

THE LIFE YOU WANT: A YOUNG WOMAN'S STRUGGLE THROUGH ADDICTION



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THE LIFE YOU WANT

Directed by Michelle Derosier

2011 | Canada | 34 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 the Northern Ontario community of Fort Hope (also known as Eabametoong First Nation), the addiction rate is estimated to be at 80 per cent. Most people are addicted to pharmaceutical drugs, primarily OxyContin. In *The Life You Want*, 22-year-old Fort Hope resident Doris Slipperjack gives viewers an unflinching look into the problems of prescription drug abuse in her community and the effects of her own addiction on her three children and her relationship—and how she reaches out for help.

The Filmmaker

Originally from the Eagle Lake First Nation in northwestern Ontario, director Michelle Derosier is a social worker based in Thunder Bay. A proponent of using art as a healing tool, Derosier was recently named Female Newsmaker of the Year by *Wawatay News*. *The Life You Want* had its world premiere at the 2011 imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival in Toronto.

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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

Provide students with the title of the film and have them work in pairs or small groups to predict the themes they think might be part of the film (responses could include health, healing, challenges, self-determination and recovery).

Play the first 1:06 of the film without sound (the opening shots, featuring the houses in Fort Hope and Doris Slipperjack walking in the snow). Ask students why they think the filmmaker used this technique. How does this technique attract the viewer? How does the filmmaker use this technique to set up the film's themes?

Print several of the quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or in pairs to discuss the ideas in the quotations. Then ask them to share their conclusions with the large group. As they discuss the quotations, ask students to think about the following:

- What is the main conflict in this film? How do you know this?
- From whose perspective is this story told? How do you know this?
- 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?

Have a large-group discussion about one of the Extension Activities quotations. Ask students to structure their discussion around the themes of identity, relationships, sovereignty and challenges.

Viewing Activities

Have students take notes on the connections they see between the issues in this film and one of the Big Ideas in the Big Questions/Ideas/Themes section of this guide.

Have students describe what they see in the film. Ask them

to withhold judgment and observe carefully. They can write notes or give an oral description.

Ask students to create a mind map as they watch the film. The mind map should contain the following key words: conflicts, techniques, purpose and perspective. To get students started, use the following prompts:

- 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 produced this media text, and for what purpose? Who profits if the message is accepted? Who may be disadvantaged?
- How would this story be different if told from the perspective of another character in the film?

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

Post-Viewing Activities

Ask students if the predictions they made in the first Pre-Viewing Activity were correct. Have them give specific evidence from the film—facts revealed in images or voiceover/dialogue—that supports or disproves their prediction.

Have a large-group discussion guided by student questions written during the last Viewing Activity.

Have students revisit the quotations they discussed during the third Pre-Viewing Activity. Have a large-group discussion to see whether their opinions have changed after viewing the film.

Have students build a conceptual map showing the web of ideas, topics and associated subtopics in the film. Using the conceptual map as a guide, ask students to create questions they think will represent the important issues. Then, using the questions and the conceptual map, ask students to make interconnections among elements of the text (film). 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 above. Students will learn that their evaluations and feelings are informed by description, analysis and interpretation.

Have students reflect on the processes of description, interpretation and evaluation they completed during the Pre-Viewing, Viewing and Post-Viewing activities. Ask students to write a personal reflection summarizing what they have learned and how the processes of describing, interpreting and evaluating have informed their understanding of the film.

Provide students with the *Toronto Star* article on the discontinuation of OxyContin and the government's plans to address withdrawal in current users (www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1144943--ontario-creates-withdrawal-plan-for-oxycontin-users?bn=1). Have students identify any connections they see between this article and the themes found in *The Life You Want*.

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

Many First Nations cultures use the medicine wheel as a tool for understanding relationships, connections and how to maintain balance. The medicine wheel has four quadrants symbolizing the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspects of human existence, as well as various aspects of the surrounding world. Human beings are at the centre of the wheel, in a position that challenges them to maintain balance with each quadrant. Using the resources listed at the end of this package (which have been evaluated for accuracy and authenticity), have students research the medicine wheel and create posters showing how the medicine wheel might be used as a tool for healing from addictions and substance abuse.

