

DOCS FOR schools

Afghan Star

Educational Resource



AFGHAN STAR

by Havana Marking

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.

SOME BACKGROUND ON AFGHANISTAN: THE PEOPLE AND THEIR RECENT HISTORY

Afghanistan is where the West and East meet. It is made up of many different ethnic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Turkmen, Baloch, and others. The country also has two official languages: Pashto and Persian, though Persian is the most widely spoken. In AFGHAN STAR the contestants come from all parts of the country and from different ethnic groups. In most cases these groups have a long history of tribal, ethnic or religious conflict. This makes the show, Afghan Star, more controversial by testing these long held tribal or ethnic associations.

Nearly all Afghans are adherents of the Islamic religion in one of its forms. It is estimated that 80% are Sunni Muslim and 20% are Shi'a. Both have somewhat different views of religious and societal practice, but much of Afghan life is determined by that practice. Through the years of tribal warfare and the Soviet war, Islamic fundamentalists — such as the Mujahideen and the Taliban — had gained a great deal of societal control.

The Mujahideen arose as the predominant Islamic group fighting Soviet rule during the invasion of the 1980's. The name literally means "struggler" and these were often small groups of village men living in the mountains fighting in a guerrilla fashion against the far better equipped Soviet army. As the fighting spread, the groups spread, becoming more organized as well as better trained and equipped (often by the U.S.) and eventually held a great deal of power in the country.

As a reaction to the overt control by the Mujahideen and corruption by their leaders, the more radical Taliban began. The name means "student" and the young men who made up the Taliban in early days were often students in madrassas or Islamic religious schools. The ideology of the Taliban was a combination of Sharia law and tribal custom. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, along the way changing much about Afghan life. Women were required to wear a burkha (complete headscarf and fully covered body), banned from becoming professionally educated and in some cases, formally educated. Music, dance and other forms of cultural expression were limited or banned outright.

When the Taliban took over rule of the country, they instituted a form of religious law known as Sharia. This law sets out societal rules and obligations and freedoms for all aspects of Muslim life. As it was interpreted by the Taliban, along with the Koran, freedoms were very limited.

Educational Package written and compiled by Chris Atkinson
christopher.d.atkinson@gmail.com

THE FILM

After 30 years of ongoing war, with internal and external enemies and Taliban rule, Afghanistan is beginning to come out of a long period of religious monoculture. With this comes the pop culture phenomenon of an American Idol-style show called Afghan Star. In Afghanistan it is just as popular, but far more controversial, and perhaps more powerful with the people than its US or Canadian counterpart.

The program is controversial due to the Taliban and male-dominated tribal rule that previously existed in the country. Music was thought to be sacrilegious by the Mujahiddeen and outlawed by the Taliban during their rule. To have young people televised while singing and dancing (despite this still being outlawed for women), is a lot for the Afghan people to come to terms with. Voting takes place via text message and a very large portion of the population votes, young and old. This has caused a great deal of difficulty for the religious leaders who still believe singing and dancing has negative effects on the hearts and minds of youth.

Voting and having their voice heard through this form is a new experience for the Afghan people; when you consider that 60% of the population is under the age of 21 and never knew this type of freedom. This is the most powerful democratic act many of the citizens have accomplished. The broadcaster for Afghan Star and their announcer (Afghan Star's own Ryan Seacrest), Doaud Seddiqi, believes that the show will help "move people from guns to music".

There is tension between some white and black female students. Deputy Sheriff Lyndon Johnson, who is armed, full-time security in the school, is concerned there could be some trouble on prom night. The preparations for the prom and the personal relationships between our characters are woven together to create the intimacy and drama that culminates on prom night in Mississippi.

THE FILMMAKER

Havana Marking is a filmmaker and journalist. AFGHAN STAR is her first feature documentary film, shot in four months in Kabul Afghanistan. She has also produced television documentaries, both factual entertainment and one-off polemics, for over ten years. Before AFGHAN STAR, she directed THE CRIPPENDALES (2007) with which she won the Channel 4 @Sheffield scheme for New Talent. In 2005 she made the GREAT RELATIVITY SHOW, a series of animated shorts that explained the Theory of Relativity. These won a Pirelli Science award. Before directing, Havana was a producer and worked on some of the most successful UK formats and films: THE F WORD, MICHAEL PALIN: HIMALAYA, RIVER COTTAGE, WAR ON TERRA – WHAT WOULD JESUS DRIVE.

