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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 Common Core Learning Standards. We understand that educators are multifaceted artists in their own right, so we encourage you to utilize your own artistic experiences to spark dialogue. The in-class activities are all optional and can be easily tailored to your students’ specific needs and learning levels.

MESSAGE FROM FILMMAKER

I grew up on Staten Island, NY. I used to deliver pizza where Eric Garner was killed. That was my backyard, my home. My father worked for the Department of Investigation (DOI) for over a decade. He wore a gun and a shield to work every day. I had two major league tryouts and came very close to playing professional sports.

The core story and characters of MONSTERS AND MEN are based on personal stories from my life and how I’ve experienced them. MONSTERS AND MEN is a triptych, and at its core tries to tackle the questions I ask myself every day. What can I do? What part do I play in all of this? As a black man? As a citizen? The answers are not always so straightforward, but I know I must do something.

This film is as much a question as it is a challenge to myself to do something. Anything. However small. However big. For me, it starts with opening a conversation. And hopefully others can feel as empowered as I do, and will be inspired and motivated to become active participants in the fight for justice. Activism is personal. It should be.

—REINALDO MARCUS GREEN

ABOUT THE FILM

‘Monsters and Men’ is a feature length motion picture that focuses on the impact of a police killing of an unarmed black man caught on camera in the tight-knit neighborhood of Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. Inspired by Eric Garner’s controversial death by way of police excessive force, the film is told through the eyes of a bystander who films the deadly act, a conflicted African-American police officer, and a local high-school baseball star turned activist. The film explores the emotional and psychological implications on an entire community when pushed to the brink, offering an intimate portrayal of race, family, and consequence. ‘Monsters and Men’ is written and directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green; starring John David Washington, Anthony Ramos, and Kelvin Harrison Jr.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Staten Island, NY native Reinaldo Marcus Green is a writer, director, and producer. He graduated from NYU’s Tisch Graduate Film School and participated in the 2017 Sundance Institute Directors and Screenwriters Lab, where he was named a recipient of the 2017 Sundance Institute/Time Warner Fellowship. He was one of Filmmaker Magazine’s 25 New Faces of Independent Film (2015). His short film ‘Stop’, premiered as an official selection at the Sundance Film Festival (2015). In 2018, he returned to Sundance with his feature film directorial debut of ‘Monsters and Men’, which won the Special Jury Award for Outstanding First Feature and acquired for theatrical distribution by NEON. ‘Monsters & Men’ was also supported by the Tribeca Film Institute (TFI) and screened to a hometown New York City audience at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival.
In an article with REMEZCLA, writer / director Reinaldo Marcus Green describes a late night heated conversation with a close friend and NYC police officer, about the graphic viral video capturing the untimely and controversial death of Eric Garner after resisting arrest in front of a Staten Island bodega. Their disparate viewpoints on whether or not the witnessed police excessive force was warranted, and the utter frustration Green felt in knowing that anyone could freely justify such horrific circumstances, inspired him to delve into his first feature film ‘Monsters and Men’. Green thought to himself, “just because he was resisting, that doesn’t mean he should be dead”. Furthermore, this unexpected argument led him to appreciate that multiple / polarizing perspectives on issues surrounding race and police brutality continue to thrive amongst many Americans. According to Green, this film would ultimately provide him the opportunity to become an active participant in the ever-expanding social justice conversation.

‘Monsters and Men’ is a socially provocative and ever-expanding social justice conversation. According to Green, who captures the incident on his cell phone and video record a random interaction with three intertwined characters: Manny, the innocent bystander who captures the incident on his cell phone; Zyric, the baseball athlete on the verge of stardom; Officer Dennis Williams, the police officer questioning his loyalty to the force. These struggling characters carry the emotional baton throughout film, leading viewers from one storied perspective to another, reacting to the visceral circumstances surrounding the death of a beloved community member in front of the neighborhood bodega. Through the intimate experiences of these three unique individuals, we begin to understand the internal conflicts that arise when one’s moral and ethical foundations are compromised, and the human fear, anger, and frustration some people experience when societal systems expect and demand silence in return.

FILM IN CONTEXT

POLICE BRUTALITY - Refers to the use of unnecessary, or excessive force by police officers when handling civilians.

SOCIAL JUSTICE - Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.

WHISTLEBLOWER - A person who informs on a person or organization engaged in an illicit activity.

TRIPTYCH NARRATIVE - In film, a story structure that provides the opportunity to continue a single theme along three different perspectives, while also showcasing how these three elements are related and complement each other.

SOCIAL MEDIA - Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

BLACK LIVES MATTER - An international activist movement, originating in the African-American community, that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people.

STOP-AND-FRISK - A New York City Police Department practice of temporarily detaining, questioning, and at times searching civilians on the street for weapons and other contraband. This is what is known in other places in the United States as the Terry stop.
The authors reported that individuals with more intrusive police contact experienced increased trauma and anxiety symptoms as opposed to those who reported fair treatment during encounters with law enforcement. In addition, those who witness these events directly or indirectly may also be impacted negatively. Scholars have coined the term “racial trauma” or race-based traumatic stress, which may result from racial harassment, witnessing racial violence, or experiencing institutional racism. The trauma may result in symptoms of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, feelings of humiliation, poor concentration, or irritability.