Additional Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

How do Doris Slipperjack's comments about the safety she felt at the treatment centre reflect the importance of relationships in Aboriginal cultures? How does the relationship Doris Slipperjack has with herself change during the course of the film? How does the relationship between Doris Slipperjack and her community change by the end of the film?

How might the challenges Doris Slipperjack faced as a foster child have led to her substance abuse?

How does telling one's story help make a person stronger? How does it help create and maintain personal identity? How might sharing her story with others have helped Doris Slipperjack make the journey from "addict" to community activist?

Why might existing addictions and healing from substance abuse be related to sovereignty and self-determination for First Nations communities?

Quotations From the Film to Explore

"I want myself back."

"To survive myself, I need their love. I need to see their love for their children. I need their love for themselves, as well, which is more important. I need them to carry on."

"I need my daughters to look after their kids. They're our future."

"I do want to share my story, because I know I can make a difference. I can feel it. But first I want to make a difference with myself. Use myself as an example."

"The challenge isn't going to detox. It's coming back from all that, you know, because I'll be coming back to all the drugs. And since everyone will still be doing it, I think that's the real challenge."

"That's what I'm striving for, is to be happy."

"I never thought feeling would be so enjoyable."

"I thought being high was everything. Being high was my world. But it's not. Because when I was high, I couldn't even think, couldn't even feel. Being high robbed me from living."

"Being here, I learned that it's okay to ask for help. Like, it's not a sign of weakness. Like, it's okay to trust. It's okay to listen. It's okay to care and love again."

"I found myself here. She's worth holding onto. She's really beautiful and strong. I love her."

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY: STATE OF EMERGENCY

Name: _____ Date: _____ Mark: _____ /40 (See rubric)

In 2009, the chiefs of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), which represents 49 First Nations communities in Northern Ontario, declared a state of emergency in their communities due to the levels and effects of prescription drug abuse. According to NAN, the causes of and solutions to the state of emergency relate to various aspects of community life, including health, social conditions, child welfare and education. NAN says that one of its strategic directions is to "work on root causes of abuse and addiction through creating healthy communities."

The film showed Doris Slipperjack's community, Fort Hope, with its boarded-up and condemned homes and lack of services (no detox or treatment centres, no youth centre). It is cut off from the outside world, accessible only by air or ice roads in the winter. Eighty per cent of the residents are addicted to prescription drugs. According to James Morris, the executive director of the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority, the biggest underlying causes of addictions are that First Nations peoples are "kept poor and powerless" and "locked up" on reserves. For this assignment, you will be responsible for writing a persuasive essay focusing on one of the following ideas: The social conditions in on-reserve communities are/are not a contributing factor to substance abuse and addictions.

Your persuasive essay must address the following:

- The changes that occurred in First Nations communities after they were relocated to reserves.
- The impact residential schools and the child welfare system has had on family structures in First Nations communities.
- The impact that the loss of traditional activities such as hunting and fishing, and of traditional diets, might have had on First Nations cultures and lifestyles.
- The support or lack of support First Nations communities are receiving from the government to deal with substance abuse issues on-reserve.

Your position must be supported by research and/or information from books, the Internet and the film *The Life You Want*. You may also use ideas from the Pre-Viewing, Viewing and Post-Viewing activities, the questions from the Big Ideas sections and the rubric categories to help guide your research and writing.