VIEWING THE FILM WITH YOUR STUDENTS

There are important themes in this film that have broad implications for our 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 sub-sections on this page are intended to provide you with a range of pre, during, and post activities. This is followed by a set of questions based upon the larger thematic domains in the film, some follow-up questions and quotations, sample curricular outcomes, and a page of web-links for further investigation.

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

1. Have students complete the *Pre-Viewing sheet Viewing Images and Making Predictions* on page four and five
2. Show students the trailer for the film (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DentE2ydnMI>). Have students work in small groups to try and identify as many themes or ideas conveyed by the trailer as possible.
3. Show students the trailer for the film (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DentE2ydnMI>). Discuss with students how effective/affective it is as a media piece.
4. Print several of the questions or quotations from page seven on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or with partners to discuss if they agree with the ideas. Have them share the statement and what they think or believe about it with the class.
5. Set a purpose for viewing by having a discussion about one or more of the questions or quotations on page seven.

VIEWING ACTIVITIES

1. Have students take notes on, or jot down connections to, one of the thematic domains on page six of this guide. Tell them to find proof from the film that supports their connections.
2. Have students use a graphic organizer to summarize the film as they watch it.
3. Stop the film at various points and have students provide summaries at each point.
4. Have students jot down five ideas for discussion, or questions, that the film raised in their minds.
5. Set a purpose for viewing: *Say: See if the predictions you made about the images come true. Try to write down information from the film that either supports or disproves your prediction. Try to write down a few impressions about each of the characters as well. Use the following, guiding questions to help you form your answer: Does this character act in a way that is agreeable? Would you make the same choice in this situation? What other options do they have and what are the consequences?*

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

1. Have students reflect on their impressions of the trailer and see if the themes they saw in it were expanded upon in the film.
2. Have students compare the affective/effective nature of the trailer with the film as a whole.
3. Show the students their quotations from the previewing activity and see if their minds were changed or opinions altered or enhanced by the film.
4. Have student complete an exit note (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.
5. Discuss with students their initial reactions to the various characters, and the degree to which they felt their predictions came true about the characters and images in the pre-viewing activity.

For further ideas around how to explore this documentary, use the guiding questions on page 6

PREVIEWING ACTIVITY: EXAMINING IMAGES AND MAKING PREDICTIONS

Below you will find an image taken from the film. In the film, characters outside of the main story are used to share ideas central to the film. Read each question and make an argument using clues from the image as well as your own experiences to support your answer.

Image A: These boys appear at the beginning of the film and talk about the importance of music to human happiness. Why do you think these boys were chosen to convey this message? Use information from the image, and your own knowledge to make your argument.



Image B: This woman is taking pictures of one of the contestants outside a mosque. What does this image say you about the lives of women in Afghanistan as well as the use of technology?

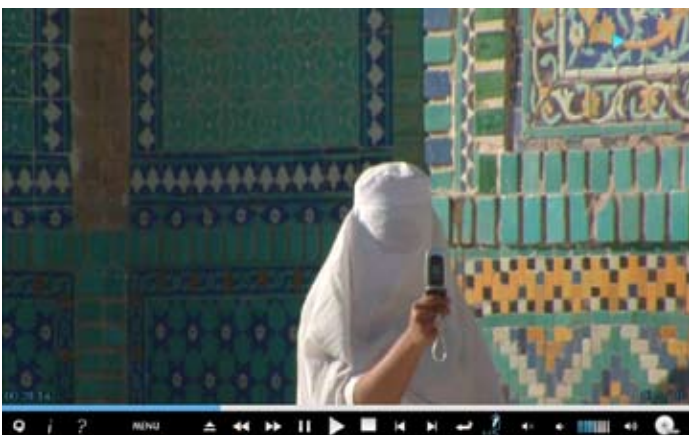


Image C: This woman is setting up an antennae to pick up the broadcast of Afghan Star. Why do you think it might be so important? What sort of personal characteristics do you think she is exhibiting?



Image D: This family is getting dressed up to watch the finale of Afghan Star. The translation of what is being said is in caption in the image. Do you think this is a serious statement? If so, why do you think the young woman has clothes that could be dangerous? How do you think her family feels about the clothes? The statement?



