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MOHAWK GIRLS

Directed by Tracey Deer

Canada | 2005 | 63 min

TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of documentary film by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their classes, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some web links that provide starting points for further research or discussion. In separate packages, there will also be support materials available with information regarding general viewing and teaching principles for documentary film and the fundamental aspects of making documentary films.

The Film

In *Mohawk Girls*, Mohawk filmmaker Tracey Deer chronicles the lives of three girls in transition. Felicia is entering high school, while Amy and Lauren are graduating grade 12 and heading to college. All three girls live on the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory in Quebec, and all three are struggling with the challenges of growing up on a reserve that, despite its proximity to Montreal, is isolated from the outside world.

In this film, viewers get a glimpse into contemporary issues facing Aboriginal youth: identity, family, school, drug and alcohol use, racism both on- and off-reserve, the role of cultural traditions, sexuality and teenage pregnancy, and making choices for the future. The film also features archival footage of the director as a teen, dealing with some of the same issues. Amy and Lauren want to see the outside world, but they also realize that Kahnawake is a tangible link to their families and their Mohawk heritage. Felicia has learned Iroquois song and dance while attending the Kahnawake Survival School. Will they feel like they belong anywhere else? *Mohawk Girls* follows these girls as they seek out their places in the world.

The Filmmaker

Born on the Kahnawake Reserve, Tracey Deer is a graduate of Dartmouth College and the publisher of *The Eastern Door*, a newspaper published out of Kahnawake. *Mohawk Girls* won the Alanis Obomsawin Best Documentary Award at the 2005 ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival. It was followed by the film *Club Native*, which examined the issue of blood quantum and membership rights at Kahnawake. *Club Native* won a Gemini Award and the Colin Low Award for Best Canadian Documentary at the 2008 DOXA/Documentary Film and Video Festival. Deer is also the co-director of *One More River: The Deal That Split the Cree*, which won the Best Documentary Award at Montreal's 2005 Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois; *Kanien'kehaka: Living the Language* (2008), about a Mohawk language immersion school; the television comedy pilot *Escape Hatch*; and *Crossing the Line*, a 3-D short produced for the 2010 Olympics. Deer is currently on staff at Rezolution Pictures.

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VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

There are important themes in this film that have broad implications for students and their futures. Take time to activate your students' background understanding of these themes before viewing. This will help them as they come to their own understanding and develop their critical abilities.

The following three subsections, on this page, are intended to provide you with a range of pre-viewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. They are followed by a set of questions based upon the film's larger thematic domains, some follow-up questions and quotations, sample curricular outcomes, and a page of web links for further investigation.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Begin with the Examining Images and Making Predictions activity on page four. Have students complete the prediction chart on page five.

Show students the first section of the film (the shots featuring the dioramas, including the director's initial voiceover, until the dissolve). Have students work in small groups to answer the following questions:

- What kind of media text is this?
- Who is the target audience for this media text?
How can you tell?
- How and why does this media text appeal to its target audience?
- How does this media text appeal to you?

Print several of the quotations from page seven on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or in pairs to discuss the ideas in the quotations. Ask them to share their conclusions with the large group. To get them started, ask them to think about the following:

- What do you think the main themes of this film are?
How do you know this?
- Do you agree with the ideas in this statement?
Why or why not?
- What values are being promoted? How do you know this?
- Whose point of view do the values represent?

Set a purpose for viewing by having a discussion about one of the quotations on page seven or by reminding students about the four strands present in Ontario Native Studies curriculum: identity, relationships, sovereignty and challenges.

Viewing Activities

Ask students to describe what they see. Ask them to withhold judgment and observe carefully. They can choose to write down or describe orally their observations. Stop the film periodically if students choose to describe their observations orally.

Have students take notes on, or jot down connections to, one of the big ideas on page six of this guide.

Have students use a graphic organizer to summarize the film as they watch it. Have students draw their own organizers using the five-W format (who, what, when, where, why).

Stop the film at various points and have students provide oral summaries at each point. Have them do the summaries using the five-W format.

