



Unsettled: Seeking Refuge in America

VIEWING GUIDE

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teaching the film

Unsettled: Seeking Refuge in America is a feature documentary that takes an intimate look at the journey and struggle of LGBT refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East as they flee persecution in their countries to seek better and safer lives in the United States. The film follows Junior (from the Congo), Subhi (from Syria), and Cheyenne and Mari (from Angola) beginning with their arrival to the United States. Although each story is unique, there are common threads of struggle, survival, vulnerability, hope, and resilience as they navigate the process of building a life in the United States. **Unsettled: Seeking Refuge in America** is a rich and layered film that brings to the forefront the vulnerability of LGBT population around the world and the challenges of making a home in a new country when you are alone and dependent

Grades 9 - 12

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All SFFILM Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFILM Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

on a system with limitations and the kindness of strangers.

Taught in conjunction with the curriculum guide, **Unsettled: Seeking Refuge in America** will challenge students to take a closer look at the struggle and traumas experienced by the film's subjects and to think critically about their own biases while expanding their knowledge on the global refugee crisis and LGBT rights worldwide.

Discussion questions and supplementary materials facilitate further research into related topics such as LGBT Rights Movement, Universal Human Rights, Technology for social good, and the power of education, art/film to affect positive social change.

More info at sffilm.org/education



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about the film

Directed by Tom Shepard

(USA 2019) English, 84 min

Powerfully and heartbreakingly detailing the challenging process that LGBTQ refugees must go through to find safety and security while starting over in the US, Tom Shepard's (Scout's Honor, 2001) inspiring new documentary profiles four people who have come to San Francisco to save their lives. Over the course of this unforgettable group portrait, Subhi (from Syria), Junior (from Congo), and Mari and Cheyenne (from Angola) experience roadblocks and triumphs as they reflect on their respective histories and try to create a home for themselves in an environment that is not always welcoming.

Once in San Francisco, they are met with setbacks but each maintains hope for a better future – Mari and Cheyenne record an album, Subhi starts a tour speaking on behalf of Syrian refugees and finds love, while Junior faces challenges of homelessness and gender non-conformance. Witnessing their different experiences in the city, Unsettled urgently and poignantly examines the systems in place to help them that can only go so far in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. It is their hope paired with the empathetic people willing to help them that gives them opportunities to overcome even the toughest obstacles.

subject areas

Cultural Studies

Ethics

Humanities

International Development

International Relations

Social Studies

Social Sciences

Political Science

World Affairs

discussion questions

pre-viewing topics and discussion

This guide can be used to tap into breadth and depth of subjects relating to local, national, or international issues, depending on the best fit for your class.

Themes directly related to the film include LGBT rights around the world, LGBT refugee and asylum-seekers, safety-nets and systems of support for vulnerable populations, and more emotionally based themes such as persecution, trauma, empathy, and resilience.

Unsettled: Seeking Refuge in America

can also be used to explore broader themes in your classroom and tie them in with current and historical events that directly impact your students locally, nationally, and internationally. These themes include Universal Human Rights, The Global Refugee Crisis, The LGBT Movement, Technology for Social Good, and the power of art/film to affect social change.

Many of these topics are delicate and require some time to prepare for a discussion and shouldn't be one-off lessons, but thoughtfully integrated into the curriculum. The post-discussion questions and supplemental materials will provide information to assist you in developing your lessons/ discussions/ and projects related to these topics.

To begin, students will take more from the film if they have a basic understanding of what refugee and asylum-seekers are, reasons why they have been displaced and/or fled their country of origin, and the process they must go through to relocate. Additionally, it is important students understand the difference between the terms migrant, immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. To give more context, students should be introduced to the global refugee crisis and an overview of LGBT rights worldwide. These are big topics and should be explored with care and in more depth (either before or after viewing the film).

