

Unit Five: Documentary

OVERVIEW

Students will work in pairs or small groups to produce a documentary movie about an event, social or cultural issue, community, place, or person. The two- to three-minute documentary will utilize still images and/or video, interviews and/or voiceover narration and text, and music and/or sound effects. The eight-lesson unit is divided into three sections: pre-production, production, and post-production.

In pre-production, students or teachers will identify a topic to address in their documentary. Through expository writing, the documentary will educate the audience by telling a nonfiction story about the selected topic through accurate facts and visual storytelling techniques. Using compelling imagery and writing, students will write a **treatment**, which is a written outline of a documentary, and create a **shot list**, a breakdown of intended shots, for their documentary in preparation for production. In production and post-production, students will incorporate visual storytelling techniques that include still images and/or video, audio, and text to produce the documentary. Language arts skills emphasized throughout the unit include expository writing, oral communication, research, summarizing, and conventions. Two rubrics are provided for teacher, peer, and self evaluation: a Documentary Pre-production Rubric and a Filmmaking Rubric. The rubrics provide a continuum of skills addressed throughout the unit. To celebrate students' work, the unit ends with a class or school screening and an optional opportunity to submit the documentaries to a youth film festival.

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5.5 <i>Interview Styles and Strategies</i> , 3:02 min



Documentary Pre-production Rubric

CONCEPT	BEGINNING	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	SCORE (1 - 10)	COMMENTS
Choosing a Topic	Topic is more general, rather than focused, and a clear purpose is not evident - the ideas seem flat or one dimensional without a clear beginning, middle, and end.	Topic is somewhat focused and clear, and can be developed into a clear beginning, middle, and end though the purpose of the documentary is not always obvious.	Topic is clearly focused. Selected topic can be developed into a cohesive and compelling story that demonstrates a clear purpose.		
Research and Organization	The topic and purpose of the documentary don't make a clear connection. The facts listed for further research are disjointed and there is little evidence of how they support the purpose of the movie.	The topic and purpose of the documentary demonstrate a relationship, but not always a strong one. Most, but not all, of the facts listed for further research support the purpose of the movie.	There is an obvious relationship between the topic and purpose of the documentary. The facts provide a strong list of research that clearly supports the purpose of the movie.		
Documentary Treatment: Act One (Beginning)	The introduction provides little evidence of a topic, setting, and main character(s) and it lacks a "hook" to engage the audience.	The introduction is not overly engaging, but clearly states the topic, setting, and main character(s).	The introduction has a compelling "hook" to capture the audience's attention and clearly identifies the topic, setting, and main character(s).		
Documentary Treatment: Act Two (Middle)	There is no conflict or problem that supports story structure. The storyline is flat.	There is a conflict or problem that supports the story structure, but the climax is under developed.	There is an obvious conflict or problem that creates an interesting climax and supports the story structure.		
Documentary Treatment: Act Three (End)	The ending is abrupt and does not provide a clear conclusion.	There is a clear conclusion that ties up most loose ends, but leaves the audience with some questions.	The conclusion provides a clear and compelling resolution and ties up all loose ends.		
Documentary Treatment: Themes and Point of View	It is difficult to understand how the themes connect to the purpose of the story and the three act structure. The point of view is unclear.	The theme descriptions are vague and don't always connect to the story's purpose or three act structure. A point of view is evident, but not entirely clear.	The themes and point of view are clearly defined and connect well to the movie's purpose and story structure.		

CONCEPT	BEGINNING	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	SCORE (1-10)	COMMENTS
Interview Questions	The interview questions are not open-ended and result in simple “yes” or “no” responses. The questions are not related to the documentary’s research topics.	Questions are inconsistent, with some being open-ended and others resulting in simple “yes” or “no” responses. Similarly, some questions are related to the research topics, while others are not.	Interview questions are thorough and well written so they engage the interview subject and result in meaningful responses. Research topics are strongly integrated in the questions as well.		
Shot List	Many locations and interview/shot times are incomplete. There is little variation in shot styles planned for production and production roles are not clearly defined.	Most locations and interview/shot times have been planned, but some details are still lacking. Most shot styles and productions roles have been defined, but not all.	Locations and interview/shot times are thoroughly outlined. There is good variation in shot styles planned for production and clear definition of all production roles.		

Student Name(s) :

Comments :

What Is a Documentary Movie?

>> ACTIVITIES

SETTING THE STAGE

1. Explain to students that you are going to screen a short documentary produced by high school students called *A Convenient Solution* from the SHIFT Drive. Ask them to think about the answers to the following questions:

- a. What is the topic? (Global warming)
- b. What happens in the beginning? (The filmmaker sets the stage, explaining why global warming is an important issue and shows differing viewpoints about the topic through street interviews.)
- c. What happens in the middle? (The impact of global warming on the environment is explained.)
- d. What happens in the end? (Ways to reduce the impact of global warming are explained.)
- e. What did you learn? (What I can do to reduce global warming.)
- f. What is the goal/purpose of the movie, or what is it trying to accomplish? (To raise awareness about global warming)

2. After screening the documentary ask students to respond to the questions above. (*Note: Possible answers to the questions are in parenthesis in step one.*)

3. Explain that a documentary tells a nonfiction story about an event, social or cultural issue, community, place, or person. The story in a documentary often follows a narrative arc, or three-act structure (beginning, middle, end). Explain to students that the goal of a documentary is to use facts, so that it's an objective, or unbiased, story. One way to achieve objectivity is to tell both sides of a story. (*Note: Many documentaries may also be considered personal narratives and may share the same characteristics as the films students explored and created in unit two.*)

4. Ask students if any of them have seen a documentary movie and can share examples. Examples of documentaries include: *Spellbound, Paper Clips, March of the Penguins, Riding Giants, An Inconvenient Truth, Fahrenheit 9/11, Supersize Me, Planet Earth, and The Cove*. Students may respond with films that are considered historical fiction, such as *JFK*, rather than documentary.

