

# Educational Documentaries

B2 – C1

Module 2

Here's What  
We Will Be  
Learning:



# Summary

- ❑ Introduction.
- ❑ Learning With Documentary Films.
- ❑ Strategies to Engage Students.
- ❑ Exercise.



A good documentary or educational film is not raw experience. The material has passed the mill of reason, it has been sifted and interpreted.

— *Rudolf Arnheim* —

AZ QUOTES

# Vocabulary

**Gamut:** the complete range of a particular kind of thing.

**Bewail:** to express great sadness or disappointment about something.

**Dawn of a new era:** the beginning of something.

**Exemplify:** to be or give a typical example of something.

**Multisensory:** involving or using more than one of the senses.

**Grapple with:** struggle to deal with or overcome (a difficulty or challenge).

**Compelling:** evoking interest, attention, or admiration in a powerfully irresistible way.

# Introduction

We are at the dawn of a new era of massively amplified learning, creativity and inventiveness. Documentaries have covered what seems to be the gamut of school experiences.

The documentary is an underrated genre in the film industry, often described as one for those who are so “crazy” about a topic, they have to make a film about it.

Educational documentaries provide a glimpse into the future of education, learning and creativity. Many of these documentary films feature leading experts and creative innovators in the fields of technology, education and online learning to talk about how we can use technology to enhance individuality, increase creativity levels and teach the process of innovation.



# Learning With Documentary Films: Strategies to Engage Students

Documentaries and films can bring the world to students in very real ways. It helps us expand our world, introducing us to values, struggles, innovations, and beliefs beyond our daily experience.

This generation of students is film and video oriented; we should use this, not bewail it. There is a need to meet students where they are, and the continuously growing digital landscape is an important opportunity for educators. How can teachers use short documentary films in a meaningful and compelling way for young people?

The following strategies exemplify ways in which short documentaries can enhance classroom environments:

## **Build Social & Emotional Awareness:**

In order to grab and hold students' attention, educators need to reach them emotionally. Films are multi-sensory. The impact of audio and visual components supports students' retention of information. Documentaries are emotionally powerful vehicles that can transport students to other cultures and create an awareness of global issues from the inside out through feeling and empathy.

When enhanced with written reflection, films help students develop social and emotional learning in ways not available from textbooks or lectures. Students can experience the world through real-life people as well as see and feel what it is like for a person living around the world. There is nothing more humanizing for students than short documentary films; they grab the heart, offer a window into the daily lives of real people, and allow students to see other cultures and places as populated by living, breathing human beings.

## **Connect to Current Events:**

Students are exposed to a range of real-world problems in their daily lives. Some of these issues include poverty, substance abuse, violence, consumerism, indigenous rights, immigration, modernization, and the effects of environmental changes. A short documentary can expose students to any number of global issues, reduce isolation, and allow students to connect to innovations and inspiration from sources beyond their immediate environment.

Students look at the past for relevancy and relationships. For example, students who may grapple with the idea of the French Revolution can relate to the more recent revolutionary actions in the Arab Spring and the Baltimore riots of 2015.

Screening a short documentary film in a social studies class offers a vehicle for critical thinking and analysis of the historical events: To encourage students to reflect on their own lives and scrutinize their actions/choices in meaningful ways. The combination of writing with film has resulted in more rich understanding for students and output options that encourage creative and critical communication.

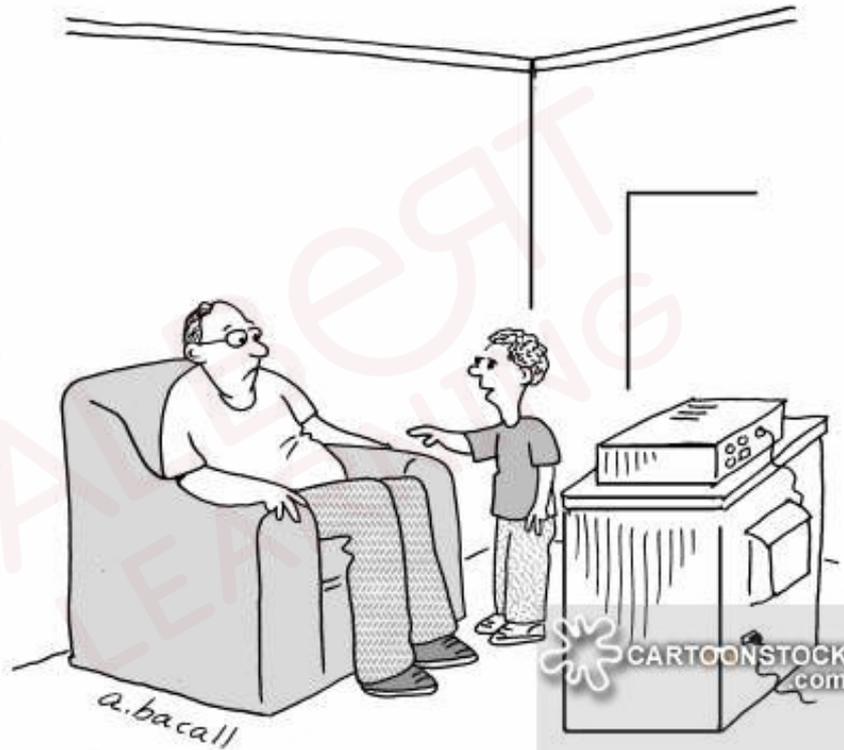
## **Incorporate Reflective Writing Assignments:**

A short documentary can increase students' literacy with connections to a source, to self, and to the world. Just as students use quotes from a book or text to prove an analytical thought, students use the film as a source to justify their reasoning.

After viewing and discussing a film, a writing prompt can provide a way to integrate knowledge from various points of view and apply newly learned ideas. An English or art teacher may use a short documentary to study character development or themes in writing such as identity, family values, or commitment. A science or history teacher may examine how the issues explored in a film relate to students' lives, such as the effects of environmental changes, immigration, the global economy, or consumer decision-making.

Following are some of the best educational documentaries, which are a must-see for both teachers and students. Some of them reveal the weaknesses of the educational system. Some show the challenges children around the world face in order to obtain an education. What they all have in common is that everyone can learn from them and be inspired by their stories. They show that some of the things people take for granted are in fact very precious to other people and that education isn't accessible to everyone.

- **Hoop Dreams.** : This highly engaging film follows two boys from Chicago as they strive to become professional basketball players.
- **High School.** : This film observes students, teachers and administrators in Philadelphia's Northeast High School.
- **Brooklyn Castle.** : This endearing film is about a champion middle school chess team.
- **Us and our Education.** : This documentary explores learning disabilities and how they affect school and work.



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**"My teacher gave us an assignment to watch educational television over the vacation. When you went to school Gramps, did you have to listen to educational radio over the school vacation?"**

# Exercise:

- 1) After reading about educational documentaries, do you think they actually help students? Explain your answer.
- 2) What are the different types of educational documentaries being made? Name four topics on which educational documentaries have been made.
- 3) Give meanings of the following:
  - a) Gamut
  - b) Compelling
  - c) Bewail
  - d) Endearing
- 4) Have you ever seen such documentaries related to education? Describe the documentary.
- 5) What topic would you choose to make a documentary film?