- What is the difference between an immigrant, migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker, and internally displaced person?
- How does the refugee and asylum process differ?
- How many refugees and asylum-seekers are there worldwide?
- Where are refugees and asylum-seekers coming from? Why are they fleeing their country?
- What is persecution?
- What does the US government consider persecution? (making individuals eligible to seek asylum)?
- Why is seeking asylum a daunting process?
- What does LGBT mean?
- What kind of human rights violations are LGBT people exposed to worldwide?

explore: human rights

Melanie Nathan, a Refugee & Asylum Advocate, told Cheyenne and Mari that it is "perfectly legal and there is nothing you are doing that is illegal at all (referring to seeking asylum)."

- What are human rights?
- What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
- What are the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers?
- Does international human rights law apply to LGBT people?
- Can depriving LGBT people of their human rights be justified on the grounds of religion, culture or tradition?

LGBT Rights FAQs
bit.ly/2r4PP06

Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.'
bit.ly/2HJaXAJ

Understanding universal human rights lesson plan bit.ly/2ljbk8



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discussion questions

characters and story

1. Asylum seekers, like refugees, must prove that they fear persecution in their home country, such as torture, imprisonment, or physical abuse. What kind of persecution and violence did Junior, Subhi, Cheyenne and Mari face before moving to the United States?

2. Cheyenne and Mari had to prove fear of persecution in their country of origin before a judge in the United States.

- Why did they Cheyenne and Mari have to go through this process?
- How did the process differ for Subhi and Junior?

3. Subhi spoke about hiding to not lose everything. He said that being gay you would be targeted from everyone, extremists, government, family, that they would come to your home and just kill you. Mari also spoke about being kicked out by the people you love and trust most and that she has an anger in her heart.

- What were some other examples of violence and prosecution that Subhi, Junior, Cheyenne, and Mari experienced from their own families? What did the family members do or say?
- Do you blame families or society for the way the families treated Subhi, Junior, Cheyenne, and Mari?
- Do you believe that people (e.g., their families) are capable of change?
- Was there a family dynamic that changed throughout the film? How did it change?

• How do you think this persecution from their family impacts their sense of self and their ability to deal with the challenges they face in the United States and how that contributes to the feeling of being “unsettled”?

4. Melanie Nathan- Refugee & Asylum Advocate, spoke about how difficult the process (relocating as a refugee or an asylum-seeker) is and how even if you are white and speak good English that is it still challenging.

- With all of the challenges, what networks of support helped Subhi, Junior, Cheyenne, and Mari survive and succeed? (e.g., individuals, groups and services).
- Which support/s did you find to be most beneficial in helping them succeed? Why?
- Where there any networks of support/ individuals that you did not view as positive in helping them succeed? Why or Why not?
- When each of them faced challenges and setbacks, did they have someone to support them (e.g., emotionally, financially)? If so, give some examples?
- Did a lack of support impact them negatively? If so, how?

5. Subhi, Junior, Cheyenne, and Mari had different experiences and different access to resources when they arrived in the United States. What were some of the similarities in their experiences when they arrived? What were the differences?

What do you think made the biggest difference in their experiences?

6. Aside from access and support, the film touched upon how each of the subjects coped with the trauma they had experienced and the current challenges they were facing. What were some examples of this?

- Were the strategies they used to cope with challenges and past trauma always positive?
- Give examples of some positive and negative ways you saw that they coped with the trauma and current challenges?
- What personal qualities/mindsets stood out to you that helped them be successful?

techfugees

How is technology helping to rebuild refugee lives and the lives of others? Give at least three examples.

Have students research and present how tech is supporting refugees.

Techfugees: Empowering the displaced with technology
techfugees.com

25 Most Innovative New Projects Using Tech to Help Refugees and NGOs tcn.ch/2yDjZwM

discussion questions

context

1. The film speaks about refugees and asylum-seekers being vulnerable and that LGBT refugees and asylum seekers are even more vulnerable. When resettling in a new country, what makes a refugee/asylum-seeker vulnerable?

• Why are LGBT refugees/asylum-seeker considered more vulnerable?

2. Cheyenne comments to the camera that she doesn't think "this happens" (stalking, following us, throwing rocks or calling names on the street) in the US? There is a slight pause and no reply.