REFLECTION: Discuss what you think would be the potential social implications of an entire community that is being heavily policed and surveilled. How would you feel living in a community that is under what seems to be a police state?

DISCUSSION PROMPT 4: SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISM - THE COLIN KAEPERNICK EFFECT

In 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, gained national attention when he chose to kneel on one knee rather than stand while the U.S. national anthem played before the start of an NFL game. After a great deal of backlash, he explained that his kneeling was in protest against police brutality and racial injustice in the United States. Colin Kaepernick was not the first athlete to use his platform to take a sociopolitical stance in front of millions of viewers, in a socially charged time where one is easily ostracized for planting their political flag. Legendary athletes like Muhammad Ali refusing to fight in the Vietnam War, to the Tommie Smith and John Carlos Black Power Salute during the 1968 Olympics medal ceremony, African-American athletes have been compelled to creatively and controversially demonstrate their discontent towards racism and the overall American status quo. Today, with the ever-expansive digital landscape, athletes far and wide have continued to push their personal political agendas to millions of loyal fans, as witnessed by Lebron James’ polarizing “I can’t breathe” practice jersey prior to a game, in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

REFLECTION: Discuss whether or not any specific celebrity or athlete has ever inspired you to reflect on social justice issues. When is it appropriate / not appropriate to share your personal political beliefs?

DISCUSSION PROMPT 5: SPORTS AND SOCIETY - A PATH OUT OF POVERTY FOR YOUTH

According to Fair Play for Children, sports play a massive role as a dynamic tool to prevent crime among youth. To this day, sports continue to be a major outlet for young people from inner city communities providing structure, resources, and mentorship, all elements which help build personal character and may potentially lead towards higher education and employment. In ‘Monsters and Men’, Zyric’s storyline is as complex as any other. Naturally quiet in demeanor, Zyric maintains a keen focus on becoming a major league baseball player. For this reason, Zyric is the pride and joy of his entire community as is evident when Manny greets him in passing, calling him a “young Jeter”. Stardom and an opportunity to “get out of the hood” is within reach, but any mishap could undermine his and his father’s plans to be recruited by a Major League Baseball Team.

REFLECTION: In your opinion, how much emphasis do you place on sports as a means to help build a better future for themselves?

Can you relate to Zyric’s aspiration and perhaps discuss how sports is oftentimes seen as the only one way to have a successful future?

KEY QUESTIONS

I. In your opinion, what are the benefits, as well as potential risks, of telling a triptych-structured story through the medium of film?

II. When reflecting on police brutality headlines in recent years, do you think that these police related events are simply isolated acts of violence against Black and Latino men, or do these staggering trends (233 African-Americans shot and killed by police in 2016) offer a glimpse into a more deliberate campaign driven by systemic racism?

III. What differences and similarities can we find between Eric Garner and Ronald Stokes, both unarmed Black men killed by police nearly 50 years apart?

IV. How has the digital age, with the rise of social media and personal mobile devices, helped put a spotlight on the historically pervasive trends of police brutality in communities of color?

V. Has the copwatch movement helped protect communities of color from potential unethical and excessive policing methods or has it undermined the necessary parameters and jurisdiction needed for effective law enforcement?

VI. In light of the staggering scientific reports that demonstrate a high incidence of mental health issues in communities of color, how much of the social justice movement in the U.S. is in actuality more of a response to a public health crisis?

VII. Do acts of political and social defiance from star athletes and celebrities only affect us in a mainstream cultural context or is there a resonating impact on actual social / political policies and change?

VIII. Why do you think the writer/director decided to name the film ‘Monsters and Men’? Who are the ‘Monsters’ and who are the ‘Men’ in this story, and are they clearly differentiated?

IX. Why do you think the director chose to visually capture the killing of an unarmed black man at the hands of police officers the way he did? How did this technique affect the scene on an emotional level?

X. In ‘Monsters and Men’, the triptych style of storytelling allowed for open-ended conclusions. What do you think are the respective fates of Manny, Zyric, and Officer Dennis?
IN-CLASS GROUP ACTIVITIES (OPTIONAL)

A. CREATING A TRIPTYCH OF YOUR COMMUNITY

AGE GROUPS: MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL
TIME: 45 MINUTES
TOOLS: MARKERS, PAPER, PENCILS, SCISSORS

A Triptych is a series consisting of three painted or carved panels intended to be displayed together. The wholeness of the Triptych that is achieved through the effective use of elements and principles of art is what allows for the formation of a feeling of completeness.

ACTIVITY 1: Using a pencil and a landscape 8 X 11 white piece of paper, draw a map of your community. Make sure to use the entire extent of the page, extending your map from top to bottom, and left to right. Include places and things on your map that you feel make your community a unique place to live. Show the roads and avenues you use to get to these places. Your map doesn’t have to be exactly how it is in real life. Next, fill in the shapes of the places and roads with colored markers / crayons, highlighting any special landmarks that are easily recognizable. Try using two or more colors on each feature of your map. You can also add small sketches of people who are frequent, live, or work in any particular area on your map.

