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BLACKFISH

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BLACKFISH

Directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite
2013 | USA | 83 min

TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of BLACKFISH by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their class, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some weblinks that provide starting points for further research or discussion.

The Film

Director Gabriela Cowperthwaite began investigating the death of a trainer who was dragged to her death during a "Dine with Shamu" show at SeaWorld. She soon found the initial story gave way to a far more shocking and further-reaching situation that plumbed the depths of a billion-dollar industry. A killer whale linked to three trainer deaths over two decades, Tilikum is the backbone of the story presented in *Blackfish*. However, Cowperthwaite discovered it wasn't just this particular whale—there have been multiple cases of orca attacks on trainers in parks around the world, although never in the wild. Featuring testimonies from experts and trainers, and with never-before-seen footage, *Blackfish* artfully and powerfully explores the complex relationship we have with entertainment and nature, and the repercussions of keeping these sensitive and intelligent creatures in captivity. **Charlotte Cook**

Source: http://www.hotdocs.ca

The Filmmaker

Gabriela Cowperthwaite is a documentary filmmaker who for more than 12 years has directed, produced and written a variety of real-life stories, including *Blackfish*, a feature documentary currently selected for the 2013 Sundance Film Festival.

She has directed, written and produced for ESPN, National Geographic, Animal Planet, Discovery and History Channel. Cowperthwaite also directed, produced and wrote *City Lax: An Urban Lacrosse Story*. The film, for which Cowperthwaite was immersed in the inner-city for eight months, chronicles the lives of six 12-year-olds as they and their families struggle through middle school in their gang-ridden neighbourhoods. After winning multiple Audience Awards on the festival circuit, the film was acquired by ESPN and DirectTV.

In 2009, Cowperthwaite completed a medical film for UCLA International Medicine in conjunction with the International Rescue Committee, teaching doctors in Darfur, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Pakistan, clinical management of assault. The film focuses on clinics in war-torn regions, with the emphasis on providing ground-breaking medical care for victims of violence. It is being translated into three different languages and will be distributed in eight countries.

She is currently directing a campaign for Supply and Demand, a commercial directing agency based in New York and Los Angeles.

Source: http://gabrielacowperthwaite.com/

Educational package written and compiled by Dimitra Tsanos (dimitra.tsanos@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 are intended to provide you with a range of pre-viewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. They are followed by a page of weblinks for further investigation, some follow-up questions and quotations, and sample curricular outcomes.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Show students the trailer and/or poster for the film found on the film's website (http://blackfishmovie.com). Have students work in small groups to try and identify themes or ideas conveyed by the trailer. As a larger group, discuss with students how effective/affective the trailer and movie poster are as is media pieces.

Print several of the questions or quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or with partners to discuss if they agree with the ideas.

Set a purpose for viewing by having a discussion about one or more of the questions or quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide. Have them share the statement and what they think or believe about it with the class.

Have students define "animal captivity." They can use a word organizer by dividing a box in four. In the four boxes, have them write in each corner the following: Definition, Non-examples, Examples and Use in a Sentence. Ask the class their opinions about animal captivity? Take it up as a class.

Have a class discussion about ethics and animals. Discuss the use of animals in entertainment, such as circuses, zoos and aquarium parks. BBC includes a brief overview on the issue in their ethics guide section (http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/using/entertainment_1.shtml).

Have a class discussion about animals in zoos and aquarium parks. Use two case studies to create conversation and provide background information. Discuss the well-being of elephants in captivity at the Toronto Zoo. The *Toronto Star* has an article titled "Elephant Tug of War: The story of the Toronto Zoo Transfer" that reviews the story. Discuss the water issues and malpractice at Marineland in Niagara Falls, Ontario, that involves the mistreatment of their marine mammals. The *Toronto Star* has a featured section titled "Marineland" that includes a number of articles written about the facility (http://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/marineland.html).

Viewing Activities

Have students jot down five ideas for discussion, or questions that the film raised in their minds. Have students use a Venn diagram to compare the life of an orca in captivity to the life of an orca in the wild.

