

VANCOUVER BIENNALE

BIG IDEAS WITH FILM

— TEACHER'S GUIDE

Unit Title: Narrating Stories Through Moving Images

Films: *When All the Leaves Are Gone* (17 min), *Salmon* (3 min)

Time required for the instruction: 9 sessions

Grade(s): 10-12



Unit Overview:

This guide has been designed to familiarize students with approaching a film as a unique form of media that can tell a story, raise awareness and impact the viewer. Inspired by Alanis Obomsawin's short films *When All the Leaves are Gone* and *Salmon*, students are invited to work together and share a story that matters to them by creating 1 - 2 minute short films.

The following activities are best suited for senior photography, digital media and film studies classes. Otherwise, the project can be modified and interesting for students in other subjects, they simply need access to phones or digital cameras and editing software. Depending on each class' course of study, this guide can be considered a complete unit or could be a section of a larger unit that is anchored on raising awareness about important social and environmental issues.

About the Films:

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When All the Leaves Are Gone – 17 min:

As the only First Nations student in an all-white 1940s school, eight-year old Wato is keenly aware of the hostility towards her. She deeply misses the loving environment of the reserve she once called home, and her isolation is sharpened by her father's serious illness. When Wato's teacher reads from a history book describing First Nations peoples as ignorant and cruel, it aggravates her classmates' prejudice. Shy and vulnerable Wato becomes the target of their bullying. Alone in her suffering, she finds solace and strength in the protective world of her magical dreams.

Based on the personal experiences of Alanis Obomsawin, *When All the Leaves Are Gone* powerfully depicts the feelings of exclusion, hurt, and loss suffered by the young Wato. Her voice-over commentary presents a child's perspectives on her situation, and the black and white film footage (a skilful blend of current and archival material from the NFB and CBC) provides vignettes of life in the Quebec of 1940. Wato's situation is a difficult one, and one which was experienced by countless numbers of First Nations children, whether in reserve, residential, or urban schools.

Salmon – 3 min:

Expert fishers for their entire lives, Líl'wat Elders Cora and Daniel Wells share their deep knowledge of salmon fishing, cleaning and smoking. They speak in their traditional language, and Obomsawin shows their process through still photos.

This short is part of the L'il'wata series. In the early 1970s, at the outset of her documentary career, Alanis Obomsawin visited the Líl'wat Nation, an Interior Salish First Nation in British Columbia, and created a series of shorts that provide personal narratives about Líl'wat culture, histories and knowledge. She combines personal interviews she conducted with responses in their traditional languages, together with still images to share personal and candid indigenous perspectives in her early films.

Curricular Big Ideas:





Core Competencies

- Creative thinking (Generating and developing ideas)
- Communication (Work together to plan and carry out activities)
- Share and develop ideas
- Social Responsibility (Solving problems in peaceful ways and valuing diversity)

What students will UNDERSTAND:

Objectives:

- Using film inquiry worksheets, student will record important events of the film
- Students will be able to identify the role and position of documentary film
- After the film screenings, in groups of 3, students will describe and analyze social and emotional meaning of the films
- After a teacher demonstration of panning techniques in iMovie, students will practice using the technique with sound and images.
 - In groups of 3-4, students will focus on the themes discussed in class and plan a 7-10 image photo essay to be turned into a very short film using iMovie.

Essential questions in this unit:

- Who is Alanis Obomsawin?

- Why is she making documentaries and films inspired by real life?
- How does Alanis create films to tell her story; what strategies or elements do you see?
- What is documentary and what is its purpose?
- How can we tell short stories through photographs?
- How can we turn photographs into moving images?
- What is the Ken Burns effect?
- What impacts do the zoom and pan and the angle of the camera have on the audience? How does it make us see an image or feel about it?
- How does she narrate a short story? What film elements or strategies does she use?

