

Name: _____

Documentary Films

Applying Critical Thinking and Media Literacy

What is a documentary?

Documentary films are non-fictional cinematic works that aim to capture and represent reality. Unlike fictional films, documentaries present real-life events, people, places, and issues. They often utilize a combination of interviews, archival footage, observational footage, narration, and other storytelling techniques to convey information, educate, and provoke thought.



Benefits of learning from documentary films

Advocate for Change

Some documentaries are explicitly created to advocate for social or political change. They may highlight injustices, promote activism, or encourage viewers to take action on a particular issue. Documentaries can be powerful tools for influencing public opinion and policy.

Profile Individuals or Communities

Documentaries often focus on individuals, communities, or subcultures, offering an intimate and authentic look into their lives. This can help humanize people and provide a platform for their stories to be heard.

Entertainment and Engagement

While the primary purpose of documentaries is to inform, they can also be entertaining and engaging. A well-crafted documentary employs storytelling techniques to captivate audiences and keep them invested in the narrative.

Record Historical Events

Documentaries serve as historical records, capturing events, movements, and cultural shifts as they unfold. They provide a visual and narrative account of the past, preserving important moments for future generations.

Explore Perspectives and Truths

Documentaries can present different perspectives on a given topic, allowing viewers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues. They may challenge preconceived notions and prompt viewers to question their assumptions.

Informing and Educating

Documentary films serve the purpose of informing, educating, and engaging audiences by presenting real-life stories, events, and issues. They play a crucial role in shaping public discourse, influencing perceptions, and contributing to social and cultural understanding.



Challenges & Limitations

of learning from documentary films

Lack of Context

Documentaries may not always provide a comprehensive historical or cultural context for the topics they cover. Viewers may miss important background information that is necessary for a thorough understanding of the subject matter.



Is there more history or context to this topic than what is shown in the film?

Cherry-Picking Examples

Documentaries may rely on specific examples or case studies to support their arguments. While these examples may be valid, they might not represent the broader picture accurately which leads to generalizations or misconceptions.



Are there more examples that aren't mentioned?

Outdated Information

Given the time it takes to produce and distribute documentaries, the information presented may become outdated, especially in rapidly evolving fields. It's important for viewers to supplement documentary content with more current sources.



What year was the film released? What are the sources and dates of the information found in the credits or citations?

Subjectivity & Bias

Documentaries are created by filmmakers who have their own perspectives, biases, and intentions. The selection of content, editing choices, and narration can introduce subjectivity and bias, potentially shaping the narrative in a particular direction.



Who else has a perspective on this topic?

Selective Representation

Filmmakers often need to condense vast amounts of information into a limited time frame. This necessity may lead to the selective representation of facts or events, potentially omitting crucial details or presenting a skewed version of reality.



What concept(s) does the film support? What does it criticize?

Limited Viewpoints

Documentaries may present a limited range of perspectives, particularly if the filmmakers have a specific agenda or viewpoint. This can hinder a well-rounded understanding of the complexity of certain issues.



Find another viewpoint not mentioned in the film. What is similar and what is different about the two views?