TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

PERSEPOLIS

A FILM BY
MARJANE SATRAPI
VINCENT PARONNAUD

STUDY GUIDE
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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

Tehran 1978: An eight-year-old Marjane, dreams of being a future prophet, intent on saving the world. Cherished by her modern and cultivated parents and adored by her grandmother, she avidly follows the events that lead to the downfall of the Shah’s brutal regime. The introduction of the new Islamic Republic heralds the era of the ‘Guardians of the Revolution’ who control how people should dress and act.

Soon after, the city is bombarded in the war against Iraq. With the deprivations brought on by the conflict and the routine disappearances of family members and loved ones, the daily repression becomes more severe. As her environment becomes increasingly dangerous, Marjane’s rebelliousness poses a serious problem. Her parents decide to send her to Austria for her own protection. In Vienna, 14 year old Marjane experiences another kind of revolution: adolescence, freedom and the dizzy heights of love but also with this excitement comes exile, loneliness and the bitter taste of life as an outcast.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

MARJANE SATRAPI / DIRECTOR

Marjane Satrapi grew up in Tehran where she studied at the French Lycée. She next continued her studies in Vienna before moving to France in 1994, and then entered the Atelier des Vosges, home to the great names of contemporary comics. In Persepolis, she speaks of her own story and that of her family, retracing her first ten years, the fall of the Shah’s regime, the Iran-Iraq war, her adolescence up to her departure for Vienna, her exile in Austria, and her return to Iran. She’s since published two albums: Embroideries and Chicken with Plums. In 2005, she made the screen adaptation of Persepolis with Vincent Paronnaud. Selected in Competition in 2007, Persepolis won the Jury Prize of the Festival de Cannes. Her work explores themes of identity, exile and loss.

VINCENT PARONNAUD / DIRECTOR

Vincent Paronnaud is the creator of numerous comics and graphic novels that have garnered awards and acclaim across Europe. Winshluss is the pen name of Vincent Paronnaud, perhaps best known as co-director of the animated film Persepolis (with Marjane Satrapi), which won the Jury Prize at Cannes and was nominated for numerous awards, including the Academy Award, Golden Globe and Cannes’ Palm d’Or. He and Satrapi are teaming up again to adapt Satrapi’s 2006 book, Chicken with Plums.

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM WRITER

Sumitra Rajkumar is an educator and writer who lives in Brooklyn. She has worked within the field of youth media for many years, using documentary video techniques combined with popular education curricula to facilitate young people telling stories about their lives and communities and connecting them to the social issues of the moment. She also trains community organizers in the analysis of historic social trends and political economy, helping to connect their particular demands to strategies for building broader social movements. Sumitra also practices a therapeutic methodology called Somatics to support the healing of survivors of trauma and violence.
**Persepolis**, Marjane Satrapi's 2007 animated adaptation of her graphic novel, traces the coming of age of a young Iranian woman through violent social upheaval in her home country and consequent escape to unfamiliar new lands when she goes to school in Europe. This tale is all too familiar to Satrapi, as the film is closely based on her own life. She explores several controversial issues like the wearing of the veil, oppression of women in Iran, the horrors of war, and the loneliness of migration. *Persepolis* is unique in its use of art to provoke feelings and responses instead of demanding them; making it much easier for the audience to identify with, as their own opinions and experiences change our understanding of the story.

Satrapi's choice of simple art styles for her characters and settings also help make the comic easy for Western audiences to identify with. This is a clear example of Scott McCloud's theory of “amplification through simplification.” McCloud believes that when people read comics they tend to adapt themselves as the main characters. By inserting themselves in the comics, they personalize what happens to the characters. “Thus, when you look at the photo or realistic drawing of a face, you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see yourself... Who I am is irrelevant. I'm just a little piece of you. But if who I am matters less, maybe what I say will matter more.” It's interesting that by using abstract art, Satrapi has overcome the notion that Iran is an abstract concept.

*Persepolis* takes several different turns as the young Marjane struggles to make sense of her rapidly shifting and surreal environments across political regimes, countries, in airports, and via her imagination, resulting in a multifaceted journey where she tries to process the many complex layers of home, identity and belonging. The audience watches the black and white comic narrative unfold through her unique perspective, revealing her spirited personality. It has moments of tenderness and humor, showing the resiliency of human beings. Joy and laughter can be found in even the grimmest situations.

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**KEY WORDS**

**Fundamentalist** A usually religious movement or point of view characterized by a return to fundamental principles, by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism.

