ZONED IN

A FILM BY DANIELA ZANZOTTO

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TRIBECA CINEMAS

STUDY GUIDE

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

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ARTS ENGINE
MEDIA THAT MATTERS FILM FESTIVAL
ABOUT THE FILM

Daniel Nartey is starting his teen years; two older brothers in prison, already a father at 15, almost a high school drop-out, when an incredible journey begins. Filmed over the course of nine years, Zoned In traces the remarkable real-life journey of Daniel from a Bronx high school to an Ivy League university while simultaneously exploring the role of race and class in the American education system. Narrated by Daniel himself, the movie celebrates the accomplishments of this extraordinary young man while still presenting an honest depiction of his struggles to fit in amongst the privileged students at his college and his candid questioning of a system that has allowed him to excel but has left so many of his friends and family members behind.

ABOUT DANIEL NARTEY’S LIFE:

By the age of 15, Daniel Nartey had dealt drugs, fathered a son, seen his mother get arrested, and witnessed two of his brothers get thrown in jail. When he turned 16 his mother decided to move his family to the south Bronx for a fresh start. When Daniel arrived he enrolled in Taft High School, one of the most crime-ridden public high schools in New York in the 1990’s. Confronted with all of these challenges Daniel decided to take control of his life. He graduated from Taft in 2000 as the first member of his family to graduate from high school.

Upon graduating, Nartey was awarded a scholarship to attend the Ivy League Brown University. At times during his college years Daniel felt out of place because of his race and socio-economic background. Once more, he used his disadvantages to motivate himself to succeed. He graduated from Brown in 2005 and has since returned to the Bronx to teach. Daniel is trusted and admired by his students. His job gives him the opportunity to encourage students in the Bronx to achieve their goals and reach for their dreams, even under the hardest of circumstances.
“Filming for Zoned In started in 1998. The original intention was to make a documentary about the challenges of public education in what was then one of the most notorious and chaotic high schools in the South Bronx. In this harsh environment, the young people I met still carried a hope that they would fulfill their dreams, but Daniel stood out. I was captivated by his personality, maturity and his desire to succeed, all the while knowing he was fighting against incredible odds. Meeting and watching someone who was putting all his might into resisting what society had reserved for him was inspiring and grabbed my interest as a filmmaker. It provided an opportunity to go far beyond the locality of a single school or issue. I started to film without yet knowing where the story would take me or how I would deal with it, but convinced that if I committed to it something valuable would come of it.

In order to fully capture the challenges, struggles, successes, and frustrations that Daniel was experiencing in a way that exposed a bigger picture, it became clear that the filming would need to be over a long period of time. It would need to follow Daniel’s academic path to its natural conclusion, whatever that might be. Through the long journey that took him out of the ghetto into elite America, Daniel’s unflinching sense of loyalty to his family and community was both his strength and his weakness. His story paints a picture of the reality of being poor and black through a constant reflection on himself, his beliefs, his past, present, and future. He hides nothing and all the personal emotions stand out for all of us to see and feel.

This is what I have tried to convey with Zoned In, by using a style that wasn’t based in vérité cinema with its focus on everyday things, and instead focused on the broader emotional strokes and events. Ultimately a simple story of achievement against the odds, the narrative of the film is strong, direct, and natural but progresses through a complex and emotional path I was fortunate to meet Daniel, follow him, and witness this young man carve out a strong sense of identity and commitment to what he believes in.”

Daniela Zanzotto specializes in documentary filmmaking. She grew up in Rome, Paris, Mexico City, and London and is of French and Italian parents. She is now based in London. In 1996 Daniela completed her master’s degree in French history and literature at the University of Rochester. She then spent two years at CUNY in the comparative literature PhD program, but after taking a short course in filmmaking, she set off for Paris to make her first documentary, If the Walls Could Speak, about public housing in Paris that was used as an internment camp for French Jews. Daniela’s second film was Kissed by Angels, and her Battaglia documentary was commissioned by four European and Canadian broadcasters.
UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS

SOME INFORMATION TO HELP YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND DANIEL’S OBSTACLES:

During the 1990’s while Daniel was attending Taft High School, it was extremely rare that a student was accepted into an Ivy League University.

