www.tash.org

National Disability Rights Network
The nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems and Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for individuals with disabilities. Collectively, the P&A/CAP network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States.

www.ndrn.org

National Center for Learning Disabilities
The National Center for Learning Disabilities improves the lives of all people with learning difficulties and disabilities by empowering parents, enabling young adults, transforming schools, and creating policy and advocacy impact.

www.ncld.org

The Arc
The Arc is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Encompassing all ages and all spectrums from autism, Down syndrome, Fragile X and various other developmental disabilities, services provided are personalized to meet the needs of the individual and encompass all stages of life.

www.thearc.org
ABOUT TRIBECA FILM INSTITUTE

Tribeca Film Institute champions storytellers to be catalysts for change in their communities and around the world. Each year, we identify a diverse and exceptional group of filmmakers and media artists and empower them with funding and other resources to fully realize their stories and connect with audiences. Through hands-on training and exposure to socially relevant films, our educational programming helps young people gain the media skills necessary to be productive global citizens and creative individuals.

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TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES® STAFF

Executive Director
Beth Janson

Director of Education
Vee Bravo

Tribeca Teaches® Manager
Sharese Bullock-Bailey

Series Curator
Flonia Telegrafi

Education Program Associate
Elizabeth Pérez

Designer
Hector Silva

ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

Tribeca Youth Screening Series is a media literacy program begun in 2006 by the Tribeca Film Institute®. The academic year is divided into two series, screened from September through April in partnership with national and neighborhood partners. These screenings are augmented by in-class sessions led by a Tribeca Teaching Artist, who works with a film-specific curriculum written and edited by a team formed through Tribeca Film Institute. Schools are selected based on relationship, location, and need; in 2014 we will be working in ten schools. Connect and download free curricula at TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG

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