LGBT rights movement

Fred Hertz, a Refugee Sponsor, takes Subhi to the site of the StoneWall Inn in NY and asked him if he knew the history. Stonewall Inn is a Gay bar & National Historic Landmark. Stonewall Inn was the site of the 1969 riots that launched the Gay Rights Movement in the U.S. and around the world.

- Was it once illegal to be LGBT in the United States?
- What were the Stonewall Riots?
- What does marginalized mean?
- What was the impact and legacy of the Stonewall Riots?

Watch more about Stonewall:
bit.ly/2Hey1vi

• What are your thoughts on safety in the US for vulnerable populations such as LGBT people?

• Is an LGBT person living in San Francisco/Bay Area facing the same issues as living in other parts of the United States? Why or why not?

3. Unsettled is defined as lacking stability or unresolved. Subhi expressed that he now feels happier and safer. However, he said "sometimes when I wake up I feel the same feeling. You're here and alone, and all the things you lived with and left behind will stay with you, but you can't go back no matter how much you miss them."

• How does his comment relate to this feeling of being "unsettled." Do you think Junior, Subhi, Cheyenne, and Mari will ever feel settled?

4. Subhi went before the UN Security Council to recount what he experienced as a gay man in Syria. Subhi spoke on "behalf of all vulnerable refugees." How did he get this opportunity?

• Why is this historic?

• What dangers are involved in him testifying?

5. Mari spoke about the perception of asylum-seekers, and Subhi also spoke about the perception of refugees with his boyfriend Mark. Mari said "just because I am different in my country, why do I have to live this way. I don't hate anyone, I don't steal, so what did I do wrong?"

• Did your perceptions change at all

about refugee and asylum seekers by watching this film? If so how

style and message

1. What do you think were the filmmakers' purpose of making this film?

2. What creative techniques are used to grab your attention? (e.g., sound, images).

3. If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?

4. What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?

5. If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask? What would you ask?

6. Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

7. What is your reaction to this film and what did you learn about yourself from your reaction or interpretation?

8. How might others see this film in a way that differs from the way you see it? How and why might different types of people interpret this film in different ways?

9. If you could require one person to view this film, who would it be? What would you hope their main takeaway would be?

activities

At the end of the film, the Canadian Refugee Sponsor who is helping Subhi's sister relocate, tells him he is "paying it forward." Kindness from strangers is a powerful theme in **Unsettled: Seeking Refuge in America**. These post-viewing activities will focus on challenging bias and building empathy.

activity 1: test hidden biases

Students will look at their own biases and develop an understanding of how even hidden biases can result in the unequal treatment of the gay and lesbian population and other marginalized groups. Use the link below to take the test. Decide ahead of time which tests your students will take (there are 14 separate tests (e.g., age, race, sexuality), takes about 10 min each) in class or for homework: bit.ly/2wEy5eh

Tell students that having biases is not a problem (it might be unavoidable because this is how our brains work). The problem happens when we do not acknowledge our biases and do not reflect on how they can influence our perception and communication (including media texts we produce). Your willingness to examine your own possible biases is an important step in understanding the roots of stereotypes and prejudice in our society.

- How did you feel taking the test?
- What made taking the test a comfortable or uncomfortable experience for you?

- Did the test results surprise you? Why or why not?
- How did the results make you feel? Surprised, guilty, defensive, skeptical?
- How might these perceptions influence stories you tell about different people?

activity 2: bias in media

Have students research advertisements or news stories about refugees, migrants, immigrants, etc. Ask them to make note of the words and images used in the media pieces and how they think these groups are being portrayed. Tell students to be prepared to share their learnings with the class.

In small groups, invite students to share the details from the advertisements and news stories they researched. Ask them to discuss the commonalities between their findings and to select one of the ads or news stories to share with the class. As a follow-up activity, students may re-write/re-enact the ad or news story to represent a more accurate portrayal of the particular group featured.

- How are immigrants, migrants, and refugee and asylum seekers portrayed in the media these days?
- What does the advertisement suggest about refugees?
- What impact does this have?
- How does media like this affect public opinion?

circles of my multicultural self

an EdChange project by Paul C. Gorski. *This activity requires 20-30 minutes.*

Purpose: The Circles activity engages participants in a process of identifying what they consider to be the most important dimensions of their own identity. Stereotypes are examined as participants share stories about when they were proud to be part of a particular group and when it was especially hurtful to be associated with a particular group.