Curricular Competencies: What students will DO

Students will be able to use the following creative process(es) to create and respond to art:

- Create photographic images with an audience in mind
- Communicate and respond to social and environmental issues
- Plan and produce moving image collaboratively by using iMovie software
- Analyze the ways in which moving images convey meaning through movement, sound, image, structure and form
- Explore the role of story and narrative in expressing First Peoples' perspectives, values, and belief including protocols related to ownership to First Peoples' oral texts

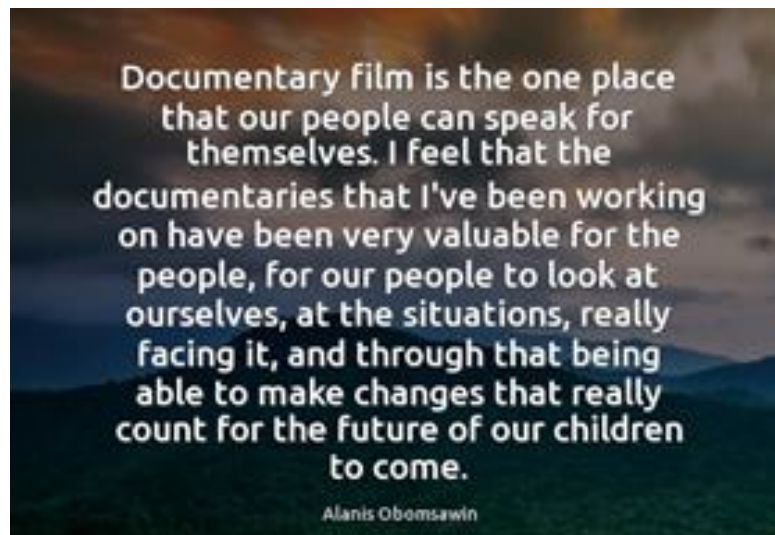
Concept & Content: What students will KNOW

Students will know the following concepts and content:

- Materials, processes, techniques, and image making technologies, used in digital photography
- Role of photographer and viewer
- Moving-image elements, principles, vocabulary, industry terms, and symbols
- Contributions of Alanis Obomsawin to the genre of documentary films and storytelling, and Ken Burns in techniques of documentary film production



- Traditional and contemporary First Peoples' worldviews, history, and stories communicated through moving images



First People's Principles of Learning:

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and sense of place).

Vocabulary:

documentary, close up, long shot, angle of the camera, zoom, pan, Ken Burns effect, transition, fade in, fade out, focal point, editing

Materials & Technologies

Students will use the following materials, tools, equipment:

- Digital Camera/iPad
- Computer (If using iMovie or Final Cut, then they have to be Mac)



- Video editing software such as Final Cut Pro, iMovie, Adobe Premiere Pro or Adobe Premiere Clip
- Projector
- Internet connection

Sequence of activities and discussions:

Lesson #1: Watch and discuss *When All the Leaves are Gone* and *Salmon*:

Introduce students to Alanis Obomsawin and share some of the following clips or interviews, or others from our BIG IDEAS with Film Director's page for Alanis Obomsawin.

<https://www.vancouverbiennale.com/big-ideas-director/alanis-obomsawin/>

Making Movie History: Alanis Obomsawin, 5 min

https://www.nfb.ca/film/making_movie_history_alanis_obomsawin/

Classroom Elder Roberta Price, CBC Radio, 5:32 min

Short audio clip from CBC Radio's Early Edition program about Elder Roberta Price, an Indigenous educator working with teachers and students across the province to share her story and her knowledge about issues related to indigenous peoples.

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2664456559>

Ask students why they think Obomsawin makes films. Help students understand Obomsawin's purpose and overarching themes that drive her as a filmmaker.

Give students the BIG IDEAS Film Inquiry questions and review together before screening the films. Have students take notes as they watch, then at the end of the film, students will work with their peers and have their worksheets completed. Have groups shuffle and spend 5 minutes sharing and note copying in the new groups. Come together as a class and summarize or share the answers from each group.



Lesson #2: Is it a Documentary film or a Drama?

For teachers, a review different genres of documentary film making may be helpful with this list from Dartmouth University:

<https://researchguides.dartmouth.edu/filmgenres/documentaries>

1. Ask students to share what they think documentary film is. What distinguishes a documentary film from a typical Hollywood film or a broadcast news story?
2. Share the list of documentary genres with them. Have students take 2 minutes to write down their ideas about:
 - Can they think of examples they have seen of films that match these genres?
 - What are the similarities and differences?
 - What are some common objectives of documentaries?
3. What filmmaking techniques are used in the documentaries you have seen?