- Being located in the South Bronx, in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, Taft H.S. earned a notorious reputation as one of the most crime, violence, and gang-ridden schools in the city, if not the entire country.

- Metal detectors were installed to prevent students from bringing weapons in the school.

- The danger of working at Taft was highlighted in May of 1997, when Jonathan Levin, an English teacher at the school was murdered by a former student in his Manhattan apartment.

TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

- What might have happened had Daniel chosen to not to graduate?

- Why does his graduation seem like an unlikely path? Was his choice to graduate something that was easy? What are some sacrifices he may have had to make?

- Is there any guilt Daniel might feel for choosing to leave his family behind and go to Brown? What do you think his siblings may have been thinking about his choice?

UNDERSTANDING BROWN UNIVERSITY:

Brown University is an American Ivy League University located in Providence, Rhode Island, about 170 miles from New York City. Brown is noted for it’s rich history as it was founded in 1764. Brown was the first college in the nation to accept students regardless of religious affiliations.

- Located in Providence Rhode Island, Brown University is a private, 4-year university

- Brown admits only 14% of students who apply

- 40% of students are white, 17% Asian, 9 % Hispanic, and 7% are black.

- The 3 most popular subjects of study are Biology, Economics, and International Relations

- According to the Princeton Review, Brown’s full-price tuition is $35,584.00 per year ($142,336 for 4 years).

- 44% of students receive financial aid to pay for their undergraduate tuition.
UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS

BROWN IS PART OF THE IVY LEAGUE BUT WHAT IS THE IVY LEAGUE?

The Ivy League is an athletic conference comprising eight private institutions of higher education in the Northeastern United States. The term is used to refer to eight schools: Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Princeton University, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University. The Ivies have been competing in sports as long as intercollegiate sports have existed in the United States.

The Ivy League Today: The Ivy League has come to represent something different in more recent history. The Ivy League schools are now mostly known for being highly selective, with acceptance rates ranging from about 7 to 20 percent from an application pool that consists of the top high school students in the country. The phrase Ivy League historically has been perceived as connected with academic excellence. An Ivy League education has undeniable benefits such as increased attention to your resume and a valuable alumni network. You’ll also receive instruction and mentoring that can help position you for competitive graduate programs and prestigious awards like the Rhodes Scholarships. But Ivy League educations come at a price – both in tuition, and anxiety over the schools’ highly competitive admissions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>ACCEPTANCE RATE</th>
<th>TOP 10% OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS</th>
<th>SAT (25/75 PERCENTILE)</th>
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<tr>
<td>BROWN</td>
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<td>94%</td>
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<td>COLUMBIA</td>
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<td>94%</td>
<td>1980-2220</td>
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<td>CORNELL</td>
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<td>87%</td>
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<td>90%</td>
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<td>7.1%</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<td>YALE</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>2080-2370</td>
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</tbody>
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SOURCE: Admissions Consultants

TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:

- Why does African-American history seem like a good fit for Daniel’s path of study? Why might he have a well rounded perspective on African-American studies between his university classes and his life in the South Bronx?
- Why might Brown be an unlikely possibility or choice for a Taft student?
- Is there any guilt Daniel might feel for having gone to Brown and not stayed with his family members in New York City? What might he be regretting?
- Does Daniel appear to be proud of himself for graduating and attending Brown? Do his feelings about his decision change during his time there?
UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS

FACTS ABOUT THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM ACCORDING TO THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

- In 2007, almost 60% of students graduated at the end of five years.
- The gap separating Black and White students narrowed by 2.6 percentage points between 2006 and 2007 as calculated by the State.
- The gap separating Hispanic and White students narrowed by 0.9 percentage points between 2006 and 2007.
- In 2007, almost 24% of students with disabilities graduated at the end of five years.
- In 2007, over 32% of English language learners graduated at the end of five years.

SOME ONLINE RESOURCES TO PLAN FOR YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:

Check out some statistics online based on the New York City Public School Reports about education.
- [http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/SchoolReports/default.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/SchoolReports/default.htm)

The College Board is a not-for-profit association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,400 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®).