Post-Viewing Activities

Show the students their quotations from the Pre-Viewing Activity and see if their minds were changed or opinions altered or enhanced by the film. Assign some of the questions and quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide for homework to be taken up the next day in class. Check for completion.

Have students complete an exit note (a single small sheet of paper with one phrase or idea written on it) that demonstrates one thing they have learned, felt or decided as a result of watching the film.

Discuss with students their initial reactions to the various scenes and situations addressed in the film.

Have a class discussion about the regulations and laws protecting animals and trainers at zoos and aquariums. A CBC article titled "Ontario Eyes Tougher Regulations for Zoos, Aquariums" (http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2012/10/10/ontario-zoos-aquariums-animals-regulations.html) will help with the discussion.

Have students conduct online research on a marine park aquarium. Have them record their policies and regulations for their individual park. Share the findings as a class.

Have a mini class debate on whether animals deserve rights.

Have a class debate on animal captivity in zoos and marine park aquariums. Split the class into two groups. Assign one side as supportive on the topic and the other against the topic. Allow one day for preparation and one day for the debate. Students will write a personal response on the debate, addressing both sides of the issue and their personal opinion. The assignment and rubric, titled Animal Captivity Debate, are found on the following pages.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About the Film

http://blackfishmovie.com

Additional Resources

Blackfish Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/BlackfishTheMovie

Blackfish Twitter:
http://twitter.com/blackfishmovie

Centre for Whale Research: For almost four decades the centre has conducted an annual photo-identification study of the Southern Resident Killer Whale population that frequents the inland waters of Washington State and lower British Columbia.
http://www.whaleresearch.com/

Maclean's magazine: This September 8, 2010, article, "The Great Whale-in-Jail debate" by Nancy Macdonald, discusses how a captive baby beluga's death in Vancouver sparked soul-searching about the ethics of aquariums.
http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/09/08/too-big-to-tank/

National Geographic: The article "The Great White Whale Fight" by Kenneth Brower discusses the Georgia Aquarium's import of Russian Beluga whales.
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130531-beluga-whale-dolphin-marine-mammal-georgia-aquarium-capture-free-willie-narwhal/

New York Times: The July 29, 2013, issue included the piece "Smart, Social and Erratic in Captivity" by James Gorman.
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/30/science/smart-social-and-captive.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

ORCA Network: This non-profit organization, registered in Washington State, is dedicated to raising awareness about the whales of the Pacific Northwest, and the importance of providing them healthy and safe habitats.
http://www.orcanetwork.org

PETA: The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals website includes videos of their campaigns, along with other information about the abuse against animals.
http://www.peta.org

Save the Whales: This U.S.-based NGO educates children and adults about marine mammals, their environment and their preservation.
http://www.savethewhales.org/

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC): The global charity is dedicated to the conservation and protection of whales and dolphins.
http://www.whales.org/en-us

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

Using Docs in the Classroom: A teacher librarian's personal website where there are excellent resources for teaching with documentary films.
http://www.frankwbaker.com/using_docs_in_the_classroom.htm

Media Awareness: A Canadian nonprofit media education and Internet literacy resource library.
http://www.media-awareness.ca

Centre 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: 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. Free PDF download.
http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs_for_schools_monthly/resource_materials

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

What do you think the title *Blackfish* means? What does it actually mean? Why is this an interesting choice as a film title?

What are the required qualities to become a marine trainer?

How do the trainers continue to work at the park when they see the conditions the animals are kept in?

How do they compartmentalize their feelings?

Why are the trainers and the general public misinformed about whales? Should trainers be responsible in learning the career prior to marine park training?

Why is Tilikum still kept in marine parks when he's proven to be an aggressive whale, causing liabilities to the park and a threat to trainers?

Is it a good idea to breed from an aggressive male? Will his genes be carried through to his offspring? What are the alternatives?

Why do experienced trainers seem to be the ones who have the most accidents and deaths in marine parks?