**“Amplification Through Simplification”** explains how viewers relate to simplified drawings versus complex drawings. If a character is drawn simply with basic shapes and lines, then this character can look like anyone. A viewer can relate to a simplified face because they can associate simplified features with someone they know or possibly themselves. An artist can amplify this association by contrasting the simple character with a detailed background.

**Hijab** A veil that covers the head and chest.

**Graphic Novel** an illustrated fictional story, like a comic book.

**Islamic Revolution** refers to the religious governmental regime that came to power in Iran in 1979 after the more Westernized dictator Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was overthrown by the people of Iran.

**Xenophobia** is a specific form of racism that focuses on the fear, hatred, ignorance or mistreatment of foreigners.

**Migration** to leave one’s homeland for another geographical location in order to seek more opportunity, freedom or safety.

**Patriarchy** the way in which a society may be structured in order for men to hold and wield more power and authority in areas ranging from government to economy to family.

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**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

**MIGRATION**

As she gets older, Marjane’s boldness causes her parents to worry over her continued safety. Iran is going through immense political strife and her parents want her to have a safer life where she is freer to express her vibrant personality, especially as a young woman. And so, at age 14, they make the difficult decision to send her to school in Austria. Vulnerable and alone in a strange land, she endures the typical ordeals of a teenager. Similarly, have you or anyone you know experienced leaving home or your community to migrate to an entirely different country, state, city, or neighborhood? What helped you adapt to your new surroundings? What things did you miss most about home?
DISCUSSION PROMPTS (CONT.)

IDENTITY
While in Austria, Marjane has to combat being equated with the religious fundamentalism and extremism she fled her country to escape. Over time, she gains acceptance, and even experiences love, but after high school she finds herself alone and homesick. Though it means putting on the veil and living under an authoritarian theocracy, Marjane decides to return to Iran to be close to her family. At age 24, she realizes that while she is deeply Iranian, she cannot live in Iran. She then makes the heartbreaking decision to leave her homeland again, this time for France, optimistic about her future, shaped indelibly by her past. Have you been in a situation where your identity was confused for another? How did you resolve the confusion? How did it make you feel?

A UNIVERSAL STORY
When asked if she intended to tell her story as an animated feature versus live-action, Satrapi insists she was set on it being an animated feature. “With live-action, it would have turned into a story of people living in a distant land who don’t look like us... The novels have been a worldwide success because the drawings are abstract, black-and-white. I think this helped everybody to relate to it, whether in China, Israel, Chile, or Korea, it’s a universal story.” Was there a moment in the film you identified with? What characteristics does Marjane have that you also have? Could you see yourself as any of the characters? If so, who and why?

WOMEN IN SOCIETY
Marjane is shown as having a fiery and passionate personality. Her mother and grandmother also have strong personalities, viewpoints and opinions. At the same time, Iran’s government under the Islamic regime is portrayed as being very oppressive to women. They are forced to wear the hijab and are abused and hurt by men in authority. What do you know about the role of women in other countries? How does that differ and overlap with how women are treated in mainstream U.S society? What commonalities, if any, exist?

XENOPHOBIA
When Marjane arrives in Vienna, she encounters various reactions to her cultural difference. Xenophobia is a specific form of racism that focuses on the fear or hatred of foreigners. It varies in how it is expressed, depending on the assumptions people have about the culture and politics of people’s home countries. Xenophobic attacks or sentiments can leave people feeling more isolated and displaced than they may already be since they are separated from their homeland making them deeply question their sense of self worth and belonging. Have you or anyone you know experienced Xenophobia? How did you or they feel and what did they do for support? What can we as individuals do to curb xenophobia?

VIDEO MODULES

1. MARJANE PUTS ON THE HIJAB AT THE AIRPORT
(2:11 - 2:27)

2. I, MARJANE, FUTURE PROPHETESS...
(4:17 - 5:19)

3. THE SHAH WASN'T CHOSEN BY GOD
(5:40 - 7:35)

4. UNCLE ANOUCHE
(14:04 - 18:09)

5. PUNK IS NOT DED
(26:22 - 28:19)

6. PARTIES DURING THE REGIME
(31:18 - 33:56)

7. IRANIANS HAVE NO MANNERS
(31:18 - 33:56)
Express Yourself!

*Persepolis* tells the story of a young woman who was outspoken from a young age, and yearns to express herself even when she feels unsafe or like she doesn't belong. Her identity or sense of self comes from many experiences, her gender, her race, her attachment to her family and culture as well as her own passionate nature and humor.