5. Distribute the *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout to each student and project the handout in front of the class. Read through the documentary movie elements described on the handout:

- a. Documents (explains with detail) an event, social or cultural issue, community, place or person
- b. Tells a story about an interesting topic using the three-act structure. The three-act structure builds the story by moving through a conflict from beginning to end. Chronology is one obvious structural framework.
 - i. Act One: Beginning (introduces setting and main character(s))
 - ii. Act Two: Middle (problem, conflict, climax, turning point)
 - iii. Act Three: End (resolution, conclusion)
- c. Uses a "hook" to catch the audience's attention
- d. Includes facts and information based on thorough and credible research

Objectives:

Students will know/be able to....

- >> Explain the elements of a documentary movie
- >> Deconstruct a documentary to assess for quality

Materials:

- SHIFT Drive *A Convenient Solution*
- *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* Handout
- *Sample One: What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* Handout
- SHIFT Drive *Me and My Mustache*
- *Sample Two: What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* Handout

Equipment:

- Computer/Tablet with Internet
- Projector
- Media Player

What Is a Documentary Movie?



Tips and Tricks...

Post the list of documentary movie elements in your classroom so students can refer to them during the unit.

from a variety of resources

- e. Uses compelling interviews, as needed, to tell the story
- f. Pacing throughout the story is good and there aren't "slow" points in the movie
- g. Uses effective visual storytelling techniques, including:
 - i. Video with a variety of shot styles
 - ii. Still images: photographs, Internet images, magazine or newspaper clippings, and personal artwork
 - iii. Interviews and/or voiceover narration
 - iv. Music and/or sound effects
 - v. Text: used in titles and credits, and elsewhere as needed
 - vii. Editing: organization of media (audio, video, still images), transitions, and effects.

EXPLANATION AND MODELING

6. Introduce or review the concept of expository writing, which is writing that uses facts to explain a topic. Expository writing is used to structure a documentary and includes facts based on thorough research and/or personal accounts of the topic to help tell a story.

7. As a class, review the questions at the bottom of the *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout. Explain that you are going to re-screen *A Convenient Solution* and complete the handout as a class after the documentary is screened. Refer to the *Sample One: What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout for answers. (*Note: Some documentaries more clearly contain all of the elements while others may lack some. As part of class discussion, brainstorm how missing elements could be incorporated.*)

- a. What is the topic of the documentary? Is it documenting an event, social or cultural issue, community, place or person?
- b. What is the setting and who are the main characters introduced at the beginning?
- c. How does the movie "hook" the audience, or catch its attention?
- d. What is the problem or conflict/climax/turning point introduced in the middle?
- e. How is the problem or conflict resolved at the end?
- f. What facts and information are included that demonstrate thorough research was done?
- g. If interviews are used, how do they help tell the story?
- h. Is the story missing any details or information?
- i. Is the pacing of the film effective? Were there any parts that could be shortened or developed further to tell the better?
- j. How do the visual storytelling techniques help the audience understand the topic of the movie?

8. After screening *A Convenient Solution*, invite students to discuss with their neighbors the possible answers to the *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout questions. Instruct students not to write on their *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handouts because they will complete them in the next section. Project the *Sample One: What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout and review it as a class.

What Is a Documentary Movie?

PRACTICE - GUIDED TO INDEPENDENT

9. Screen *Me and My Mustache* from the SHIFT Drive. Instruct students to think about the questions on their *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout because they will be asked to complete the handout with a partner or small group after the screening.

10. After screening *Me and My Mustache*, divide students in pairs or small groups to complete the *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout.

11. As a class, discuss students' completed *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handouts, focusing on similarities and differences in student responses. Refer to the *Sample Two: What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* handout to help guide the discussion.

Assessment:

Completed *What Makes a Good Documentary Movie?* Handout

Standards:

- NCTE: 6, 8, 11, 12
- CCSS:
 - Grade 4: RI7, RI8, SL1, SL2, SL3
 - Grade 5: RL6, RL7, RI7, RI8, SL1, SL2, SL3
 - Grade 6: RI8, SL1, SL1c, SL2, SL3
 - Grade 7: SL1, SL1c, SL2, SL3
 - Grade 8: SL1, SL1c, SL2, SL3
- NMAS:
 - Grade 4: MA: Re7.1.4a,b, MA: Re8.1.4a, MA: Cn10.1.4a, MA: Cn11.1.4b
 - Grade 5: MA: Re7.1.5a,b, MA: Re8.1.5a, MA: Cn10.1.5a, MA: Cn11.1.5b
 - Grade 6: MA: Re7.1.6a,b, MA: Re8.1.6a, MA: Cn10.1.6a, MA: Cn11.1.6b
 - Grade 7: MA: Re7.1.7a,b, MA: Re8.1.7a, MA: Cn10.1.7a, MA: Cn11.1.7b
 - Grade 8: MA: Re7.1.8a,b, MA: Re8.1.8a, MA: Cn10.1.8a, MA: Cn11.1.8b