What should the solution be for the improvement of the health of the animals? What regulations should be enforced? What should the priority be for the trainer or for the animals or both? Explain.

Why hasn't there been any changes made in trainer procedures in the last 20 years since the first trainer death occurred? What should be done?

Can marine parks create an environment where what happened at SeaWorld never happens again anywhere else?

Do we need marine park aquariums? Why do people visit them? Are they important or cruel? What are the alternatives?

Have you ever been to a marine park? Are you surprised at what you learned about them in the film? Would you visit a marine park aquarium after watching the film? Why or why not?

QUOTATIONS FROM THE FILM TO EXPLORE

1. *"When you look into their eyes, you know someone is home, somebody's looking back. You form a very personal relationship with your animal."* John Jett, former SeaWorld trainer
2. *"There's something absolutely amazing working with an animal. You are a team and you build a relationship together, and you both understand the goal and you can help each other."* Mark Simmons, former SeaWorld trainer
3. *"If you were in a bathtub for 25 years, don't you think you'd get a little irritated, aggravated, maybe a little psychotic?"* animal activist, CNN Special
4. *"It's just like kidnapping a little kid from its mother, everybody's watching, what can you do? It's the worst thing I can think of, I can't think of anything worse than that."* John Crowe, diver, speaking about catching orcas in Puget Sound
5. *"When we first started, they were quite small, quite young, so they fit in there quite nicely, but they were immobile for the most part. It didn't feel good, it just didn't. And it was just wrong."* Steve Huxter, former director of Sealand, speaking about the living conditions of the orcas during non-performance hours
6. *"If that is true, it's not only inhumane and I'll tell them so, but it probably led to what I think is a psychosis. He was on the hair trigger to kill."* Ken Balcomb, director, Centre for Whale Research, about the storage and living conditions of orcas at SeaWorld
7. *"I saw that there were a lot of things that weren't right. And there was a lot of misinformation and something was amiss. And you know, you sort of compartmentalize that part of it and I did the best that I could with the knowledge that I had to take care of the animals that were there. And I think all the trainers there have the same thing in their heart. They're trying to make a difference in the lives of the animals."* John Jett, former SeaWorld trainer
8. *"It's culture, you get back on the horse and you dive back in the water. And if you're hurt, well, then we've got other people that will replace you and you've come a long way. You sure you want that?"* John Jett, former SeaWorld trainer
9. *"Anywhere along the line, it could have been stopped because everyone knew it was a tragedy waiting to happen, but no one wanted to do anything about it. And in the end, it was the best trainer that lost his life."* Suzanne Alee, former video supervisor, Loro Parque
10. *"I've been expecting it since the second person was killed. I've been expecting it, for somebody to be killed by Tilikum. I'm surprised it took as long as it did."* John Jett, former SeaWorld trainer
11. *"All whales in captivity have a bad life. They're all emotionally destroyed; they're all psychologically traumatized, so they're a ticking time bomb. It's not just Tilikum."* Lori Marino, neuroscientist

CULMINATING ACTIVITY: ANIMAL CAPTIVITY DEBATE

Name: _____ Date: _____ Mark: _____ /10 (See rubric)

Circle your side: For Against

Your sub-topic to research: _____

Animal captivity has become a controversial subject. Many believe that zoos and marine park aquariums serve as educational facilities and provide the public with opportunities to learn about species they may not have been able to learn about otherwise. As well, they can sometimes provide protective measures in terms of endangerment or rehabilitation efforts. On the other hand, some find it unnatural and feel it can hinder a species, as they live in different environments than they do in the wild. Some consider it cruel when these species are purposely taken from their natural environments, as seen with the baby orcas in the film.

You will be debating animal captivity in zoos and marine park aquariums. You are encouraged to use case examples brought up in the film, but should also use other case studies from your local communities.

Group tasks:

Outline the topics you want to bring up during the debate with a speaker list.

There should be about six speakers and four rebutters for each side.

Each speaker will bring their research with them to the debate.

Rebutters need to predict what the other side will bring up and bring research to counter their points.