**PART A**

*Time:* 45 minutes  
*Tools:* Pre-printed identity charts, markers and colored pencils, Video Module 1: “Marjane puts on the hijab at the airport” 2:11 – 2:27

As a class, discuss what information we understand about Marjane’s character in the first few minutes of Video Module 1. What different identities is she contending with? How do you think Marjane identifies herself? What characteristics would you say she would use to describe herself? Then ask students to answer the same questions. Use the questions below to make the discussion more personal for students.

**GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. What qualities do you feel make you unique?
2. What are activities you are passionate about?
3. What are some things that you identify with? (i.e. Music, video games, movies, etc.)?

Distribute blank identity charts to each person. Show students the sample identity chart included in the study guide. Explain that in the box they should write their name, and around it they should write all the things they feel they identify with. For Example: Students can identify as artists, rappers, dancers, sisters, brothers, etc. They can write about family, friends, their neighborhood, native country, their personality, things they like to do or are good at, etc. The list can be endless. They should feel free to include drawings and personalize as much as possible.

Give students approximately 20-25 minutes to finish their Identity Charts. Once everyone is done, have students hang up their identity charts around the room for a gallery walk.

**PART B**

Before students start the gallery walk, give them an index card, where they can write down things they see on their classmates Identity Chart that they would want to include on their own. Give students 15 minutes to walk around and look at each other’s charts.

After the 15-minute walk through, break students up into groups, and have them discuss the following questions:

1. What did you appreciate about your partner’s chart that may be different from yours?
2. Is there anyone you’d like to collaborate with on a project? Describe the project.
3. Is there anything you could learn from someone else? Who? What? Why?
4. Was there anything in particular you’d like other students to know about you?
Through Marjane’s parents we learn about the civil unrest going on in Iran during 1978. Her father shares the story of how the Shah came to power. Although he loved his country dearly, and wanted to modernize and uplift his people, he was seduced by the idea of absolute power presented by the West.

**PART A**

**Time:** 30 minutes  
**Tools:** Butcher Paper, Markers, Crayons, Colored Pencils, DVD Player, Video Module 3: “The Shah Wasn’t Chosen by God” 5:40 – 7:35

Using the butcher paper, draw a large world map and tape it to a wall or the chalkboard. Give each student a different color marker, crayon, or colored pencil to work with. Have students come up to the map one at a time and draw a line from where their family traces its roots, to where they are now. Have each student write their name next to their line.

As a class, sit and discuss the many different places students come from, and the types of government these countries have. If time permits, do a quick web search so students can base their information on facts about the country their family originated from. Use the questions below to guide the discussion:

**GROUP DISCUSSION:**

1. How many people come from the same places?  
2. How many people come from different places?  
3. What do we know about the governments in these countries?  
4. What restrictions/freedoms do people have in these countries that we do not have in the US?

After the group discussion, have the class watch Video Module 3: “The Shah wasn’t chosen by God,” before moving on to PART B of this activity.

**PART B**

**Time:** 45 minutes  
**Tools:** Scrap Paper, Markers, Map of New York City Worksheet, Our Government Worksheet

Now that the class has a basic idea of different governments from around the world, they’re going to create their own country and government in New York City. Split up your class into five groups (one group per borough). Give each group a copy of the NYC Map, and the “Our Government” worksheet.

**On the NYC Map:** In order to make the activity fair, have each group select their borough (country) out of a hat. Then, have students use markers to outline where their country is.
Each group should fill out one “Our Government” worksheet to hand in. They should consider the following questions when filling out the sheet:
1. Who is in your government?
2. What does each role do?
3. What resources are unique to your country?
4. Who protects the country?

After the groups have completed their worksheets, have them present their plans to the rest of the class.

**PART C**

As a closing activity, you may want to consider asking students to each write a short journal entry about their experience participating in this activity. Here are some questions they may want to think about as they write:
1. How did participating in this activity make you feel?
2. How does this activity relate to US politics and the structure of our government?
3. What would you change about current US politics?
4. Does the country you created represent an ideal? If so, why?

*Teacher’s Note:* While this activity is New York City centric, it can still be adapted for other cities. You may want to consider the cities, towns, or communities your students come from and divide them by using the above method.
Throughout the film we see how important family is for Marjane. She has a very close relationship with her grandmother and parents, and with the return of her Uncle Anouche, she finds another adult figure whom she admires greatly. During Anouche's visit, he recounts for her the story of when he, his uncle, and friends declared the independence of Azerbaijan's Iranian province. While for some it might seem like a fantastic adventure that Uncle Anouche went on, it was a dangerous undertaking that put his life at serious risk. This history represents the oral traditions that people across the world rely on to impart stories of family, community, struggle, and perseverance to younger generations.