There are several adaptations of this activity. Choose what works best for your classroom. See links for instructions and more information.

bit.ly/1n0whGu
bit.ly/2U5FrIM
bit.ly/2YYJJ24

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online resources

refugee resources

Watch: Should the US Asylum System Change?

bit.ly/2SJxzWP

Watch: Immigration 101: Refugees, Migrants, Asylum-Seekers -- What's the Difference? bit.ly/2SBDVaa

9 questions about the global refugee crisis you were too embarrassed to ask bit.ly/2sM3ln2

Refugee and Internationall Displaced People Data bit.ly/2CjoOgR

Refugee Stories: Mapping a Crisis bit.ly/2UtKhP3

UN Refugee Agency unhcr.org

UN Migration Pact: Making migration more orderly and humane n.pr/2VvdTYt

Teaching About Refugees bit.ly/2SqcRLv

Famous Refugees bit.ly/2iNjghO

Refugee Week bit.ly/2sCAs18

Cities of Light unhcr.org/cities-of-light

Amnesty International Resources bit.ly/1MauCDw

Diversity Ice Breakers bit.ly/2JkjMWA

lgbtq+ resources

Free and Equal: LGBT Rights FAQ bit.ly/2r4PP06

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network glsen.org

Tackling LGBT Issues in Schools (curriculum and staff development activities) bit.ly/2I6PV2M

10 Countries where homosexuality may be punished by death wapo.st/2G1JY3z

Map of LGBT Laws Worldwide bit.ly/1TTftxD

plural+ video festival

Plural+ is a joint initiative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which collects, screens and awards youth produced videos on migration, diversity and social inclusion.

By supporting the distribution of youth-produced media, Plural+ recognizes youth as powerful agents of positive social change in a world often characterized by intolerance, and cultural and religious divisions.

pluralplus.unaoc.org

Suggested Student Activities:

- Have students watch past winning films
- Download a discussion guide
- Create your own video

california media literacy standards

- Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (style and message question 1).
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.14 Analyze the techniques used in media messages for a particular audience and evaluate their effectiveness (style and message q1, q2, q3).
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.10 Evaluate when to use different kinds of effects (e.g., visual, music, sound, graphics) to create effective productions (style and message q3).
- Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language) (context q2).

- Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

common core standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

media literacy resources: screening with meaning

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive. Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best

be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) Medium: the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) Author: the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) Content: the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) Audience: the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) Purpose: the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

common core standards

MEDIUM

All Media Is Constructed.

- What is the message, how is it delivered and in what format?
- What technologies are used to present the message?
- What visual and auditory elements comprise the media content?
- What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?

CONTENT

Media Is A Language For Information.

- What is the subject of the media message?
- What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content?
- What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response?
- To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?

PURPOSE

All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.

- Why was the message constructed?
- Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How?
- To what extent does the message achieve its purpose?
- What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?

AUTHOR

All Media Is Constructed by Someone.

- Who is delivering the message?
- Who originally constructed the message?
- What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?

AUDIENCE

All Media Messages Reach an Audience.

- Who receives the message?
- For whom is the message intended?
- What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message?
- What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message?
- How might others perceive this message differently? Why?



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what is a documentary?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. Leni Reifenstahl's propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth.

The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

a brief timeline of the documentary

1895 The Lumiere brothers develop the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief unedited clips of life around them called 'actualities.'

1900-1920 Travelogue or 'scenic' films become popular showcasing exoticized images from around the globe.

1926 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With A Movie Camera*.

1939 John Grierson collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in the support of war.

1960s The 'cinema vérité' movement began in Europe, followed by the 'direct cinema' in the US. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos*, opened the door to activist cinema of the 1970s, using film as a tool to counter capitalist politics in Latin America.

1988 Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium more affordable to independent filmmakers. The term 'documentary' comes to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema.