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THIRST

Directed by Gail Maurice

Canada | 2007 | 14 minutes

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

More than 100 First Nations communities across Canada do not have clean, safe drinking water. *Thirst* is a glimpse into Keewaywin, an Oji-Cree community north of Red Lake, Ontario, where the water is contaminated with uranium and residents are forced to purchase expensive bottled water.

The Filmmakers

Métis actor and director Gail Maurice is originally from northern Saskatchewan. Gail is a speaker of Michif, the mixed language created from Cree and Métis French, with influences from English, Assiniboine and Ojibwe. Michif is an endangered language, with fewer than 1,000 speakers. Her film *Smudge* played at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, one of only five Canadian films invited. *Thirst* had its world premiere at the Planet In Focus International Environmental Film and Video Festival in Toronto in 2008.

Educational package written and compiled by Suzanne Methot suzanne.methot@tdsb.on.ca

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

View the short YouTube video on Gail Maurice (www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHzH-hUjktw). Have students work in pairs or small groups to identify the themes Maurice says are part of her filmmaking (telling stories, language, culture, history and connections among her, her ancestors and the contemporary environment). Once they identify these themes, and now that they know the biographical information contained in the YouTube video, ask students to predict what themes might be present in *Thirst*.

Play the first few seconds of the film (the opening shot, with the sound of dripping water). Ask students why they think the filmmaker used this technique. How does this technique attract the viewer?

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?

Host a large group discussion about one of the quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide. Ask students to structure their questions and responses 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 the ones stated 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?
- How was the film made? What conventions or production techniques are used? How do these techniques attract the viewer?
- 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.

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, title cards or voiceover/dialogue—that supports or disproves their prediction.

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

Post-Viewing Activities

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

Have students build a conceptual map showing the web of ideas, topics and associated sub-topics 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 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.

Ask students to reflect on the processes of description, interpretation and evaluation they completed during the Pre-Viewing, 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.

Have students research water issues in First Nations communities in Canada. When they have completed their research, have them create a one-page newsletter summarizing the issues. The newsletter should contain text, illustrations and at least one chart or graph. To get them started, have them visit the websites listed at the end of this package.

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

Have students write letters to the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, asking the minister to detail the government's plan to improve water quality in First Nations communities. If students completed the newsletter activity, include copies of the newsletters with the letters.

Have students make an online connection with a First Nations, Métis or Inuit community in your province or territory. Have students ask the community members if there are any water issues in their community. Ask them how important water is to their identity as First Nations, Métis or Inuit people. Have students share their own local water issues, and the importance of water to their own identity (whether ethnic, geographical or spiritual/religious).

Canada is one of the world's top three producers of uranium. Most uranium is used for nuclear power plants. Have students conduct a research project on (a) the impact of uranium mining on ecosystems worldwide (including in the other top two uranium producing countries) and (b) alternative sources of energy that would reduce the impact of uranium mining on First Nations communities in Canada.

If students complete the Self-Government Hot Seat Activity, have a discussion about the ways in which the seating arrangement(s) during the debate affected the tone and outcome of the debate. Did it privilege one group over the other? Did it ensure everyone was heard in the same way? How would the Aboriginal community group be disadvantaged, for example, by a theatre-style seating arrangement arranged by the government group? How might a circle seating arrangement make the Aboriginal community group more comfortable but perhaps disadvantage the government group?

Additional Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

How does the issue of poor water quality on First Nations reserves relate to the relationship Aboriginal people used to maintain with the natural environment? How would not being able to drink the water in one's own community affect a person's spiritual and cultural connections to the world around them? How would it affect an Aboriginal person's relationship with the federal government, which controls all aspects of life in on-reserve communities?

How might the concept of sovereignty—the right to govern oneself—include responsibility for taking care of the natural environment? What connections are there between managing oneself and taking responsibility for the Earth?

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

Quotations From the Film to Explore

"Every single First Nations community had a boil-water advisory."

Compare and contrast this statement (from the filmmaker) with the following statement (from the government of Ontario).

"As a government, we set our water standards high. We're vigilant. We work in partnership. And we make significant investments in infrastructure to keep our drinking water safe. Ontarians deserve no less."

How does this statement connect to issues of identity for First Nations people? Are First Nations people fellow citizens? Are they Ontarians?

"We get it [water] from the Northern Store or from the community hall."

What does this say about the relationship Aboriginal people have with the natural environment? Is this a change from pre-contact ways of relating to the environment?

"An entire school shares a single water jug and a single plastic cup that is placed beside it." What does this say about resources available to on-reserve schools in Northern Ontario?

"Clean water... is a basic human right."

The speaker here is a non-Aboriginal consultant to the community. How might he have a more politicized view of the water-quality issue than the Oji-Cree people of Keewaywin? How might this relate to issues of oppression and marginalization?

"First Nations citizens do not have drinking water that accords with Canadian standards."

Do you think government treats Aboriginal people differently from non-Aboriginal people? Does location play a role? Does race? Would this happen in a large city?

"Every time I give her a bath, her skin gets so dry, you can see the white stuff on her skin, and she just scratches."

How might the water-quality issue in Keewaywin affect generations still to come? How does this relate to the Aboriginal concept that making a good decision involves thinking of the impact that decision might have for the next seven generations?

"It really is a Third World condition."

How can a so-called First World country such as Canada have "Third World" conditions inside its borders?

"After one year, you learn to cope with it. After two, you begin to joke about it."