**PART A**

**Homework:** Family Interviews

Prior to this session, have each student interview their family members or elders about an important family story passed down from generation to generation. The story can be an adventure story, a romantic story about how their parents or grandparents first met, it could be a story of struggle and perseverance, or simply a fun story. What is important is that the story bear some significance for your students’ families.

**PART B**

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Tools:** Graphic Novel Plan worksheet, DVD Player, Video Module 4: “Uncle Anouche” 14:04 – 18:09

As a class, watch Video Module 4: “Uncle Anouche”. Discuss the importance of the story Anouche is sharing with Marjane. Use the questions below to guide the discussion:

1. Why is Anouche sharing this story with Marjane?
2. Why does Marjane need to know this history?
3. Has your family shared any stories about your family history with you? If so, what kinds of stories?

- Instruct students that they will be creating a graphic novel or comic based on their family history.
- Hand out the Graphic Novel Plan worksheet to each student.
- Encourage students to hone in on the key details of the story and write these points down in their notebooks.
- Once they are ready to create their graphic panels, students can begin filling in the worksheet.

After students have completed their worksheets, break them up into pairs and have them share their work. Each pair can then report back to the class about their partner’s story.
EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

Time: 45 minutes
Tools: Computers with Internet access, Pixton Comics website, completed Graphic Novel Plan worksheets

If time permits, students can convert their drawn worksheets into web-based graphic novels by using Pixton Comics, a website that allows users to create original stories and worlds. Stories can be as simple or challenging as students want to make them. Depending on the kind of technology available in your classroom, you can also consider skipping PART B and starting this activity with Pixton Comics. The site offers a school portal that allows educators to sign-up an entire class, with individual log-in per student. You can access the website through this link: www.pixton.com.
POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY 2

When Words Fail, Music Speaks

In the film, we see how Marjane gravitates toward Metal and Punk Rock music at an early age. In a country where Western culture is regarded unfavourably, Marjane takes a risk by publicly displaying her like of Iron Maiden. This risky display can be viewed as an act of dissent against the authoritarian regime. In one scene, she begs her mother to give her money to buy an Iron Maiden tape. After her purchase, Marjane is interrogated about her outfit and music choices by the morality police, and goes so far as to make up an outlandish lie about her parents in order to evade getting in trouble.

PART A

Time: 20 minutes
Tools: Computer with Internet access, Scrap Paper, DVD Player, Video Module 5: “Punk Is Not Ded”
       26:22 – 28:19

As a class, screen Video Module 5: “Punk is Not Ded”.

Discussion Questions:
1. What do metal and punk music mean to Marjane?
2. Why is such music sold on the black market as opposed to out in the open?
3. Why might these types of music be seen as a threat by the regime?
4. What other types of music have been at one time seen as threatening or anti-establishment
   by governments or groups of people outside Iran? What about in the US?
5. Can you name any musical genres or specific songs that were once considered controversial?

PART B

Time: 20 minutes
Tools: Pens, Pencils, Notebooks or Loose-leaf

Discuss the importance of music for your students. How do students choose the music they listen to? What
is appealing to them? How does the music they listen to reflect their personalities?

Discussion Questions:
1. What kind of music do you like to listen to? Explain.
2. Does the genre of music you listen to change depending on your mood?
3. How can music help us to heal or to express ourselves in difficult situations?

Have students write an entry in their notebooks or journals about what music means to them and how it
shapes and reflects their identity. Afterwards, select a few volunteers to share their entries with the rest
of the class.
PART C

Time: 20 minutes
Tools: Scrap Paper, Pens, Pencils

Ask students to create a soundtrack to their lives. They must choose 2-3 songs that describe how they feel about:
1. Family
2. Friends
3. Home
4. When they are frustrated
5. When they are happy

For every song they choose, students can write down why that particular song represents how they feel about the topic. Students can also include excerpts of the song lyrics. Afterwards, break the class up into groups and have each student share what songs would make up their life soundtrack within their groups.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:
Taking inspiration from *Persepolis*, students can write their own short film scene. Instruct students to create a modern day scenario including a protagonist and a conflict modeled after the “Punk is Not Ded” scene from the film. Students should consider the following storytelling elements as they come up with their ideas:
1. Where does your story take place?
2. Who are your main characters?
3. What is the main conflict? Is there anything at stake in this scene? You may want to recall that in *Persepolis*, Marjane risks being reprimanded or worse, only because she publicly displays her embrace of Western music.
RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS

FURTHER READING
IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi
In powerful black-and-white comic strip images, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah’s regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran’s last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country.

