



GASLAND

A FILM BY JOSH FOX

Photograph from www.gaslandthemovie.com

EDUCATORS' SUPPLEMENT

TRIBECA
YOUTH
SCREENING
SERIES

FALL 2010: **HBO** DOCUMENTARY FILMS.

TRIBECA
FILM INSTITUTE

FOR TEACHERS

THEMES

When filmmaker Josh Fox received an unexpected offer of \$100,000 for the natural gas drilling rights to his property on the border of New York and Pennsylvania, he set off on a cross-country journey to investigate the risks of agreeing to the deal. With a focus on the environmental and public health costs of the largest domestic natural gas drilling boom in history, the film examines the rights and responsibilities that governments, corporations and individuals have in safeguarding our natural resources.

The film explores the following themes, which were drawn from the NYC Scope and Sequence for High School Science and Global History & Geography:

Geography

Economics

Power, Authority, and Governance

Science, Technology, and Society

Earth Science/Geology/Ecology

Sustainability

WHY WE PICKED THIS MOVIE

Film is a powerful medium that can inform, entertain, educate and serve as a catalyst for social change. This season, the *Tribeca Youth Screening Series* is focusing on documentaries that have aired on HBO, a company with a strong history of creating films that tackle the most critical, and at times controversial, social issues of our times. Films such as *Gasland* have been chosen not only for their educational relevance, but also for their cinematic merits.

The *Tribeca Youth Screening Series* provides students with access to documentary films, filmmakers, and subject matter not typically explored in mainstream Hollywood fare. In the process, students are introduced to new places and new ideas, and experience innovative approaches to storytelling that highlight and reinforce the skills and themes they are studying in their Social Studies, Earth Science and English Language Arts classes.

PREPARING YOUR CLASS

Preparing students to be critical viewers is different than simply having them watch a film. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a film is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. One key step is having students read and complete the activities in the Study Guide (which they will receive at the screening). The following pre-screening activities will help your students engage with the film as critical viewers and prepare them to be active participants at the screening event and in the classroom work you do surrounding the film.



PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In preparation for viewing the film, you can have your students discuss some of the following questions:

- What do you think of when you think of New York City tap water? Do you drink it? Why or why not?
- Where does our drinking water come from? Do you think it is important to know?
- Who is responsible for keeping our drinking water safe? What role do you think you can play to protect the quality of our drinking water?
- The United States is the largest energy consumer in the world and our need for energy grows every year. Where does most of our energy come from (petroleum, solar energy, coal, natural gas, nuclear energy, etc.)? What energy sources do you think the US will depend on in 50 years?
- Do you know what natural gas is and where it comes from? Do you think it is good for the environment?
- New York State is one of the largest consumers of natural gas in the country. What do you think we use natural gas for? Can you give some examples of how you use it in your own life?
- What is a documentary film? How is it different from a narrative film? If a film is a documentary, does that mean that it is depicting the “truth”?
- How are film and activism connected? Does film have the potential to make change? As a filmmaker, what are the challenges inherent in trying to move your audience to take action?

RESEARCH IN ADVANCE

Goal: To help your students prepare to view *Gasland* by having them research and review key terms and film vocabulary. Helpful background information on these technical terms can be found on the following websites:

- Biology-online.org
- Enviropedia.org.uk
- Wikipedia.org
- Gaslandthemovie.com

Time: 30-60 minutes

KEY TERMS

Natural Gas
Hydraulic Fracturing or Fracking
Marcellus Shale
Watershed
Reservoir
Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)
Ozone
Environmental Protection Agency
Clean Water Act

FILM VOCABULARY

Documentary Film
Narrative Film
Director
Editing
Score
Point of View
Archive Footage

PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

JOINING THE DEBATE: FORMULATING ARGUMENTS AND BUILDING SKILLS

Goal: *Gasland* examines the current national debate surrounding the natural gas drilling technique called hydraulic fracturing or “fracking”. As critical viewers, your students will have the opportunity to debate the issues surrounding the film themselves. The following exercise will help students formulate arguments and practice their own debating skills.

Time: 20-30 minutes

- Split the class into two teams A & B and have the teams stand in two lines facing each other.
- Select a subject for debate (any subject will do—it could be something general like fashion, food or books or a subject from the class curriculum).
- The debate will start with the students from team A and B at the beginning of each line.
- The first member of group A must give an argument.
- The first member of group B (standing opposite them) must give a response to this argument.
- The second member of group A must give a new argument.
- The second member of group B must give a response to the new argument.
- After all the members of group A have given an argument, the groups swap roles.

STEP UP: SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT CONSERVING ENERGY AND WATER

Goal: This exercise will give students a chance to explore the choices they and their classmates make when it comes to conservation.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Have the students line up and instruct them to step forward when they can answer “yes” to a question related to energy and water conservation. Use the questions below as a guide but feel free to add your own.

- Do you unplug your electric appliances when you have finished using them?
- Do you turn off the water when you brush your teeth?
- Do you take less than 20 minutes in the shower? Ten minutes? Five minutes?
- Do you plug your appliances into a power strip? Into the wall?
- Do you throw your batteries in the trash when you are done with them?
- Do you drink tap water? Bottled water?
- Do you know where your water comes from?
- Do you know where your electricity comes from?
- Do you think about conserving water and energy?

POST-SCREENING LESSON PLAN OPTIONS

OBJECTIVE

This activity is designed to engage the students as active audience members and critical viewers and challenge them to examine and better understand both the point of view of the film and the opposing views and opinions. Students will be able to:

- Identify and understand the themes and messages of the film.
- Engage with the film's material as critical viewers.
- Discuss the pros and cons of natural gas drilling from multiple perspectives.
- Develop and present a persuasive argument.
- Understand how the issue of natural gas drilling impacts their own lives.

