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SPIRIT DOCTORS

Directed by Marie Burke

Canada | 2010 | 40 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 *Spirit Doctors*, filmmaker Marie Burke travels to B.C.'s Similkameen Valley to speak with traditional healers Mary and Ed Louie. The Louies, who are Okanagan, have been working as healers for more than 50 years. Burke wanted to speak with people seeking traditional healing from the Louies. She also wanted to explore the ethics involved in filming traditional ceremonies. However, during filming, sound recordist Don Howell is diagnosed with throat cancer. Although Howell chooses to use Western allopathic medicine to deal with his cancer, he also decides to approach Mary and Ed for traditional healing. Burke follows Howell as he balances treatment at a Vancouver cancer centre with treatment given by the Louies. The film also brings together a circle of elders and leaders who offer their opinions on whether technology should be used to prevent the loss of traditional lifeways and as a resource for Aboriginal people seeking information on traditional worldviews. *Spirit Doctors* shows some techniques used by the Louies, but does not document specific ceremonies. What it does show is the lifestyle of traditional healers: the gratitude they have for the plants and other items they use to help their patients, how they must live cleanly in order to be able to heal others and the things they give up—such as family life—in order to work for their communities. Through the words of Mary Louie, the film also delves into the theory behind Aboriginal medicine.

The Filmmaker

Marie Burke is the producer, director and writer of the films *Inside and Out* and *Hard Drugs*. *Spirit Doctors* is her first documentary for the National Film Board of Canada. Of Cree, Dene and French descent, Burke was born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta. She is the recipient of the 2001 Aboriginal Role Model Award in Media.

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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 pre-viewing activity, Examining Images and Making Predictions, on pages four and five.

Have students examine the DVD case. Ask them to note the images and the text. You might also have them look at the film's page on the NFB website (<http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=51618>). 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 six 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 values are being promoted? How do you know this?
- Whose point of view do the values represent?
- Are your values represented? Why or why not?

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 their observations orally. 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?
- 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?

- Who produced this media text and for what purpose? Who profits if the message is accepted? Who may be disadvantaged?
- How was the text made? What conventions or production techniques are used?
- How would this story be different if told from the perspective of another character in the film (e.g., a Western medical doctor)?

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

Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss students' predictions from the Examining Images and Making Predictions pre-viewing activity. Discuss the differences between Western medicine and Aboriginal medicine as seen in the images. How is this theme carried through the film?

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

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 jotted down as part of the viewing activities, 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 six.

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.

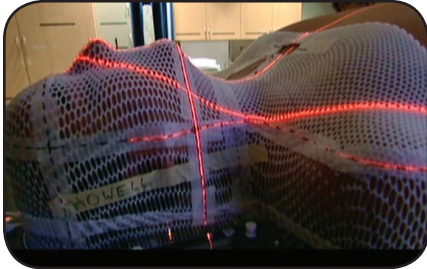


IMAGE A.



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 Western Medicine			
Image B Aboriginal Medicine			
Image C Chief of Lakes			
Image D Pharmacology			

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 the creators of this media text. Is the film an effective tool? Did it present the issues clearly?

A fast-paced television commercial or music video may contain more than 40 shots in 30 seconds. Some people think that when we return to the slower editing of other programming, such as documentary film, we find the pace too slow or dull. Have students discuss the effect of speed in commercials and music videos on our perception of other programming and on our lives in general.

Ask students to write a journal entry or have a formal debate on the following: Aboriginal ceremonies, including medical practices, were once outlawed by the Canadian government. What is the role of healers/doctors in any culture or society? What are the consequences to the individual when this knowledge is suppressed? What are the consequences to society?

Take another look at two pictures from the Examining Images and Making Predictions activity on page four: the radiation machine and the eagle feathers used by Mary Louie on filmmaker Marie Burke. Have students create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the approaches used by Western allopathic doctors and traditional Aboriginal healers.

Have students create a piece of artwork that shows the relationship Mary and Ed Louie have to the land. What is the relationship between the land and their medical/ceremonial practices? Between their lifestyle and their practices?

Additional Questions for Pre- or Post-Viewing Activities

What is the relationship between Aboriginal healers and the land? Between Aboriginal healers and the people they help? Between Aboriginal healers and the spirit world?

What kinds of medicine/healing are practiced in your religious or ethnic community? Are these practices respected by people outside of the community? Are the practices being handed down to younger people?

Mary Louie's first marriage didn't work out. Ed Louie says they work as a team. What role does their partnership play in their ability to help others? What role might Mary Louie's work have played in the demise of her first

marriage? What role does accepting and supporting your partner play in maintaining a strong lifetime commitment?

What are your feelings for one or more of the characters you met in the film?