Set a purpose for viewing. Give students some or all of the following guiding questions:

- Did the predictions you made in your prediction chart come true? Jot down information from the film that supports or disproves your prediction.
- In what ways does this media text tell a story? What type or category of story is it? Does it follow a formula?
- What are the main conflicts we encounter in this film? Were the conflicts resolved at the end of the film? Why or why not?
- From whose perspective is this story told? Whose perspectives are absent in the film? Why do you think this is so?
- Who are the key characters? What characteristics do they possess that make them interesting to watch? Are the motivations of the characters clear to the viewer?

What other options do the characters have and what are the consequences of their actions?

- How was the text made? What conventions or production techniques are used?

Have students jot down three questions for discussion that the film raises in their minds.

Post-Viewing Activities

Have students revisit three questions from the pre-viewing activities: Who is the target audience for this media text? How can you tell? How and why does this media text appeal to its target audience? Have students' answers changed? Were their initial impressions of the film correct? Were the themes they saw in the first few minutes of the film expanded upon later in the film?

Have a large-group discussion guided by student questions for discussion written during the viewing activities.

Using the summaries they created during the viewing activities, ask students to identify the main idea of the film.

Have students revisit the quotations from the pre-viewing activities. Were their minds changed or opinions altered or enhanced by the film?

Have students build a conceptual map showing the web of ideas, topics and associated sub-topics in the film. Ask students to create questions they think will represent the important issues.

Using information and the questions students created in the previous activity, ask students to make interconnections among textual elements. This should take the form of an argument, including a thesis statement and evidence from the text.

Have students make a final judgment about the text based on the argument they created in the previous activity. Students will learn that their evaluations and feelings are informed by description, analysis and interpretation.

Ask students to reflect on the processes of description, interpretation and evaluation they completed during the viewing and post-viewing activities. Did these steps help inform their ideas?

Ask students to write a personal reflection to summarize what they have learned.

For further ideas around how to explore this documentary, use the guiding questions on page seven.

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITY: EXAMINING IMAGES AND MAKING PREDICTIONS

Below you will find images taken from the film. View each one and use the organizer on the following page to record what you think these images are telling us about in the film. Use clues from the image as well as your own experience to support your answer.



IMAGE A.



IMAGE B.



IMAGE C.



IMAGE D.

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITY: IMAGE AND IDEA ORGANIZER

	My prediction	Clues from the image	From my own experience
Image A Community			
Image B City			
Image C Two Worlds			
Image D The Future			

THE BIG QUESTIONS/IDEAS/THEMES

Multiple Perspectives

What is the subject of this film? Can you determine the filmmakers' perspective on this subject? What evidence can you find in the film to support your view?

How does this film help you analyze and interpret points of view about issues that concern people?

Does the filmmakers' perspective foster respect for diversity and an inclusive society? If so, how?

Identity

Whose story is told in this documentary? Whose story is not told? How does this story, and the way it is told, help you understand your own community/life?

How do the people in this film identify with their community? What are the common bonds among the people in this film? What challenges do they face in expressing their identity?

What film techniques do the filmmakers use to convey the identity of the people in this film?

Citizenship

What insights does this documentary offer about the ideals of good citizenship in the community depicted in this film?

How does the film deal with issues of freedom, equality, human dignity, and individual and collective rights and responsibilities?

Change and Continuity

How does this film help you understand a community's values and its attitudes towards an issue at a particular time?

What changes do the people in the film experience? What causes those changes? What are the consequences of those changes for the people in the documentary?

Culture and Community

Which aspects of a people's culture does this film focus on? Why do you think the filmmakers focused on those aspects?

How do the images, themes and message of this film help you understand the filmmakers' attitude towards the subject? What do you think might have been the intended audience's attitude towards the documentary subject?

Individuals, Societies and Economic Decisions

What economic systems are at work in this film? What are some of the causes and effects of the economic decisions made by the people in the film's community?

Does money play a part in the decisions being made in the film and what does it tell you about their local culture?