*I Remember* by Joe Brainard
This literary and artistic cult classic is an autobiography with a brilliantly simple method. Brainard sets down specific memories as they rise to the surface of his consciousness, each prefaced by the refrain “I remember” Brainard’s enduring gem of a book has been issued in various forms over the past thirty years.

*Brother I’m Dying* by Edwidge Danticat
From the age of four, award-winning writer Edwidge Danticat came to think of her uncle Joseph as her “second father,” when she was placed in his care after her parents left Haiti for America. And so she was both elated and saddened when, at twelve, she joined her parents and youngest brothers in New York City. As Edwidge made a life in a new country, adjusting to being far away from so many who she loved, she and her family continued to fear for the safety of those still in Haiti as the political situation deteriorated.

*From Every End of this Earth* by Steven Roberts
New York Times bestselling author Steven V. Roberts follows the stories of thirteen families in this poignant, eye-opening look at immigration in America today. He profiles immigrants from China and Afghanistan, Mexico and Sierra Leone, who have journeyed to U.S shores in pursuit of the same dream that propelled his own grandparents to leave Russia and Poland a century ago. He combines compelling interviews and meticulous research to produce an engaging, wonderfully clear, and accessible narrative that explores each family’s original yet deeply resonant story.

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

*Ma Vie en Rose* (English translation: My Life in Pink)
is a 1997 Belgian drama film directed by Alain Berliner. It is a powerful story about the persistence and resilience of self-expression, told from the perspective of Ludovic, a child who is seen by her family and community as a boy, but consistently insists that she is a girl. The film depicts Ludovic and her family as they struggle to accept her gender.

*a.k.a Don Bonus*
This is a raw and revealing video diary by a Cambodian-born teenager who turns the camera on himself. Under the guidance of veteran filmmaker Spencer Nakasako, Sokly Don Bonus Ny offers a stark look at coming of age in San Francisco’s inner city where he confronts the reality of the American Dream.

*Machuca*
Written and directed by Andrés Wood in 2004, is a coming of age film set against a backdrop of political upheaval in Chile. Set in 1973 Santiago during Salvador Allende’s socialist government and shortly before General Augusto Pinochet’s military coup in 1973, the film tells the story of two friends, one of them the very poor Pedro Machuca who is integrated into the elite school of his friend Gonzalo Infante.

*Sin Nombre*
A 2009 U.S.-Mexican film written and directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, about a Honduran girl trying to emigrate to the U.S.A, and a boy caught up in the violence of gang life who also needs to escape.
GET INVOLVED
CRAVING MORE HANDS ON EXPERIENCE? CHECK OUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS.

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)
www.nnirr.com
This social justice organization works to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status. Since its founding in 1986, it has drawn membership from diverse immigrant communities, and actively builds alliances with social and economic justice partners around the country.

Iranian American Society of New York
www.iasnewyork.org
A non-profit, non-political and non-religious organization whose charter includes promotion of Persian language, heritage and culture. IAS also provides humanitarian, medical and financial assistance to Iranians in need.

Global Action Project
www.global-action.org
Global Action Project works with young people in New York City who are most affected by injustice to build the knowledge, tools, and relationships needed to create media for community power, cultural expression, and political change.

Farhang Foundation
www.farhang.org
A non-profit organization dedicated to celebrating and promoting the study and research of Iranian art, culture, and history for the benefit of the community at large.
### OUR GOVERNMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flag (Can draw separately to include)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of government</td>
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<td>How do leaders become leaders?</td>
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<td>Who makes the decisions in the government?</td>
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<td>Who holds power in this form of government?</td>
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<td>How are the people’s views taken into account?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does this government use money or barter system?</td>
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<td>How does the government raise money?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How does your country defend itself?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is one benefit of your country’s government?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is one drawback of your country’s government?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
GRAPHIC NOVEL PLAN WORKSHEET

WRITE THE PLAN FOR YOUR STORY! WHATEVER YOU DON’T KNOW ON THESE TWO PAGES, LEAVE BLANK AND FILL IN AS YOU GET TO KNOW YOUR STORY.

BIGINNING:

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR STORY:

Who is your **protagonist**?

Who is your **Antagonist**?

What is the **conflict** in your story?

What is your **plot**?

What is the **theme** of your story?

What is the **setting**?

RISING ACTION:

CLIMAX

FALLING ACTION:

RESOLUTION:

ENDING:
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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 June 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 2012 we will be working in eight schools in New York and New Jersey. Connect and download free curricula at TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:

Honorable Margaret S. Chin,
New York City Council

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