PREDICTION CHART

	MY PREDICTION	CLUES FROM THE IMAGE	IDEAS FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE
IMAGE A			
IMAGE B			
IMAGE C			
IMAGE D			

THE BIG QUESTIONS/IDEAS/ THEMES

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

- What is the subject of this film? Can you determine the filmmaker's 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 filmmaker's 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 does the filmmaker 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 filmmaker focused on those aspects?
- How do the images, themes and message of this film help you understand the filmmaker's 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 filmmaker's point of view on the opportunities and challenges of those issues? (adapted from NFB Documentary Lens, www.nfb.ca)

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

PRE-VIEWING OR POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

- How can a singing contest affect the democracy of a country?
- Can you identify and explain the gender issues, both subtle and obvious in the story? How are they similar to/different than your own culture of origin or Canadian society?
- What do you think the motivations are to try and limit the freedom of Afghan Star to involve people in voting for the winners?
- Who do you see as heroic in the story? Why? Would you be willing to make the same decisions or take the same actions if it were you?
- What character(s) do you empathize with? How are their lives different from, or similar to, your own life?

SOME QUOTES FROM THE CHARACTERS TO EXPLORE:

- *"From today the public can vote for their favourite contestant. Rich people, poor people, women and men, everyone. It is a new idea and the Afghan people like it"*
 - o What is the perspective of the young man speaking? Is he saying something that is as important to us as it seems to be for him and his people?
- *"When I listen to music, I feel happy. If there were no music humans would be sad. There would be nothing."*
 - o This was the boy at the beginning of the film. Why do you think the filmmaker chose him and why is his perspective important to the film?
- *"Because I am an artist, I see no difference between a woman and a man."*
 - o Does this perspective seem new to this woman, to this culture?

- *"I have learnt to struggle. Some people need to struggle to have a good life. Because of our poverty I have got this far."*
 - o What does this person mean about needing to struggle to have a good life? Does this make sense in her culture? In ours?
- *"We hide the songbooks and everything. If the Taliban come at night, we have a special place to hide the computer."*
 - o Think about the degree of secrecy that occurs in Afghan society. How do you think you would cope with this? Have you?
- *"Music is our unity. Is this more exciting than parliamentary voting? Yes, Afghan Star is more exciting. It captures that love of the people."*
 - o Do we share in valuing pop culture over politics in Canada? Does it make more sense for the Afghans than it does for us?

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS THAT CAN BE COVERED

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Music, Grade 10, Open (AMU20)	Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the function of music in society.
Civics, Grade 10, Open (CHV20) Informed Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the need for democratic decision making; • explain what it means to be a “global citizen” and why it is important to be one.
Challenge and Change in Society, Grade 12, University/College Preparation(HSB4M) Foundations of Social Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify a major question about social change posed by anthropology (e.g.,What impact does technology have on cultural norms?), psychology (e.g.,How is ego affected by family breakdown?), and sociology (e.g., How has women's changing workforce participation affected gender relations?)
English, Grade 10 Academic ENG2D Media Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding Media Texts: demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts; • 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; • creating Media Texts: create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques; • reflecting on Skills and Strategies: reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts.
Exploring the Arts, Grade 12, Open (AEA40)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze aspects of cultural identity found in works of art and productions.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES FOR AFGHAN STAR

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

The Huffington Post: An article written by Havana Marking describing the film

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/havana-marking/emaafghanem-stars-at-sunda_b_161401.html

Facebook: The Facebook page for the film put together by Havana Marking

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/AFGHAN-STAR-the-documentary/36816230678>

ABOUT AFGHAN STAR

Afghan Star: The Afghan Star television show's website

<http://www.afghanstar.tv>

AFGHAN STAR: The film's website which contains information about the film, filmmaker, and the music

<http://www.afghanstardocumentary.com>

CBC: A news article regarding a law implemented by the Karzai government to limit women's rights in Afghanistan.

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/04/01/harper-interview.html>

CNN: a set of news articles about the television show Afghan Star.

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/01/09/afghan.idol/index.html>

Standpoint Magazine: A magazine article that describes the film, the show, and their impact.

<http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/888/full>

CNN: A news story about the film highlighting the racial divide that we see in the film

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/Movies/01/21/mississippi.prom/index.html>

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 non-profit 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 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>

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