The Princeton Review helps students, parents, and educators achieve the best results at every stage of their educational careers. By focusing on preparation and practice, we help students improve their performance in the classroom and on standardized tests. Through their website, they help parents, teachers, students and schools navigate the complexities of school admissions.
IN THE CLASSROOM

FURTHER WATCHING:

**AKEELAH AND THE BEE (2006)**
Eleven year old African-American Akeelah Anderson comes from a working class family living in South Los Angeles. Akeelah is a bright girl, especially when it comes to words, but finds life at poor Crenshaw Middle School boring and unchallenging. Her natural aptitude for words spurs the school administrators, led by Principal Welch, to convince her to try out for the process of the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

**BAGHDAD HIGH (2008)**
Four classmates (Kurd, Christian, Shiite, and Sunni/Shiite) in Baghdad are given cameras to document their last year in high school, resulting in a rare firsthand view of what it’s like growing up where sectarian violence rages right outside the classroom window.

Jamal Wallace is sent to a prestigious prep school in Manhattan due to his exceptional test scores, and basketball skills. He soon befriends the reclusive writer, William Forrester. The friendship leads William to overcome his reclusive nature and for Jamal to defeat the racial prejudices and pursue his true dreams.

**THE CLASS (2008)**
The Class is François Bégaudeau’s autobiographical novel of trying to teach French language to a rowdy classroom of African teenagers on the outskirts of Paris. He explores issues of race, class, identity, and colonial history against the backdrop of a turbulent French society.
IN THE CLASSROOM

FURTHER READING:

**THE FREEDOM WRITERS DIARY: HOW A TEACHER AND 150 TEENS USED WRITING TO CHANGE THEMSELVES AND THE WORLD AROUND THEM,** Freedom Writers
Straight from the front line of urban America, the inspiring story of one fiercely determined teacher and her remarkable students.

**HOW THE GARCIA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS,** Julia Alvarez
Fifteen tales vividly chronicle a Dominican family’s exile in the Bronx, focusing on the four Garcia daughters’ rebellion against their immigrant elders.

**THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET,** Sandra Cisneros
The House on Mango Street deals with a young Latina girl, Esperanza Cordero, growing up in the Chicago Chicano ghetto. Esperanza is determined to “say goodbye” to her impoverished Latino neighborhood.
IN THE CLASSROOM

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Consider Daniel's childhood and the limitations he faced. Many of his family members have served time in prison or sold drugs. How do these choices inform Daniel's path and choices? What inspires him to change his life? How much are our identities based on choices, and what part is based on things we cannot control?

- Who does Daniel think he is before he goes to Brown? How do you think he would describe himself? Do you think his idea of who he is changes after he goes to Brown?

- How does Daniel's point of view affect his experience at Brown? How do other people view his identity? Are they accurate in their views?

- Does Daniel's perspective on life change after he attends Brown?

- While Daniel is at Brown he gets the impression that he doesn’t belong there? Why does he think this? Is he right?

- What is identity? How do you think people define themselves? How do you express yours?

- Who has the power to create your identity? Do you choose how other people see you?

- How does Daniel find friends with a similar identity to his? Does this change the nature of his experience once he meets them? How do their backgrounds keep them together?

- Beyond academics, what does being at Brown add to Daniel’s life? What does it take away? Can that be a positive thing?

FOCUS ON YOUR SCHOOL AND TAKE ACTION!

When Daniel arrived at Brown he felt like an outsider. Consider ways to take Action in making your school an even better place for all races, religions and social classes:

**Write!** Create a list of some issues that you think could be improved in your school. Write a letter to your principal about possible ways to fix these situations and how the changes could influence your education.

**Discuss!** In the film Daniel marches with the group Onyx. Their purpose is to centralize the needs and experiences of the Black students at Brown and to promote unity among students of the African Diaspora. Consider the importance of a social club in a student's educational experience. Talk to your teachers about how you may go about creating your own group. How can that group educate your peers about your background or identity?

**Research!** Search the internet or school library for some information about colleges you may want to attend. Look into some specific programs that may fit your interests or needs. How might each school allow you to follow your dream career path? Talk to your teachers and peers about where you might find further resources or information about careers.