Some examples may include:

Footage: live action (vérité or contemporaneous), re-enactments, informal (smartphone, home movies), archival, animation, something else?

Dialogue: interviews, monologue, conversational, scripted, voice-over, narrator, singing, no dialogue, something else?

Shots/Angles/Transitions: close-up, medium, long, wide, point of view (POV), two shot, low angle, high angle, montage, something else?

4. What do they think about dramatization/re-enactment – can acting to show an event be part of documentaries?
5. Essential questions for today—



- What is a documentary film?
- How is Alanis Obomsawin creating this film?
- What is the difference between documentary and non-documentary movies?

Ask students thinking back about their notes from the films they watched last class:

- What are some of the film elements she used to tell a story?
- How did Alanis Obomsawin make her stories in these films, what strategies did she use?
- *When All the Leaves Have Fallen* is based on the experiences of Alanis Obomsawin, with re-enactment, real archival footage from CBC and NFB archives, and uses first person narration with Wato telling the story in her own words. Which elements felt like documentary, what felt fictionalized?

Lesson #3: The Ken Burns effect

This is a simple film editing effect that uses static photos, smooth zooming and panning to bring still frames to life. Documentarian Ken Burns made the effect famous, but many filmmakers throughout history have used it, too.

Teachers can demonstrate the technique and students can keep it in mind as they plan their film project, photos, and how they will use them to tell a visual narrative.

-Vocabulary needed: zoom in, zoom out, close up shot, camera pan.

-Ken Burns Effect in iMovie - How to zoom in & out and hover over an image

4 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jSeHkY6PgE>

-Tips to help you decide how to use Ken Burns Effect in your video:

<https://www.wevideo.com/blog/for-work/being-ken-burns>



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-Digital photos and story planning:

This project includes taking photos, adding audio files and editing. Students should be familiar with the basics of photography. Draw students' attention to the composition, lighting, and the purpose of documentary photography.

Resources for documentary photography:

Documentary Photography 101: Tips, Tricks and Other Important Details

<https://contrastly.com/documentary-photography-101-tips-tricks-and-other-important-details/>

A Complete Guide to Documentary Photography

<https://www.pixpa.com/blog/guide-documentary-photography>

Have students form groups of 2-3 and begin to plan their short narrative photo film project. What story do they want to tell? Fictional? Documentary? What stories do they wish people knew more about? Now's the chance to bring attention to those stories. Together choose the topic and divide the group tasks.

Lesson#4, 5: Capturing the photographs

Students will create 7-10 photographs, working in groups of 2 or 3.

Lesson#6: Presentation

Lesson #7, 8: Work class on editing the films

Lesson# 9: Presentation and critique.

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Formative Assessment:

Collect the BIG IDEAS film inquiry question worksheet and observe the workflow during the work. One on one interview and conference with students.

Summative Assessment:

After students complete their short film in their groups, have student fill out a self-assessment and peer assessment.

BIG IDEAS with Film Inquiry Questions

1. Who is the film maker, what are they known for?
2. What is this film about? What are the main messages the filmmaker wanted us to understand?
3. If you could ask the film maker a question, what would you ask?
4. What were you thinking as you finished watching the film?



5. What part of the story told by the film was the most powerful or memorable? Why?

6. Sometimes fiction and documentary films explore important social or political issues. Describe any specific social or political issues that affect the story. How do these issues impact the people we saw in the film?

7. Documentaries can show us new ways of understanding an issue or topic in our world. Describe an aspect of the film that showed you something you hadn't seen before, caused you to think in a new way, or helped you to understand something more thoroughly than before.

8. What particularly appealed to you in the cinematic presentation of the film, such as the way in which particular scenes, images, or sounds were presented?

9. For documentary films: what conventions does the filmmaker incorporate in this film? Do they use voiceover, re-enactments, archival footage, interviews?

10. Are there multiple viewpoints? Do they agree or contradict each other?



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11. Who are the dominant voices in the documentary? Are they official sources such as government representatives, or are they experts of another kind? Or are they everyday people from the street? What is their connection to the documentary's subject?

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