**ABOUT THE FILM**

*Smoke Signals*, the award-winning independent feature by Chris Eyre is a magical story that connects the histories and destinies of Victor and Thomas, who grew up together along the Spokane River on the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation. The film follows Victor as he is called across the country to retrieve his father, but Thomas is the only one around who can help him get there. Amidst struggles with poverty and domestic violence familiar to many communities, this narrative raises questions of authenticity. Who is a real Indian and what does it mean to be Native American in the late 1990’s?

Central to *Smoke Signals* is the story of triumph and reconnection, and the journey of healing and rebirth, as two young men come to terms with themselves and the turbulent circumstances that caused Victor’s father to leave the Reservation, never to return.

**ABOUT THE FILMMAKER**

**CHRIS EYRE, DIRECTOR**

Chris’ journey began in Portland, Oregon in 1968 and his path led to Klamath Falls, Oregon where he was raised. An enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribe, Chris’ creative talents became apparent at a young age. Because of his love for photography, Chris attended Mt. Hood Community College with the intent to expand his talents. It was here that he learned the basics of three-camera television and his desire to become a director was born. After studying, Chris created several short features before making *Smoke Signals*, which was followed by *Skins* (2002) and *Edge of America* (2003). Chris currently resides in Rapid City, South Dakota with his daughter, Shahela.

**THINKING AHEAD**

**Q.** When you think of the word ‘father’ what comes to mind? What feelings do you have about fathers? What role have fathers played in your life?

**Q.** Have you ever thought about what hair says about a person? Do all Native Americans have long hair? Can we communicate with our hair?

**Q.** Do you know what domestic violence means? How can we start to speak more openly in our communities about it?

**Q.** What do you think might be different about telling a story through a documentary film and a narrative film?
SMOKE SIGNALS

The first major nationally acclaimed film release written, directed and co-produced by Native filmmakers, *Smoke Signals* fleshes out complexities and the humanity of Reservation life. Using humor and folklore, Director Chris Eyre’s characters resonate across generations and backgrounds. Victor, whose father left home while suffering alcoholism, is thrust into confronting his family, his roots and the magic and healing that continues through Native American oral traditions today.

• Among the 3.5 million Native Americans in the U.S. the poverty rate is double that of other ethnic groups, and is almost 30% on Reservations. Some have looked to Casinos as “anti-poverty programs” or a solution, yet others argue that the money raised is not fairly distributed to all tribal members.

• Statistical reports have found that U.S. children without fathers in their homes are more likely than others to be poor, have higher odds of being incarcerated, and higher teen pregnancy. They are also more likely to be abused and less likely to be healthy and do well in school.

• Violence in our homes does not discriminate. Anyone may be coping with the effects of violence at home. Fifty percent of men in the U.S. who abuse their wives also abuse the young people in the home. Every year, between 3–10 million children witness a parent or loved one being harmed by domestic violence.

• Hair has both sacred significance and a troubling history for Native Americans in the U.S. Traditionally, Native people did not cut their hair, unless mourning the loss of a loved one. From 1879–1980 U.S. Indian Residential Schools forcibly cut young Indians’ hair in a misguided and abusive attempt to erase their heritage and identities.

• Cultural magic is invoked and shared through stories, symbols, rituals and the practicing of belief systems. This magic can catalyze healing, stimulate imagination and preserve heritage. Though elements of magic may be shared across cultures, creative and spiritual expression is best understood within each unique context.
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.
CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

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.)
CRITIQUE: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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.

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!)
**RESOURCE GUIDE**

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

*Finding My Way: A Teen’s Guide to Living with a Parent who has Experienced Trauma*
By Michelle D. Sherman and DeAnne M. Sherman
A practical, accessible handbook for young people dealing with the stress and isolation of witnessing a parent or loved one’s trauma.

*Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*
By Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps
A 15th century to the present history connecting Black Hair with politics, economics and everyday relationships in the United States.

*The Storyteller’s Beads*
By Jane Kurtz
Set in 1980’s Ethiopia, a Christian and a blind Jewish girl learn to overcome their prejudices against one another through the dangerous course of fleeing their country.

*Trickster*
By Matt Dembicki
Over twenty Native American storytellers partner with illustrators to present traditional trickster and shape-shifter folklore in vivid comic form.

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

*More than That...*
A film by Rosebud Reservation High School Students
Lakota Sioux youth respond to Diane Sawyer’s special program entitled ‘Children of the Plains’ with this two and a half minute short video protesting Sawyer’s portrayal of them as “poverty porn”.

*The Story of Fathers and Sons*
A film by Luna Productions
A graduating class of Lower East Side high school students collaborate on this HBO documentary about fathers in, and absent from, their communities.

*Roots of Love: Exploring Hair in the Sikh Community*
A film by Harjant Gill
*Roots of Love* shows how the spiritual significance and traditions surrounding hair for Sikh Communities in India is being cut short by modern youth fashion and assimilation.

*Magic Radio*
A film by Stéphanie Barbeey and Luc Pete
In Niger, with 80% illiteracy, small outlets have demonstrated the magic of radio as central to democratic communication and the sharing of culture, information and entertainment.

**ONLINE RESOURCES**  DISCOVER MORE INFORMATION ON THE WEB ABOUT THIS FILM AND RELATED TOPICS.

*Bursting the Bubble*
burstingthebubble.com/steps.htm
Interactive web resource from Australia for youth who are personally experiencing family violence or know someone who is. This source is filled with quizzes, checklists, stories and facts.

*Red-Haired Students Targeted*
hartland.patch.com/articles/red-haired-students-at-hartland-middle-school-targeted-in-south-park-inspired-bullying
Article about ‘Kick a Ginger Day’ organized by Hartland Middle School youth targeting red-haired students with bullying and violence.

*Myths and Legends*
myths.e2bn.org
Interactive online digital story creator allowing students to write text, create characters, borrow images and build their own animated stories which can be shared.

*The New Normal: Stay at Home Dads and Gay Parents*
Article highlighting the ways that traditional ideas of fatherhood and parenting are vastly transforming in the United States.

**GET INVOLVED**

*Volunteer:* Help parents and children stay connected. Donate your time to support a local ‘Fatherhood’ or healthy parenting initiative in your area. Share your experiences and questions involving diverse family and parenting structures.

*Test Yourself:* Download the ‘Love is Not Abuse’ iPhone app, an educational resource demonstrating the dangers of digital dating abuse. Don’t have an iPhone? Visit the website and attend an online training, then share the site and the information you’ve learned with your friends: lovesnotabuse.com/web/guest;jsessionid=C59A551BC870F6377174A4655B2EAA3

*Become a Storyteller:* Talk with (and most importantly listen to) elders in your family to uncover a magical story that was passed on to them. Learn the story and practice telling it with body language and emotion. Feel the magic of keeping the story and its history alive by sharing it with your classmates, friends and the other adults in your life.
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

Chartered by an act of Congress in 1989 as the 18th museum of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of American Indian (NMAI) is dedicated to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Americas. The NMAI Film and Video Center (FVC) produces the Native American Film + Video Festival. The FVC is headquartered at the NMAI in New York, where it provides screenings of and information services about Native film, video, radio, and television in the Americas and Hawai‘i.

americanindian.si.edu
nativenetworks.si.edu (English)
redesindigenas.si.edu (Spanish)

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