Power and Governance

What system of government control do we see in this documentary? How is power distributed within this society? What are the implications of that distribution on issues affecting the people's well-being and freedom?

Global Connections

What global issues are addressed in this film? What is the filmmakers' point of view on the opportunities and challenges of those issues?

Adapted from NFB Documentary Lens: <http://www.nfb.ca>

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Additional Pre- or Post-Viewing Activities

Have students write a letter to one of the characters in the film. What are your feelings about the character? What do you think about the choices she has made? Would you make the same choice if you were in her position?

Using whatever equipment is available to them (e.g., cellphone or digital camera video), have students make a five-minute video on the issues facing youth in their own school, ethnic or geographical community(-ies). Students can interview other youth or, like director Tracey Deer, record themselves speaking about the issues they face.

Take another look at the picture of the graduating class from the Examining Images and Making Predictions activity. How has your understanding of this image changed as a result of viewing the film?

Additional Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Questions

What issues of identity and group membership exist in your ethnic or religious community? Are these issues the result of oppression from an outside group? How are these issues related to internalized oppression?

How is it that a community so close to a major city could stay so isolated? Do you think this is a choice made by the residents of Kahnawake? What part might racism and/or exclusion play in this situation?

One of the girls lives with her grandparents. What role does the extended family play in Mohawk culture? What role does it play in your own culture?

Is there a relationship between identity and place (geographical location)? How might a person lose their identity when they leave a place? How might a person retain their identity when they leave a place?

How does this film encourage you to see the world differently?

Quotations From the Film to Explore

"I joined because it's a way of expressing my anger in a healthy way instead of taking it out on other people." What does this quotation say about the importance of getting involved?

"A lot of these students don't want to go past high school. To them, as long as they get their 60 [per cent] and they move on to the next level, that's all that matters.... They don't want the best they can have. They're happy with mediocre." What does this quotation say about Mohawk

students' hopes for the future? What connection might this have to the racism they experience in the dominant society? What relationship might it have to internalized racism? What does it say about the curriculum? What does it say about the teacher's approach?

"Relationships between my community and the outside world have always been strained. My first experience of this was when I was 12 years old. It was during the 1990 Oka Crisis, when many of us fled the community, only to be met by an angry mob. Although it was my first experience with hatred, it would not be my last." How would this experience affect a 12-year-old child's outlook on the world?

"It was like living in a bubble, like the rest of the world didn't matter. It didn't make much sense to me, and I began to feel like a prisoner." How might a person's opinion of their community change over time? What might cause these changes in opinion?

"I hate this town.... Everyone is so set in their own way. Something as small as getting street signs, they're like, 'No, that's white.' But at the same time they're driving cars and living in houses. Where do those come from? I don't see them living in a... tent." Why do non-dominant people sometimes become very oppositional to anything they see as reflecting the dominant society? How do these positions expose contradictions and hypocrisies?

"They say they're not racist. They get mad when someone calls us down because we're Indians, but they can call down Frenchmen and this and that. And they're not racist at all." Racism is about power. How might the Mohawks of Kahnawake be racist toward their own people? Toward outsiders living on the reserve? How might that power to be racist change when Mohawks leave the reserve and enter the city?

"After I'm having a bad day, I just want to sing. For me, it just releases a lot of stuff." What does this quotation say about the importance of artistic and/or cultural expression?

"I was aware... that the outside world didn't expect much from me, because I was Native. That subtle message was everywhere, and it was very discouraging. But it also made me all the more determined to prove them wrong." Can racism and/or discrimination ever be a positive force in someone's life? What is the difference between an emotional reaction and a chosen response?

"I know who I am and no one can take that away from me." Compare and contrast this statement with question about identity and place in the additional questions for pre-viewing or post-viewing activities on this page.