STATE OF EMERGENCY RUBRIC

Name: _____ Group: _____

Criteria	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
Knowledge and Understanding	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Understands the relationship between life experiences and human behaviours	Demonstrates limited understanding of the relationship between life experiences and human behaviours	Demonstrates some understanding of the relationship between life experiences and human behaviours	Demonstrates considerable understanding of the relationship between life experiences and human behaviours	Demonstrates thorough and insightful understanding of the relationship between life experiences and human behaviours
Understands how colonial policies impact First Nations communities	Explains how colonial policies have affected and still affect First Nations communities with a limited degree of understanding	Explains how colonial policies have affected and still affect First Nations communities with some degree of understanding	Explains how colonial policies have affected and still affect First Nations communities with a considerable degree of understanding	Explains how colonial policies have affected and still affect First Nations communities with a thorough and insightful degree of understanding
Thinking/Inquiry	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Uses critical thinking and inquiry to analyze and interpret information, formulate an hypothesis and form a reasonable conclusion	Applies few of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies some of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies most of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies all or almost all of the skills involved in an inquiry process
Communication	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Communicates ideas clearly using appropriate language that persuades the reader	Communicates information and ideas with limited clarity; not persuasive	Communicates information and ideas with some clarity; somewhat persuasive	Communicates information and ideas with clarity; very persuasive	Communicates information and ideas with clarity and insight; highly persuasive and well-argued

Comments:

Total: _____/40

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 10 Native Studies: Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, Open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal Peoples in 20th-century Canadian history. • identify historic and contemporary events affecting the self-determination of Aboriginal Peoples. • describe how Aboriginal Peoples have adapted to change. • demonstrate understanding of how to analyze and evaluate information when conducting research on a historical topic or issue.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, University/ College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing. • use appropriate writing forms for intended purposes.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, University/ College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the influences on Aboriginal societies that have an impact on their sense of identity. • describe how Aboriginal Peoples adapt to external forces. • identify social, political and economic issues currently being addressed by Aboriginal individuals and communities in Canada. • identify the challenges facing Aboriginal youth in Canada and suggest how these challenges can be addressed at a personal, community and governmental level. • demonstrate an understanding of contemporary Aboriginal health issues. • 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: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe traditional and contemporary beliefs and values of Aboriginal cultures that influence present-day activities and behaviours. • describe the efforts and actions of Aboriginal communities and individuals to maintain their cultures within traditional land bases. • explain how Aboriginal Peoples' links to the land and to a sustainable environment are part of their cultural identity. • demonstrate an understanding of the varying perspectives on Aboriginal Peoples' right to self-determination. • describe the efforts of Aboriginal Peoples to attain autonomy in their lives. • identify the obstacles that Aboriginal Peoples must overcome to protect and maintain their cultures and languages. • demonstrate an understanding of differences in the challenges faced by various Aboriginal Peoples, including status Indians and Métis.

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College/Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the issues facing Aboriginal youth in their interaction with Canadian society. • identify traditional teachings and contemporary beliefs that promote Aboriginal self-determination. • describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives. • demonstrate an understanding of the challenges facing Aboriginal youth.
Grade 11 & 12 English, University/College/Workplace Prep	<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.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

The CBC's *Fifth Estate* aired a show March 9, 2012, focusing on OxyContin use and abuse in Canada and role of the medical and pharmaceutical industries.

<http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/2011-2012/timebomb>

Durham College's online resources for Aboriginal students contain a good explanation of the medicine wheel and how it might be applied to create healthy relationships between institutions and Aboriginal Peoples.

<http://www.durhamcollege.ca/info-for/aboriginal-students/medicine-wheel>

The Fourdirectionsteachings.com website contains a PDF on the medicine wheel as understood in Cree culture.

<http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/transcripts/cree.pdf>

The Little River Band of Odawa (Anishinabe) has created an online medicine wheel listing the attributes of each quadrant of the wheel.

<http://www.anishinaabemdaa.com/medicinewheel.htm>

The website of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, which represents 49 First Nations communities in Northern Ontario, contains a link to strategic directions for prescription drug abuse under the Health Policy sector heading.

<http://www.nan.on.ca/article/sectors-5.asp>

This article on the discontinuation of OxyContin appeared in the *Toronto Star* on March 12, 2012.

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1144943--ontario-creates-withdrawal-plan-for-oxycontin-users?bn=1>

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

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

<http://www.medialit.org>

Hot Docs Library: Dozens of online Canadian documentaries, including a number with education support material to aid with classroom viewing.

<http://www.hotdocslibrary.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. Free PDF download.

<http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth>

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

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

NFB Education: Rich in resources and activities.

<http://www.nfb.ca/education>

CAMPUS: Your online media solution from the NFB. Ontario teachers—activate your profile today at

<http://www.nfb.ca/campus/go>