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

Quotations From the Film to Explore

"My grandmother taught me. I'd been with her since I was small, until she left me. So what she did every day, I saw and I heard, so that way, it was a natural way for me to grow up. It's a natural teaching." What does this quotation say about Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning? How does Mary Louie's training as a healer compare and contrast with the training given to Western allopathic doctors?

"Mary and Ed follow ancestral protocols handed down to them from their teachers—and the spirit world." Where does knowledge come from in your society? In Aboriginal society?

"One of the things that I've learned is when I go and help the people, I know that the Creator is helping them... by allowing them to be comfortable with their ways, being comfortable accepting who they are and to be able to centre themselves." What does this quotation say about the idea of holism within Aboriginal medicine? What does it say about a patient's responsibilities when they undergo treatment with an Aboriginal healer?

"When you work with people, there's a lot of the bad habits you need to let go. You can't go out drinking... or taking drugs... or sleeping with others. You can't do that, because you're an instrument that the spirits and the Creator work through to help their relatives and his children." What does this quotation say about the demands placed on Aboriginal healers? How does it compare to Western allopathic medical doctors? What does it say about the theory behind Aboriginal medicine?

"We always give thanks for whatever we take.... When you go out and gather the medicines, you thank the Mother Earth for giving birth to that medicine and allowing you to learn about it and to know its purpose and helping you to regain your strength again. You make an offering." What does this say about the relationship Aboriginal people have to the land? About the responsibility Aboriginal healers have when they use their gifts to help others?

"The elders say, 'Nothing is forgotten, only left behind.'"

Aboriginal people believe that ancestral knowledge is present inside each person even if they haven't been formally taught that knowledge. How might this quotation inform the debate over using technology to safeguard ancestral knowledge?

"When I was asked to do this, I was struggling with it.... I had dreams, I had visions and sometimes the wall became a TV to me.... I struggled with it, running away from it. Finally, they brought me to my knees by taking my son and I was really hurt by that. But after that one year, after the feast and giveaway, when the elders came again and they asked me, 'Are you ready?... It's time to help the Creator and his children.'" After Mary Louie's son died, the community would have held a remembrance feast after one year and given away his belongings. Why would this experience have convinced Mary that she was ready to take on the duties of being a traditional healer?

"I know that I'm on a journey and it's a difficult one. And it's forced me to begin to re-examine what my role really is in this world." How can negative experiences show us what we need to learn in life? Compare this statement (from Don Howell) with Mary Louie's statement above.

"We're never asked to set a price. It's up to the people to give what they want to give." Compare and contrast this statement with the business of medicine in the Western world. What does this quotation say about the relationship between Aboriginal healers and the people they help? What does it say about the challenges Aboriginal healers might face in their lives and their work?

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, University Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare, through analysis, relationships presented in media works by Aboriginal creators. • identify and assess solutions to challenges suggested 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"> • demonstrate an understanding of how Aboriginal identity is linked to the physical environment. • demonstrate an understanding of Aboriginal Peoples' strong relationship to the land. • demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships that characterize an Aboriginal world view. • demonstrate an understanding of contemporary Aboriginal health issues.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe traditional and contemporary beliefs and values of Aboriginal cultures that influence present-day activities and behaviours. • identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples. • explain how Aboriginal peoples' links to the land and to a sustainable environment are part of their cultural identity.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze images in media works related to Aboriginal identity. • compare, through analysis, relationships presented in media works by Aboriginal creators. • identify and assess solutions to challenges suggested 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"> • identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples. • identify traditional teachings and contemporary beliefs that promote Aboriginal self-determination. • describe how contemporary Aboriginal communities assert their autonomy through a blend of traditional and modern practices.

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
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. • describe the challenge of achieving personal well-being. • identify challenges addressed in media works by Aboriginal creators. • use a variety of print and electronic resources to gather information and develop ideas for personal, school and workplace-related writing..
Grade 12 Native Studies: Aboriginal Governance: Emerging Directions, University/College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe how the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples is reflected in community-based activities. • demonstrate an understanding of the resourcefulness and commitment of Aboriginal peoples in addressing the needs of their communities.
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 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Workplace Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples. • identify traditional teachings and contemporary beliefs that promote Aboriginal self-determination. • describe how contemporary Aboriginal communities assert their autonomy through a blend of traditional and modern practices.
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 11 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 in society.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About Aboriginal Medicine

Native Women's Association of Canada: This site contains a paper on Aboriginal women and traditional healing.

http://www.laa.gov.nl.ca/laa/naws/pdf/nwac_traditional_healing-jun1607.pdf

National Aboriginal Health Organization: This organization supports the health of First Nations, Metis and Inuit people in Canada.

<http://www.naho.ca/english/>

The *Canadian Encyclopedia* website has an entry on medicinal plants.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0006333>

About the Filmmaker

National Film Board of Canada: The site contains information on another of Marie Burke's films.

<http://www.nfb.ca/explore-by/director/Marie-Burke/>

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/