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, University Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyze themes related to sovereignty, as portrayed in media works by Aboriginal creators. use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, University/College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe relationships among language, culture and identity. demonstrate an understanding of how Aboriginal identity is linked to the physical environment. demonstrate an understanding of the influences on Aboriginal societies that have an impact on their sense of identity. describe Aboriginal perspectives related to issues of identity and sovereignty. describe how Aboriginal peoples adapt to external forces.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate an understanding of the cultural practices of Aboriginal peoples. demonstrate an understanding of how traditional teachings and contemporary beliefs are the foundation of Aboriginal self-determination. describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyze images in media works related to Aboriginal identity. demonstrate an understanding of form, purpose, audience and production techniques by designing or creating media works, independently and collaboratively, based on ideas, themes and issues related to relationships examined in this course. compare, through analysis, relationships presented in media works by Aboriginal creators. analyze themes related to sovereignty, as portrayed in media works by Aboriginal creators. use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Workplace Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explain how legal definitions of Aboriginal identity in Canada affect relationships within and among Aboriginal communities. identify traditional teachings and contemporary beliefs that promote Aboriginal self-determination. identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples. describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives. demonstrate an understanding of the issues facing Aboriginal youth.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Workplace Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe images in media works related to Aboriginal identity. demonstrate an understanding of relationships presented in media works by Aboriginal creators. identify issues of sovereignty, as presented in media works by Aboriginal creators. describe the challenge of achieving personal well-being. identify challenges addressed in media works by Aboriginal creators. use a variety of print and electronic sources to gather information and develop ideas for personal, school and workplace-related writing.

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 12 Native Studies: Aboriginal Governance: Emerging Directions, University/College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the impact that governance has with respect to Aboriginal identity. • describe how the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples is reflected in community-based activities.
Grade 11 English: Media Studies, University Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.
Grade 11 English: Media Studies, College/Workplace Preparation Grade 12 English: Media Studies, University/College/Workplace Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning. • reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding media texts.
Grade 11 English: Media Studies, Open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • deconstruct a variety of types of media texts, identifying the codes, conventions and techniques used and explaining how they create meaning.
Grade 12 The Arts: Exploring the Arts, Open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the concepts (elements, principles, styles, genres and techniques) used in various art forms. • analyze and interpret others' productions, demonstrating an understanding of the process of critical analysis. • analyze aspects of cultural identity found in productions.
Grade 11 The Arts: Media Arts, Open Grade 12 The Arts: Media Arts, Open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe how various concepts (elements, principles) and techniques and procedures are used in the works of others. • evaluate the aesthetic components of media productions, demonstrating an understanding of the process of critical analysis. • analyze the impact of media productions on themselves and their communities. • analyze the function of media art

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About the Film and Related Issues

A teacher-librarian's review of *Mohawk Girls*.

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/cm/vol13/no16/mohawkgirls.html>

Executive summary of the Kahnawake Membership Law.

<http://www.kahnawake.com/org/docs/MembershipReport.pdf>

A *Maclean's* magazine story on the eviction of non-members from Kahnawake.

<http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/02/10/inside-the-kahnawake-evictions/>

A story in *The Montreal Gazette* about the evictions at Kahnawake.

<http://www.montrealgazette.com/life/Hearings+planned+Kahnawake+evictions/2599180/story.html>

Various Links for Lesson Plan Ideas, Media Awareness, Critical Literacy and Documentary Films

The Association for Media Literacy: This Canadian website examines how media impacts and influences culture.

<http://www.aml.ca/home>

Using Documentaries in the Classroom: This teacher librarian's personal website contains excellent resources for teaching with documentary films.

http://www.frankwbaker.com/using_docs_in_the_classroom.htm

Media Awareness: A Canadian non-profit media education and Internet-literacy resource library.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

Center for Media Literacy: A U.S. website which provides several resources for making, understanding and criticizing media.

<http://www.medialit.org>

The National Film Board of Canada website: On this site is an area with teaching resources and short documentary films that can be used as teaching aides.

<http://www.nfb.ca>

Hot Docs Looking at Documentaries: A teaching guide that sets out questions designed to help teachers include the study of documentary film in their curriculum.

http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs_for_schools/2010_docs_for_schools_selections/