Time: 15-20 minutes

MATERIALS

You will need: writing paper and pens, *Gasland* Study Guide and computers for Internet-based research (optional)

PREPARE

Introduce the ***Preparing Your Class: Discussion Questions*** before you attend the screening, and record the students' responses. This feedback will be revisited during the lesson and will provide the jumping-off point for further discussions.

OUTLINE

1. Introduction

- Begin by discussing the screening of *Gasland* and the students' experience of the film.
- Ask a volunteer to provide a brief summary of the film's story for the class.
- Revisit the *Discussion Questions* listed above and the *Critical Viewing Reflection* from the *Gasland* Study Guide.
- Examine how their expectations about the film compare to what they actually experienced and learned at the screening.
- Explain to the students that they will be asked to examine the controversy surrounding natural gas drilling from the perspective of one of the groups currently involved in the debate.
- Imagining that the citizens of New York City are their audience, the students will work in teams to develop a persuasive argument to convince New Yorkers that their team's position on the issue is the right one.
- At the end of the project, each group will present their arguments and the class will vote to determine which is most persuasive.

POST-SCREENING LESSON PLAN OPTIONS

2. Research

Divide the class into three teams representing each of the following groups: the natural gas industry, the government (local or national), and environmental activists. (Students can use information from the film *Gasland* and the film's Study Guide as well as Internet research, if available).

Have each team answer the following questions:

- Does your team support natural gas drilling?
- Why does your team think your position on the subject is the right one? List at least three reasons.
- What are the facts that support your position? Give as much detail as possible.
- What three actions would your group like to take to further your cause?
- What are the positive outcomes that would result from taking these steps?
- What are your opponents' arguments and why do you disagree with them?
- What governmental policies, if any, do you think should be put into place?
- What impact will your position on the issue have on the life of New Yorkers?
- How would you summarize your argument in one sentence?

3. Presentation

Have each team present their argument to the class. Teams can select one representative to present their work or they can divide the presentation up among the group. The presentations can also be staged as debates with a question and answer portion and a team of moderators or as a mock trial.

After the teams have presented, ask the class to vote on the presentation they found most persuasive (students are not allowed to vote for their own team). When possible, the teams can present their arguments to students from other classes and have them vote and/or give feedback as well.

4. Reflection

Discuss the impact that the film and the activity had on their understanding of the natural gas drilling debate and how this issue affects their own lives. Also take time to review how the process may have changed their perspective on where their drinking water comes from and the importance of protecting New York City's water sources.

GOING FURTHER

These writing activities are meant to serve as a follow-up to the Pre-Screening Activities and the Lesson Plan. Assignments can be used as in-class writing activities, homework assignments, or the jumping off point for longer-term art, creative writing, or research projects.

TAKE IT TO THE STREETS: KNOW THE FACTS CAMPAIGN

You will need: poster board, markers, paint, scissors and glue

Time: 1-2 class periods

Have students research the natural gas drilling debate including the “Frac Act,” which is making its way through Congress, and create a public awareness campaign that illustrates the pros and cons of this contentious issue. Students can develop persuasive posters and catchy slogans that make their case, while always sticking to the facts they have collected in their research. After completing posters, students can:

- Take their posters out into the neighborhood or around the school in order to engage the public and their school community in a conversation about the debate.
- Record the responses to the posters by taking notes or using a video camera, if available.
- Photograph people standing next to the poster they support.
- Analyze the data in class.
- Take action by presenting their findings to their local representatives.
- Display posters in the classroom or school hallways.

MONOLOGUES: THE VOICES OF THE NATURAL GAS DRILLING DEBATE

You will need: pen and writing paper

Time: 1 class period

Have the students write a monologue from the perspective of someone involved in the natural gas drilling debate. Using the film as a guide, students will develop a character and talk about why they feel so strongly about their opinion on the subject. The monologue should be written in the first person and should answer the following questions:

- What is your character’s name?
- Where does your character live? What is her/his family and neighborhood like?
- How does your character feel about natural gas drilling?
- What impact does natural gas drilling have on your character’s life, job, health, environment and family?
- What does your character want to have happen next with natural gas drilling?
- What actions is she/he taking?
- What future does your character see for natural gas drilling and what impact will this future have in her/his own life?

GOING FURTHER

STRAIGHT FROM THE TAP: WHERE DOES MY WATER COME FROM?

You will need: poster board, markers, paint, scissors and glue

Time: 1-2 class periods

Resources: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/drinking_water/wsmaps_wide.shtml

Students study the sources of New York City tap water and the systems that bring it from the watershed (the source of NYC's drinking water) into the city. Using their research, students create a map that tracks the journey of a drop of water from the watersheds and reservoirs miles away to the faucets in their own homes. The maps can be created individually or in teams and can be made in small or large scale.

Students can add to the completed map by illustrating areas along the route where the water supply currently faces challenges and threats. They can also indicate actions that are currently being undertaken to improve and protect the system. The completed maps can be displayed in the classroom or hallways with a description of the project.

GET INVOLVED

Speak Out: The "Frac Act" is a bill that will amend the Safe Drinking Water Act so that the process of hydraulic fracturing is no longer exempt from regulation by the government. Contact your elected officials and let them know how you feel about the Frac Act. Check out the *Gasland* website for details: www.gaslandthemovie.com

Volunteer: Find opportunities to lend a hand conserving the waterways in New York State at www.riverkeeper.org

Organize: Start a campaign at your school or in your community to raise awareness about the need to protect New York City's water supply. Visit the *Gasland* website for resources and tips on how to get started: www.gaslandthemovie.com



Photograph from www.gaslandthemovie.com

We'd love to know how you are using these study guides in the classroom!
Email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org to share lesson plans and ideas.