Humour is an important part of Aboriginal identity. How might humour allow people to deal with stressful situations? How might it strengthen collectivity?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY: CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS EFFECT ON LIVING THINGS

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

The Assembly of First Nations believes that Aboriginal self-government is the only way that the standard of living will improve in First Nations communities. The Nishnawbe Aski Nation, which represents the community of Keewaywin in Northern Ontario, recently asked the federal and provincial governments to:

- * Share the revenue the government receives from fees, taxes and royalties related to logging, mining and water extraction on First Nations territories with First Nations people
- * Create and enforce legislation that forces companies to set aside a portion of profits derived from forestry, mining and other activities on First Nations lands for the benefit of First Nations communities impacted by these activities
- * Consult with First Nations communities about any resource development on First Nations lands and seek the community's consent
- * Implement a government-to-government relationship with First Nations communities that will provide the fiscal and technical resources to allow Aboriginal people to protect Aboriginal ways of life while still agreeing to sustainable economic development

The film showed a community that was not able to improve its water quality because it is dependent on outsiders who do not ask for the community's input into the situation. Your group will be responsible for detailing how Aboriginal self-government will or will not improve living conditions in First Nations communities. You will do this by taking a role, acting as either a member of an Aboriginal community or as a government official. Your group will research the issue from either the community's or the government's point of view and then debate your conclusions by questioning the other group. After the debate, each student will create a position paper using evidence collected from your research and from the debate. The position paper can, but does not have to be, written in role.

Your debate will need to include the following:

- The government group must include the Minister of Indian Affairs, the Minister of the Environment, lawyers, negotiators for the development corporations and government media-relations personnel
- The community group must include elders, hunters/fishers/trappers, youth, the band council chief and a non-Aboriginal environmental activist from the south
- Questions about the impact resource extraction, such as uranium mining or forestry, has on Aboriginal life and culture
- Questions about the impact resource extraction has on the environment
- Questions about how the band council allocates the funding provided each year to the community by the federal government
- Questions about how the band council would consult with community members about improving the quality of life on the reserve
- A seating plan for the debate, detailing how will you set up the chairs when you question the other group. Could the seating arrangement(s) give the groups an advantage/disadvantage?

Your position paper must give at least three clear reasons why Aboriginal self-government will or will not improve the quality of life in First Nations communities. Your position must be supported by research and/or information learned during the debate.

You may use ideas from the Pre-Viewing, Viewing or Post-Viewing activities, information from the film, the questions from the Big Questions/Ideas/Themes section and the rubric categories to help guide your research, debate questions and position paper.

THE SELF-GOVERNMENT HOT SEAT RUBRIC

Name: _____ Group: _____

Categories	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 history and causes of poor living standards on-reserve	Demonstrates limited knowledge of facts about history and causes of poor living standards on-reserve	Demonstrates some knowledge of facts about history and causes of poor living standards on-reserve	Demonstrates considerable knowledge of facts about history and causes of poor living standards on-reserve	Demonstrates thorough knowledge of facts about history and causes of poor living standards on-reserve
Explains the effects living standards have on personal and cultural identity	Explains the effects of living standards on personal and cultural identity with a limited degree of understanding	Explains the effects of living standards on personal and cultural identity with some degree of understanding	Explains the effects of living standards on personal and cultural identity with a considerable degree of understanding	Explains the effects of living standards on personal and cultural identity with a thorough degree of understanding
Thinking and 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
Formulates questions and analyzes and interprets information to arrive at 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 consistent with role and a logical point of view for that role	Communicates information and ideas with limited clarity	Communicates information and ideas with some clarity	Communicates information and ideas with clarity	Communicates information and ideas with clarity and insight

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 7 Science and Technology: Understanding Life Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess the impacts of human activities and technologies on the environment, and evaluate ways of controlling these impacts.
Grade 8 Science and Technology: Understanding Earth and Space Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess the impact of human activities and technologies on the sustainability of water resources. • investigate factors that affect local water quality.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, University/College Prep	<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 Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 the social, legal and political environments in which Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples are constructing new relationships. • explain the need to promote dialogue and reconciliation in the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society. • demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships that characterize an Aboriginal world view. • 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 education and health issues.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples. • describe relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples as a result of actions taken by the federal and provincial governments. • describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives. • demonstrate an understanding of the challenges facing Aboriginal youth. • describe competing values between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies on issues of ecological sustainability.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the challenge of achieving personal well-being. • use a variety of print and electronic resources to gather information and develop ideas for personal, school and workplace-related writing.
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Governance: Emerging Directions, University/College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the historical context that underlies current relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the government of Canada.
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

About the Filmmakers

The official website for filmmaker Gail Maurice contains information on her other films and her acting credits, as well as a photo gallery and links to her blog.

<http://www.gailmaurice.com>

NGOs/Organizations

The website of the Council of Canadians contains background information on water issues in First Nations communities, the threat of privatization and the impact Aboriginal self-government might have on water quality.

http://www.canadians.org/water/issues/First_Nations/index.html

The website of the Assembly of First Nations, which represents status Indians in Canada, details the holistic relationship First Nations people traditionally had with water, and also contains information on water rights in First Nations communities, the impact of climate change on water quality and quantity, water management practices, Aboriginal and treaty rights to water and drinking water and waste-water treatment for on-reserve communities.

<http://www.afn.ca/index.php/en/honoring-water>

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

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>

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

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

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

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