WHEN THE DRUM IS BEATING

A FILM BY WHITNEY DOW

STUDY GUIDE

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
ABOUT THE FILM

The 20-member band Septentrional has been making music for 62 years as Haiti’s most celebrated big band. This inspirational documentary charts the history of Haiti from its triumphant independence from French colonialism to 2010’s devastating earthquake—all set to the vibrant music of Septentrional and punctuated with its members’ personal memories. Featuring a wealth of live rehearsal and performance footage, *When the Drum is Beating* is a poignant and high-energy story of resilience.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

**WHITNEY DOW, DIRECTOR**

Dow is an award-winning filmmaker whose directing credits include *Two Towns of Jasper*, *I Sit Where I Want: The Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education*, and *Unfinished Country*. His work has received numerous honors, including the Peabody, Columbia DuPont, Gotham, and Beacon awards.

“I was introduced to the 60 year-old band Septentrional and I was intrigued by the idea of doing a film on something that had survived for decades in a place where very little lasts... The members of Septentrional are all working hard to pursue their dreams, not in spite of, or as response to, the conditions in their country, but because that is simply what artists do.” —Whitney Dow

THINKING AHEAD

**Q:** What words and images come to mind when you think of Haiti? What do you think life is like for teenagers living there today?

**Q:** What do you know about the earthquake in Haiti? Why do you think that it took a natural disaster for the rest of the world to turn its attention to Haiti?

**Q:** When you think of how the media or network news covers the events in Haiti, what do you think is missing from their reporting? What would you like to learn more about regarding Haiti, the earthquake, Haitian youth, etc.?
THE FILM IN CONTEXT

HAITI PAST AND PRESENT

On January 12, 2010, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck the republic of Haiti, leaving the country in ruins. The quake not only shattered Haiti’s already poor infrastructure, it also devastated a nation already in the grips of poverty, leaving an estimated one million people homeless, while affecting the lives of an estimated three million people. According to the Haitian government:

- 230,000 Haitians died as a result of the earthquake.
- 300,000 people were injured.
- 250,000 residences were destroyed and 30,000 commercial buildings.
- Haiti’s infrastructure, including all hospitals in the capital as well as transport and communication systems, were severely damaged or destroyed.
- Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital and the most developed city in the country, lay in ruins.

In order to understand the devastation wreaked by the earthquake, the impact of which is unimaginable in a highly industrialized country like the US, we need to first look at Haiti’s tumultuous history. Did you know:

- Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas and the 4th poorest in the world. Once the richest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti was France’s most prosperous colony, owing its riches to growing and importing coffee, sugar, and indigo—a blue dye.
- In 1804, after years of colonialism under France and Spain, Haiti became the world’s first black republic.
- Toussaint Louverture, one of the most prominent figures in Haitian history, was instrumental in winning the republic’s independence, having organized an army and led a successful revolt in the north of the country.
- From 1957-1986, Haiti endured the brutal dictatorships of Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier, and his son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier respectively. The Tonton Macoutes, a paramilitary militia set up by Papa Doc to ensure his stay in power, were responsible for over 60,000 deaths in Haiti.
- The year 1990, almost two hundred years after its independence, marked the first democratically held elections in Haiti in which Jean-Bertrand Aristide won the presidency. A Catholic priest, Aristide came to power after decades of military coups and carried out substantial reforms that made him unpopular with Haiti’s military and business elite. He was overthrown in the 1991 Haitian coup d’état.
- Such political insecurity and the failure of the country’s leaders to invest in developing Haiti’s natural and human resources have significantly contributed to Haiti’s current state of underdevelopment and poverty.

The recent presidential elections in Haiti are seen as a step toward renewal, as the country currently struggles to pick up the pieces. Today, numerous non-governmental organizations like Doctors Without Borders, UNICEF, the Clinton Bush Fund, CARE, etc. are on the ground, aiding with the rebuilding process. While it is estimated that the process may take decades, current efforts aimed at restoring the country’s infrastructure through the building of hospitals, schools, ports, etc. aim to bring the small nation back from the brink.
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.
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.

Haiti: The Tumultuous History—From Pearl of the Caribbean to Broken Nation
By Philippe Girard
Through the lens of Haiti's history, this book explains how colonialism and slavery have left a legacy of racial tension, both within Haiti and internationally.

Haiti Noir
By various writers
Eighteen authors who either live in Haiti or have connections to the country contribute stories of greed, love, lust, murder, and other traditional noir themes.

Krik? Krak!
By Edwidge Danticat
A collection of short stories detailing daily life under dictatorship in Haiti by one of the most renowned contemporary Haitian writers. Her writing has also appeared in magazines like The New Yorker and The Progressive.

Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Triptych
By Marie Vieux-Chauvet
Available in English for the first time, Marie Vieux-Chauvet's stunning trilogy of novellas is a scathing response to the struggles of race, class, and gender that have ruled Haiti.

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

Children of Haiti
This film follows three of the over 500,000 orphaned children in Haiti as they reflect on their country and their lives, while sharing a common dream of education, government assistance, and social acceptance.

The Agronomist
A profile of Haitian radio journalist and human rights activist Jean Dominique that weaves historical footage of Haiti's troubled past with one-on-one interviews with Dominique and his devoted wife, Michele Montas.

Haiti: Killing the Dream
This 1992 documentary takes a close look at Haiti's first democratic elections and the violent history that preceded them.

Moloch Tropical
Raoul Peck, Haiti's most renowned filmmaker, delivers a searing critique of a government corrupted by power. Completed just months before the devastating earthquake, this film explores the ruinous costs of political dysfunction in Haiti.

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

Orchestre Septentrional
orchestresextentrional.org
Official website featuring the band's history, music, photos, and more.

Nouvelle Vie Haiti
nouvelleviehaiti.org
Official website of organization working to train young Haitians to become leaders and impact their communities and environment by responding to trauma and the mental health needs of Haitians affected by the 2010 earthquake.

Clinton Bush Haiti Fund
clintonbushhaitifund.org
Official website for foundation created after the 2010 earthquake by Bill Clinton and George W. Bush with the aim of helping Haitians by investing back into local businesses and organizations.

Panos Caribbean
panoscaribbean.org
Official website of the Caribbean-based organization advocating for human rights, proper healthcare, environmental justice, and accuracy in reporting news about Haiti and Jamaica.

GET INVOLVED

Speak out: Hold a poetry slam in your school, local church, or community center to raise awareness for those affected by the Haiti and Japan earthquakes. Invite friends from your school and your neighborhood to participate in the slam.

Donate: Help to raise funds in your school for CARE, an organization working to fight global hunger in countries like Haiti, with a special focus on poor women. For more information visit www.care.org.

Organize: Become a Make a Difference team leader for Save the Children, a US-based organization that aims to improve the lives of children throughout the world. You can organize fundraising events to help support the victim’s of the Haiti and Japan earthquakes. For more information visit www.savethechildren.org.
ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
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

“Good Audience” music by: Teddy Blanks
Tribeca Youth trailer music by: The Budos Band

Curriculum writer: Flonia Telegrafi

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The Tribeca Film Institute (TFI) is a year-round nonprofit arts organization that empowers working filmmakers through grants, professional development and resources, while also helping New York City students discover independent film and filmmaking.