

Mary Pickford Film Center
DOCTOBER DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL, 2016
Discussion Guide

ELDER IN THE MAKING (2015)

Chris Hsiung, Producer/Director

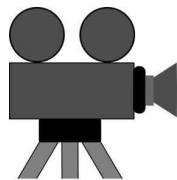
Cowboy Smith X, Co-Producers

CAST

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Chris Hsiung | Cowboy Smithx | Floyd Smith |
| Lacy Morin-Desjarlais | Kris Demeanor | Jane O'Connor |
| Wes Olsen | Dale Walde | Shawn Morton |
| Deserae Yellow Horn | Jason Plain Eagle | Shawna Goodstriker |
| Herman Yellow Old Woman | Narcisse Blood | Brent Scout |
| Keith Aune | Leroy Little Bear | Alvine Mountainhorse |

Two young urban dwellers, one a Blackfoot aboriginal named Cowboy and the other, a Chinese-Canadian newcomer named Chris, embark on a spiritual journey across traditional Blackfoot territory. Through thousands of years of ancient history guided by the wisdom of modern day elders, they find the beginnings of the long road to reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous people

Elder in the Making” is a feature documentary inviting all residents of North America to explore the tragic and hopeful history of their home. Through the journey of two unlikely travel companions, this film uncovers our responsibility as stewards of the land and of the generations yet to come.



DOCUMENTARY STYLE:

Bill Nichols, film educator, has written many texts on documentary styles and his analysis is distilled in the article cited here. He categorizes documentaries into 6 styles.

<https://www.videomaker.com/article/c06/18423-six-primary-styles-of-documentary-production>

Elder in the Making relies predominantly on the **PERFORMATIVE STYLE** of documentary filmmaking. This style “emphasizes the filmmaker’s own involvement with the subject. The filmmaker shows a larger political or historical reality through the window of her own experience. Rather than rely on the expository approach, the rhetoric of persuasion, the performative filmmaker becomes a personal guide who shows it and tells it like it is with raw emotion.”



USING THIS GUIDE:

This guide has been produced to enhance students’ viewing experiences. Questions reinforce CCSS for Social Studies and help the students to answer at least one of the essential questions of the Native Education Curriculum including: “What are the ways in which Tribes respond to the threats and outside pressure to extinguish their cultures and independence?”

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:

Cowboy SmithX is a Blackfoot man from Piikani Nation. Chris Hsiung is a first generation Chinese-Canadian raised in Calgary. Together they embark on a journey across Treaty 7 territory to learn about their common heritage and what it means to be an elder of value.

Treaty Territories: Locate Treaty 7 on a map. In addition to Reserves for several Aboriginal nations, it also encompasses the province of Alberta and the city of Alberta. Identify the natural resources, geographic features, and climates of the area known as Treaty 7. **What geographic factors stimulate the movement of goods, people, and ideas in pre-contact times and today?** Through centuries of interaction, First Nations view the Numbered Treaties as sacred. As an expression of this association, First Nations in Canada and members of the Federal Government will regularly meet to celebrate milestone anniversaries, exchange ceremonial and symbolic gifts, and discuss treaty issues. **After so many acts of deception and dishonor by the Federal Government, why do the First Nations continue to celebrate these historic treaties?**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numbered_Treaties

Northwest Mounted Police: The North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) was a Canadian police force. It was established in 1873, and in 1904 the name was changed to Royal Northwest Mounted Police ("Mounties"). <http://www.militaryheritage.com/nwmp.htm>

ROOTS

Like the vast majority of Canadians, Chris is a descendant of immigrants. He grew up thinking there was no history or culture before the Europeans came. Today, he realizes he is missing an important part of Canadian history and his own story as a resident of Treaty 7.

What do Chris and Cowboy have in common regarding their heritage?

Howard Zinn said that "*If you don't know your history, it is as if you never were born.*" After viewing the documentary, what do you think Zinn's statement means to Chris and Cowboy? Provides details (stated or inferred) from the film to support your answer.

Do YOU feel this way? Do you need to know your family's history in order to feel whole and complete? Do you know the cultural traditions, language, and history of your ancestors? What does your name mean? What aspects of your heritage have been preserved through the generations, and what aspects have been lost? If you want to know more about your history and heritage, how would you go about doing that?

ADAPTATION

Cowboy goes on a journey to understand the history of his people and discovers many examples of cultural adaptation, beginning with the origin on his own name, Cowboy Smith.

What does he discover? Why was he named "Cowboy" and why "Smith"? Why did he add "X" to the end of his name? What does the "X" mean, and why did he feel that it was important to make the name-change legal? Compare this to the naming of African slaves.....or to name-changes made to immigrants who entered the US via Ellis-Island.

Were you surprised to know that Cowboy plays golf, the "game of the oppressor"? Were you surprised to find out that Cowboy was an actual 'cowboy' at one point in his life? Why were you surprised? Explain the "irony."

