

LESSON ONE

Before viewing ANCESTORS IN THE AMERICAS

Grade Level: 9-12

Estimated Time: One class period

Materials:

- Copies of the “Day in the Life” handout at the end of this lesson plan
- Computer, Internet access
- Blackboard
- Notebook paper

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will define terms related to the process of documentary filmmaking and give examples.
2. By outlining a proposal for their own documentary, students will understand how a particular point of view or perspective affects how a story is told, and understand what external factors (age, race, etc.) influence perspective.
3. Students will distinguish the differences between primary and secondary sources.

Background:

ANCESTORS IN THE AMERICAS presents the untold history and contemporary legacy of early Asian immigrants to the Americas from the 1700s to the 1900s. Creating first-person voices through an innovative “documemoir” approach, ANCESTORS brings to life a largely unexplored past not found in standard textbooks and invites a new understanding of American history.

Procedure:

I. Vocabulary

Write the following terms on the board and have students define them. Where possible, encourage them to generate examples (i.e., *Eyes on the Prize* for documentary; *first person* for point of view; *eyewitness accounts* and *photos* for primary sources, etc.).

- documentary
- point of view
- primary source
- secondary source
- public history
- personal history
- visual effect
- auditory effect

II. Activity

The students will outline a short “day in the life” documentary about a selected student, with the time frame being the first day of the current school year.

1. Divide the students into groups of four each. Have one person tear notebook paper into four pieces and mark accordingly:
 - “X”: This person is the *subject* of that group’s documentary.
 - “R”: *Record Keeper*- writes down and organizes information generated by the group.

- “T”: *Time Keeper*- paces the group so it stays within the allotted time frame for completing tasks.
- “P”: *Presenter*- reports the group’s ideas to the rest of the class.

After folding the paper and mixing, students draw one and assume that role for the remainder of the class.

2. Pass out the “Day in the Life” handout to each group. Go over the contents. Instruct students, as a group, to go through the table and generate ideas for each section, with each person acting in their assigned role of Record Keeper, Presenter, etc. Students have **30 minutes** to complete the task.

- A. Synopsis: What happens in the documentary? Who are the players?
- B. Perspective/Point of View: Does the subject narrate the story (first person)? Or is information relayed from the “camera’s” point of view? Other possible perspectives to take: the subject’s teacher, friend, mom or dad—even a stranger or member of the local community the subject sees randomly.
- C. Primary Sources: Do they use the subject’s photographs, letters or diaries?
- D. Secondary Sources: Does the documentary incorporate other voices such as the subject’s family or friends?
- E. Visual Effects: What format? Black and white, or color? Are there special effects? Do you incorporate elements such as cartoons or the use of text?
- F. Auditory Effects: Is there music? If so, what? Sound effects? Recorded interviews or voice-overs?

3. After 30 minutes, have each group’s presenter share their ideas with the rest of the class. Invite reactions, and write them on the blackboard. After all the groups have presented, point out that, even though the subject matter for their documentaries is essentially the same (a student’s first day of school), the treatment and presentation of it varies widely.

4. Through discussion, link the students’ own experiences with brainstorming ideas for a documentary with the process behind making *ANCESTORS IN THE AMERICAS*, which they will view in the next class. They may want to read the interview with filmmaker Loni Ding where she backgrounds her project. The interview may be found at: <http://www.naatanet.org/community/filmmaker/index.html>. Another good resource for the students to consult is the web site for [Motion-Picture Industry: Behind-the-Scenes](#), which offers comprehensive insight and background into the process of making movies.

III. Discussion

Some possible questions to ask:

1. Is a documentary historical “fact?” How could a particular point of view affect how a story is told? What place do individual people’s stories have in a documentary? What, in your opinion, is a “documemoir?”
2. What perspectives might filmmakers have? What would influence perspective (age, race, etc.)? Did you see this in your own documentary?
3. What are the differences between primary and secondary sources? How might a filmmaker decide which sources to use? As a viewer, how important is it to be critical about what sources are chosen?
4. How can we find out about events that were not recorded when they happened?

****If there is not enough time to discuss, you may assign these questions for homework. Have students choose two questions to answer, and turn in their written responses at the next class.**

Assessment Suggestions:

1. The teacher may evaluate student participation in class discussion, as well as how well each student fulfilled the assigned role within groups.
2. Students will turn in their completed “Day in the Life” charts, along with answers to the discussion questions.
3. Students should be able to define and give examples of vocabulary words such as “primary source” and explain how they relate to documentary video making.

Extension Activities:

1. Ask one or two students to share their answers to the discussion questions with the class.
2. Have students choose a short article in a newspaper or “news magazine” and identify what perspective is being represented. Have them articulate another way that same subject could have been portrayed. Mention that journalists often strive to be objective. Ask students if they think that is possible, and what “objective” and “subjective” mean.
3. Have there been certain historical events that were framed one way by a certain group of people and differently by another? Record responses on the board.

National Standards:

This lesson addresses the following national content standards established by McREL at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards>.

Understands the historical perspective:

- Knows how to evaluate the credibility and authenticity of historical sources;
- Evaluates the validity and credibility of different historical interpretations;
- Knows different types of primary and secondary sources and the motives, interests, and bias expressed in them (e.g., eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, magazine articles, newspaper accounts, hearsay).

- GROUP #-**
 A. Subject:
 B. Recorder:
 C. Time Keeper:
 D. Presenter:

“Day in the Life” Brainstorming Sheet

1. Pretend you are creating a “day in the life” documentary about the selected student in your group, with the time frame being the **first day of the current school year**.
2. Using the chart below to record your answers, brainstorm ideas for how your documentary would tell the story. Be sure to detail what primary and secondary sources you would use, and give your documentary a title.

TITLE: _____

A. Synopsis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens? • Who are the players? 	B. Perspective/ Point of View <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who narrates? • How is the story told? 	C. Primary Sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: photos 	D. Secondary Sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: eyewitness accounts 	E. Visual Effects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black and white, or color? • Special effects? • Cartoons, text? 	F. Auditory Effects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music? • Sound Effects? • Recorded interviews, voice-overs? 	G. Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What else?