1. Format of the debate: (to be presented on: _____)
2. For animal captivity speakers: opening statement, one to two minutes each speaker (Against listens)
3. Against animal captivity speakers: opening statement, one to two minutes each speaker (For listens)
4. Congregate for one minute to plan for rebuttal
5. For rebuttal
6. Against rebuttal
7. Speakers list (if you want to speak, put your hand up and the teacher will keep a running speakers list)
8. Closing statements (one minute each)

As a final assessment for the debate, you will use your research and your notes from the debate and type a report of one to two double-spaced pages introducing the topic, addressing both sides of the debate and concluding with your opinion.

Due: _____.

Make sure to attach your research for your topic to your report.

ANIMAL CAPTIVITY DEBATE RUBRIC

Knowledge and Understanding					
Concepts	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Clear understanding of issues	Limited success in use of terms and concepts	Some success in use of terms and concepts	Moderate success in use of terms and concepts	Employs terms and concepts with a high degree of success	/5
Thinking and Inquiry					
Research	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Collection of Information	Information indicates limited research skills and does not include sufficient research on own topic	Information indicates moderately effective research skills on own topic	Information indicates effective research skills with most issues examined and considered	Information indicates excellent research skills with all issues thoroughly examined and considered	/5
Application					
Report	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Accounts in writing both sides of the debate as well as a well-supported opinion (grammar, 1-2 typed pages)	Communicates in writing with limited effectiveness	Communicates in writing with some effectiveness	Communicates in writing with considerable effectiveness	Communicates in writing with a high degree of effectiveness	/5
Communication					
Debate	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Overall communication skills are clear and to the point, well-supported points; emphasis, clarity and confidence	Overall points are limited/vague; hard to understand with very little emphasis	Points are somewhat effective, with a few details; had some confidence in speech	Points and overall aim is clear; some points supported	Excellent suggestions and debating skills; research is used in speech	/5

Comments:

Total /20= /10

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 7 Geography	• use the geographic inquiry process to investigate the impact of natural events and/or human activities that change the physical environment, exploring the impact from a geographic perspective.
Grade 9-12 English	• Developing and Organizing Content: generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience. • Understanding Media Forms, Conventions and Techniques: identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning. • Understanding Media Texts: demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.
Grade 9 Geography	• analyze the ways in which natural systems interact with human systems and make predictions about the outcomes of these interactions.
Grade 9 Science	• investigate factors related to human activity that affect terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and explain how they affect the sustainability of these ecosystems.
Grade 11 Geography	• evaluate the effectiveness of programs and initiatives designed to manage and protect the resources on which tourism is based. • explain the social, environmental, cultural, economic and political effects of travel and tourism on various destination regions. • analyze the social, environmental, cultural, economic and political effects of tourism-related development on a community or region. • evaluate the impact on travel and tourism of the plans, policies and initiatives of governments, businesses and other organizations.
Grade 11 Intro to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology	• Theories, Perspectives and Methodologies: demonstrate an understanding of major theories, perspectives and research methods in psychology. • Explaining Social Behaviour: use a sociological perspective to explain how diverse factors influence and shape individual and group social behaviour.
Grade 11 Law	• describe the role of law in the workplace.
Grade 12 Geography	• analyze geographic issues that arise from the impact of human activities on the environment in different regions of the world. • explain significant short-term and long-term effects of human activity on the natural environment. • analyze and evaluate interrelationships among the environment, the economy and society. • evaluate a variety of approaches to resolving environmental and resource management concerns on a local, regional and national scale.
Grade 12 Law	• evaluate the effectiveness of governments, courts and individual and collective action in protecting the environment. • analyze the legal process, legal systems and sanctions used to protect the rights of the employer and the employee in the workplace.
Grade 12 Politics	• explain the rights and responsibilities of individual citizens, groups and states in the international community.

The Overall Expectations listed above are from *The Ontario Curriculum*. Complete course descriptions, including all Overall and Specific Expectations, can be found at: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html