When your map is finished, fold the landscape paper in three sections. See image below for reference. Once the three sections have been folded, carefully use a pair of scissors to cut each section.

If possible, share your Community Map Triptych with your class by taping the three consecutive sections to the board / wall. Walk around and see what your classmates also produced.

B. THE POWER OF EMPATHY THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

AGE GROUPS: HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY
TIME: 45 MINUTES
TOOLS: BOARD OR CHART PAPER, MARKERS, PAPER, WRITING UTENSILS, VIDEO LINKS, WIFI, TV / SMARTBOARD, SPEAKERS

OBJECTIVE: This lesson helps students understand empathy and identify ways to be more understanding toward others, without compromising one's own values.

VOCABULARY: empathy [em-puh-thee] (noun) the understanding of or the ability to identify with another person's feelings or experiences

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
• What does it mean to put yourself in someone else's shoes?
• What kinds of behaviors show that you understand someone's feelings?
• What are the benefits of empathy? How does it differ from sympathy?
• How does research provide an opportunity to better understand others?

ACTIVITY 2: Watch the following Youtube videos. All provide a unique perspective on the stressors experienced in an environment where police officers frequently engage with local community residents. Each video explores the potential fears and emotional stress experienced by members of either side of the line.

BENEATH THE VEST: POLICE OFFICER PTSD & MENTAL HEALTH
https://youtu.be/jOUziW6SwT4

WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE STOPPED BY POLICE AS A BLACK MAN
https://youtu.be/-tk3w-A07_s

HOW TO DEAL WITH THE POLICE | PARENTS EXPLAIN | CUT
https://youtu.be/coryt8IZ-DE

Using chart paper, create a Venn Diagram that explores the potential stressors that both Police Officers and People of Color experience respectively when interacting with one another. Then identify the shared fears that are experienced by both.

POSSIBLE FEARS EXPERIENCED DURING INTERACTIONS
C. UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS AS CIVILIANS

AGE GROUPS: HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY

TIME: 45 MINUTES

TOOLS: BOARD OR CHART PAPER, MARKERS, PAPER, WRITING UTENSILS, COPY OF NYPD PATROL GUIDE

ACTIVITY 3: Explore the contents of the NYPD Patrol Guide. The NYPD’s Patrol Guide contains the rules that NYC police officers must follow in carrying out their official duties. When the CCRB investigates a complaint of police misconduct, it focuses on the details of the encounter and determines whether or not the officer’s actions were improper based on the Patrol Guide, New York State law, and the United States Constitution.

Using the link below, explore the details of each code of conduct mandate for all NYC patrol officers. Then, identify the specific scenes from the film that capture both direct and indirect police encounters with civilians. Independently or in a group, analyze the nature of these scenes and identify any and all potential police conduct violations.

https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ccrb/investigations/nypd-patrol-guide.page

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ABOUT TFI
TRIBECA FILM INSTITUTE® partners with storytellers and joins them in breaking barriers of access, exposure, and sustainability in the media landscape. Each year, we identify a diverse group of exceptional filmmakers and media artists then empower them with funding and resources to fully realize their stories and connect with audiences. Our education programs empower students through hands-on training and exposure to socially relevant films, offering young people the media skills necessary to be creative and productive global citizens. We are a year-round nonprofit arts organization founded by Robert De Niro, Jane Rosenthal, and Craig Hatkoff in the wake of September 11, 2001.

ABOUT THE TFI SCREENING SERIES
The TFI Screening Series is a media literacy program and yearlong presentation of films that provides New York City youth and educators with access to free, relevant programming. Available in classrooms or in theater venues, each screening is followed by a discussion, a workshop, or Q&A talkbacks with the filmmakers to enhance students’ academic engagement and foster critical thinking skills. Offering documentary and scripted films, the TFI Screening Series provides an interactive experience where students participate in thematic discussions, connect with filmmakers, and engage with each other through post-screening activities. Screenings are available on a first-come-first-served basis and are free of charge.

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM WRITER
Kevin A. Lopez is an independent filmmaker and educator, with a masters degree in Film and Performance from the University at Buffalo and a Special Education Master of Science degree from City College. He is currently the Executive Director of LPZ Cinetech, Ltd., a non-profit organization that teaches kids the art and craft of making films. From 2013 to 2016, Kevin served as the Lead Film Studio Teacher for the NYC Summer Arts Institute, and was co-chair of the film production department at Frank Sinatra School of the Arts. Kevin has worked with the NYC Department of Education as the Coordinator for the Moving Image Blueprint and was a co-author on the first New York State Board of Regents Media Arts Standards. Kevin has also executive produced the feature films ‘The Inquisition of Camilo Sanz’ (HBO), ‘The Hudson Tribes’ (Amazon Prime), and ‘Paradise City’.

THIS STUDY GUIDE IS MADE POSSIBLE BY

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ALIGNMENT TO COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1
Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2
Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7
Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8
Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10
Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.