Rubble Kings transports the viewer into the crime-ridden world of New York in the 70’s. Through the film we see a city under the grip of an economic crisis, the catalyst for the surge of gang activity that would take over neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs, the South Bronx being the most affected. The film shows how hopelessness and fear lead people to seek out community, and at times, the kind of community that materializes is not so positive. Through raised social and political consciousness, however, formerly violent youth learn that education and peaceful co-existence can be more empowering for marginalized communities than guns and violence.

The film explores the following themes, which were drawn from the NYC Scope and Sequence for High School Global History & English Language Arts:

Civic Ideas and Practices
Culture
Individuals, Groups and Institutions
Individual Development and Identity

WHY WE PICKED THIS MOVIE

Film is a powerful medium that can inform, entertain, educate and serve as a catalyst for social change. Tribeca Youth Screening Series showcases the exciting work being produced in the independent film community. Films such as Rubble Kings have been chosen for their educational relevance, but also for their cinematic merits, and provide students with access to documentary films, filmmakers, and subject matter not typically explored in mainstream Hollywood fare. In the process, they are introduced to new places and new ideas, and experience innovative approaches in storytelling that highlight and reinforce the skills and themes they are studying in their English Language Arts and Social Studies classes.

PREPARING YOUR CLASS

Preparing students to be critical viewers is different than simply having them watch a film. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a film is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. One key step is having students read and complete the activities in the Study Guide (which they will receive at the screening). The following pre-screening activities will help your students engage with the film as critical viewers and prepare them to be active participants at the screening event and in the classroom work you do surrounding the film.
PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In preparation for viewing this film, you can have your students discuss some of the following questions:

• What do you know about the history of New York City during the 1970's?
• What do you know about the South Bronx?
• What groups have lived in the community over the years?
• Do you see any parallels between NYC today and NYC in the 1970s?
• How can the formation of gangs and widespread violence throughout a city reflect the state of that city’s social, political and economic climate?
• How can a weak economy impact a city’s population and infrastructure? What typically happens to cities and their populations when they face debt?
• What does political consciousness mean? How does one attain it?
• What is a gang? What role do gangs serve in society? Can gangs ever be non-violent and spread a positive and empowering message in the communities they operate in?
• What do you know about the history of hip hop? Who were some of its founding members?
• What does battle mean in hip hop and break dancing? Why is this an interesting use of the word?
• What is a documentary film? How does it differ from a narrative film or the news? If a film is a documentary, does that mean that it is depicting the “truth”?

RESEARCH IN ADVANCE

Goal: To help your students prepare to view Rubble Kings by having them research and review key terms and film vocabulary. Helpful background information on these technical terms can be found on the following websites:

• www.filmsite.org/filmterms.html
• www.blackpanther.org
• www.oldschoolhiphop.com

Time: 30-60 minutes

KEY TERMS

Street Gang
Black Panthers
Hell’s Angels
Young Lords
South Bronx
Hip hop
Break dancing
Truce
Swastika
Outlaw
Colors
Turf
DJ Cool Herc
Afrika Bambaata
Warlord
Gestapo

FILM VOCABULARY

Documentary film
Narrative film
Director
Editing
Score
Point of view
Archival footage
PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

GANGS OF NEW YORK

Goal: Students will be paired in groups and research the historical rise of gangs in New York City. Through their research, they will learn what societal and economic factors have helped gang activity to thrive through the decades.

You will need: Computers and Internet access, pens, loose-leaf paper or journals

Time: One class period/45–60 minutes

- Depending on the size of your class, divide your students into groups of 3–4.
- Assign each group a twenty-year span of New York City gang history to research starting with the year 1900.
- Explain to the groups that they will be responsible for researching the history of New York gangs, how they were formed, the reasons why they thrived, what some of their activities were, as well as the impact they had on the city.
- Students should feel free to highlight key historical figures, be they famous gangsters, police officers, mayors, politicians, etc. as well as pertinent historical events such as Prohibition, for instance.
- Each group will present their findings to the class. It may be a good idea to have the groups present chronologically.
- After the groups present, conduct a group discussion about what the class learned. A question to consider asking is: What did students learn about New York City history that they previously were not aware of, i.e.?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HIP HOP

Goal: Students will each pick a hip hop pioneer from the list below and conduct research on how their subject impacted the movement. Feel free to add other names to this list in order to accommodate the number of students in your class. Students will have the opportunity to write a mini-biography of the subject and present their findings to the class.