Participating in golf and rodeo are examples of cultural “adaptations. ‘ What was happening historically that made it OK for people of aboriginal descent to participate in golf or rodeo while they were not welcomed into other public spaces? Can you draw parallels to other historic events, such as Jim Crow Era?

How are our ideas about other cultural groups shaped? How did Hollywood shape and reinforce the stereotypical image of the North American Indians? Beyond Hollywood, in what other ways have the stereotypical images and ideas about Native Americans been perpetuated? Why would one culture do this to another culture? Where else is this happening in the world today?

THE “INDIAN PROBLEM”: REMOVAL, ASSIMILATION and GENOCIDE

Both men believe that they are foreigners in their own land because they have been cut off from their heritage through cultural assimilation. Cowboy, like many of Canada’s indigenous peoples, is re-establishing his identity by educating himself about his past. The “X” in his name marks his missing history that was wiped away by generations of cultural genocide. To be an “elder of value” he must understand his past so that he can lead people into a more humane future.

Identify the political, economic, and cultural forces that led to the movement of the tribes onto reserves? Were these pressures the same in Canada as in the United States?

How does the rebuilt site of Fort Macleod exemplify: “History is how we want it to be seen, rather than how it really was.”?

At the time of colonization, there were 50 million buffalo. Why did the government slaughter this keystone species? How did this wholesale slaughter impact the aboriginal people of the plains? How did it impact the ecology of the region?

How did the economic system of the Industrial Revolution impact land encroachment, and the demise of the buffalo and the Plains Indians?

What were the impacts of Old World diseases on the Aboriginal people?

What was the purpose of Residential Schooling and how has it impacted the Aboriginal culture for generations?

How and why do religion and government exercise authority over people?

ECOLOGY and INTERDEPENDENCE

How does the physical geography and climate of the plains affect the Blackfoot’s culture, economy, and where they chose to settle and trade?

This geography is also deeply intertwined with First Nations spiritual beliefs and with their identity. What did you learn from the film about Blackfoot spiritual traditions?

Ecosystems are interdependent systems. When one part of the system crashes, the other parts crash, as well. Explain the phrase, “The trauma of the past crashes into the present”—What does this mean? What aspects of the present culture have been affected by events of the past?

How have the discoveries of archaeologists and ecologists helped to illuminate the history and lifeways of the Blackfoot?

ELDERS

The documentary film you just viewed is entitled, *Elder in the Making*. Define the term “Elder.” **What does the term “Elder” mean to you?** Respond using this stem:

“An Elder is _____.”

The film maker, Chris Hsiung, concludes that Elders the world over share at least 4 common qualities. **Explore each of these common attributes.**

- An Elder is concerned about his/her community and future generations.
- An Elder continues to learn deeply and broadly.
- An Elder helps people learn from history and from life.
- An Elder is always an ‘Elder in the Making’.

Now **watch Chris define** what he thinks it means to be an Elder during this—the very first-- “RedxTalk” (similar to a Ted Talk). <https://vimeo.com/151964680>

Cowboy considers himself an Elder-in-the Making and his purpose is to be a “person of value” to all people, including people of aboriginal descent. Which members of the cast have achieved Elder status in your mind? Which cast members seem to be like Cowboy and Chris-- Elders-in-the-Making?

What kind of “Elder in the Making” are YOU?

RESOURCES

MENTIONED IN THE FILM

BLACKFOOT CROSSING HISTORICAL PARK: <http://www.blackfootcrossing.ca/>

“HEAD-SMASHED-IN BUFFALO JUMP” WORLD HERITAGE SITE Interpretive Center:
<http://www.history.alberta.ca/headsmashedin/>

CALGARY STAMPEDE: <http://www.calgarystampede.com/>

FORT MACLEOD MUSEUM: <http://nwmpmuseum.com/>

TEACHER RESOURCES

INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: Indigenous School:
<https://sites.coloradocollege.edu/indigenoustraditions/2014/10/23/the-reality-of-residential-schooling/>

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/>

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. Article: “Soul Wound: The Legacy of Native American Schools.”
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/node/87342>

CULTURAL SURVIVAL: <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/what-we-do>

CBC ARCHIVES—Native Residential Schools.
<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/society/education/a-lost-heritage-canadas-residential-schools/the-eyes-of-children---life-at-a-residential-school.html>

OVERVIEW DOCUMENTARY “America’s Great Indian Nations” (1994)
<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/americas-great-indian-nations/>

NATIVE AMERICA STUDIES RESEARCH GUIDE: Native American Documentary Films
<http://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=95603&p=624343>

PBS NATIVE AMERICAN DOCUMENTARIE:
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/eight-native-american-documentaries/>

INDIAN COUNTRY MEDIA NETWORK Documentary Recommendations
<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/04/10/10-fascinating-documentaries-about-native-americans-you-can-watch-right-now-159964>