DJ Cool Herc
Grandmaster Flash
Cold Crush Brothers
Afrika Bambaata
The Furious Five
The Treacherous Three
Kool Mo Dee
Sylvia Robinson
Sugar Hill Gang
Run-DMC
Biz Markie
Doug E. Fresh
Salt N’ Pepa
MC Lyte

You will need: Computers and Internet access, pens, loose-leaf paper or journals

Time: One class period/45–60 minutes

- Explain to students that they each must choose a hip hop pioneer from the list above and conduct research to learn more about their subject’s life and art.
- Students should be given plenty of time to research their subject and to collect any images that will aid their presentation.
- After students complete their research, have them type out or write up their findings to create a short biography. If the classroom is equipped with a printer and speakers, students may also want to print out a photo of their subject and choose an original song to play for the class.
- Each student will then present their subject’s biography to the rest of the class.
SOUTH BRONX MURAL TOUR

Goal: To learn about the history of graffiti, how it emerged from the birth of hip hop as its own viable form of self-expression, and to witness its influence on the streets of the South Bronx.

You will need: Scheduled visit to Tats Cru, train passes

Time: 90–120 minutes

- The tumult of the 70s and 80s gave birth to a renaissance of art and activism that has been fostered in the South Bronx for the past 15 years. Organizations such as The Point CDC, Sustainable South Bronx, Rocking the Boat, Bronx Academy of Art and Dance, etc. have helped turn the area from a once neglected and stereotyped region, to a thriving community where art and environmental consciousness is thriving.
- Graffiti writing, one of the art forms that came out of the hip-hop movement in the Bronx, is alive in the area. Tats Cru, a Hunts Point collective of graffiti artists with international exhibitions under its belt, specializes in artistic murals that area youth have participated in. The South Bronx Mural Tour would start with a visit to the Tats Cru studio where students can learn about the history and art of graffiti writing from professional artists. To contact the group, visit www.tatscru.com.
- After the visit to the graffiti studio, you can take your students on a walk in the “Village of Murals,” the name local activists have given the area located near Garrison Avenue in Hunts Point. You can find a map of the neighborhood with photos of each mural and their location by clicking on the following link www.thepoint.org/campus.php. The walk should not exceed an hour.

POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: BLACK PANTHERS AND YOUNG LORDS

Goal: Students will research the history of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords in order to better understand how the two movements influenced the gangs from Rubble Kings to drop their weapons and become politically conscious.

You will need: Computers with Internet access, history books, pens, loose-leaf paper or journals

Time: 60–90 minutes

- Divide your class into two groups and assign each group a political movement to focus on.
- The research groups should study the historical factors that brought about the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, paying close attention to the Civil Rights movement and how it gave a voice to formerly marginalized African Americans and Latinos.
- Ask each group to focus on some of the key personalities that came out of each movement as well as the political and educational activities the Panthers and the Lords tried to foster in their communities.
- Students should carefully consider the reasons for the creation and rise of these two groups. Ask your class to think about the political climate of the 60s and 70s in the US and how it affected the African American and Latino populations as well as other marginalized and underrepresented groups.
- After each research group has gained a thorough understanding of their subject and compiled their information, have them share what they learned with the class.
GOING FURTHER

These writing activities are meant to serve as a follow-up to the Pre-Screening Activities and the Lesson Plan. Assignments can be used as in-class writing activities, homework assignments, or the jumping off point for longer-term art, creative writing, or research projects.

SELF-EXPRESSION AS A FORM OF EMPOWERMENT

**Goal:** *Rubble Kings* shows how self-expression can lead to self-empowerment as former gang members transition from violence through the influence of hip-hop culture. Through writing a personal essay about self-expression, students will each tap into what inspires them and makes them who they are.

**You will need:** Pens, loose-leaf paper or journals

**Time:** One class period/45–60 minutes

- Explain to your students that they will each be writing a personal essay about how they express themselves in their personal or public lives. Students can write about their passions, be it art, music, dance, film, fashion, cooking, etc.
  
  **Please Note:** You can turn this activity into a show-and-tell by asking students to bring any artwork, clothing, prepared food, or other item to share with the class if they feel comfortable showing or sharing.

- Ask your students to think about how they feel when they are expressing themselves as well as how others respond to them. Students should also consider why their particular mode of self-expression is unique to them.

- Once your students have finished writing, have them share their essays with the rest of the class. Along with their essay, students can also showcase their talent or mode of self-expression.

**RUBBLE KINGS JACKETS REVISITED**

**Goal:** Using the embellished jackets of the gang members from *Rubble Kings* as a reference, students will put their own positive spin on the personal statement by creating jackets with empowering statements of self-affirmation.

**You will need:** Pens, pencils, markers, construction paper, colored paper, scissors, glue

**Time:** One class period/45–60 minutes

- Explain to your students that they will be creating their own positive versions of the jackets from the film. Students will have drawing and painting tools in order to create jackets that express who they are as individuals, what they are passionate about, and what inspires them.

- Each student will be given construction paper and drawing materials to create their jacket design. Ask students to think of words, phrases, and images or symbols that inspire them or represent who they are. These can then be used to embellish their jacket drawings.

- Once finished, students will share their creation with the rest of the class.

We’d love to know how you are using these study guides in the classroom!

Email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org to share lesson plans and ideas.