



Dear Teachers,

This guide has been developed as preparation and follow-up for your screening at the Reel Fun Film Festival of the film "Everything's Cool".

Background

Documentary

The documentary tradition has evolved through several theoretical forms and styles of representation, as Bill Nichols outlines in *The Voice of Documentary* (1983). Nichols argues that there are four main historical styles of documentary, each with distinctive formal and ideological attributes.

Nichols writes that the first thoroughly developed mode of documentary was the direct address style of the Grierson tradition, such as the March of Time's "voice of God". The Grierson style often presented an authoritative off-screen narration. But after World War II, the Griersonian was replaced by the new style of cinema verité. This approach provided an increase in the "reality effect" with its directness and immediacy. Filmmakers often used a hand held camera that elicits an unsteady frame to create the impression of "being there" during the everyday events of people's lives. The style is "transparent", not unlike the classical Hollywood style of capturing people in action, and allows the viewer to draw conclusions about individuals unaided by any commentary.

But the cinema verité style rarely offered a historical context, so in the 1970s a third style developed which incorporated direct address, usually in the form of the interview whereby characters or a narrator speak directly to the viewer. The interview-oriented film offered a central model for contemporary documentary, but this style was sometimes fragmented and incomplete (Nichols 248).

More recently, in the post-modern era, a fourth phase developed with films moving toward more complex forms where epistemological and aesthetic assumptions become more visible. With this style, documentaries become forms of re-representation, not clear windows onto "reality". The filmmaker is a participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning, a producer of cinematic discourse (Nichols 247-248). Nichols further explains that he does not intend to support the self-reflexive documentary as an ultimate solution to the dilemmas of representation, rather, he considers it part of an evolving process of documentary filmmaking.

Cinema verité addresses certain limitations in the voice-of-God tradition, the interview-oriented film addresses limitations apparent in the style of cinema verité, and the self-reflexive documentary addresses the limitations of assuming that subjectivity and both the social and textual positioning of the self (as filmmaker or viewer) are ultimately non-problematic. By acknowledging the importance of point of view, the self-reflexive strategy is less problematic than the strategies of commentary, cinema verité or the interview (Nichols 262).

The stylistic strategies of the self-reflexive filmmaker are numerous. Self-reflexive documentaries mix observational passages with interviews, and the voice-over of the filmmaker with inter-titles. Further, direct address has been reinstated rather than implementing the voice of authority evidenced by a narrator. The self-reflexive filmmaker may also edit a string of conflicting interviews together to create a counter-pointing text. This is a strategic response that recognizes that a single voice cannot speak with ultimate authority. When there is no longer a governing narration, the word of witnesses must provide its own validation (Nichols 253-256).





The self-reflexive filmmaker admits, through the tissue and texture of his/her work, that all filmmaking is a form of discourse fabricating its effects, impression and point of view (Nichols 248-249).

Film Synopsis

Everything's Cool

Dir. Daniel B. Gold, Judith Helfand, 2007, USA, 100 Mins –English

In their signature upbeat comedic style, Daniel Gold and Judith Helfand weave an entertaining, character-driven tale about the mother of all problems: global warming.

“Everything's Cool” explores whether North America is finally “getting” global warming in the wake of the most dangerous chasm ever to emerge between scientific understanding and political action. In their own ironic and desperate way these ‘so-sad-they-are-funny’-vignettes of apathy, frustration and individual activism might very well be the thing that finally speaks to the public. The ultimate challenge is to convince the audience how urgent this situation really is – while leaving them optimistic and energized to try and take action.

This highly appealing documentary with appearances from Salma Hayek and Jake Gyllenhaal addresses the truly critical issue, not whether Global Warming is a reality but how do we close the gap between the scientific fact of Global Warming and the equally dangerous fact of political inaction. In a society numbed by frequent and generally overblown prophecies of doom, the film tackles the truly daunting task of enlightenment and inspiration for action with wit and style.

Curriculum Themes: Environment, global warming, Inuit culture with respect to the global warming in the Canadian Arctic, politics, universal climate change

www.everythingscool.org/

Pre-Screening Exercises

Objective: Students will become well informed on the issue of global warming by collecting information from current newspapers. Students will question, evaluate and formulate their own opinion of the text. This exercise will help raise awareness that it is a controversial issue with multiple perspectives and also encourage critical viewership of the documentary.

Materials: Newspapers, magazines, scrap book

Find a recent article in a newspaper or magazine that covers the topic Global Warming. Cut it out and past it in the scrap book. Summarize the article in your own words. At the end of the synopsis state your own opinion, do you agree or disagree, why or why not? Discuss the articles with the whole class and debate the issue.



Post-Screening Questions

Content

- What was the film about? What do you remember the most about this film?
- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- Of all the perspectives put forth in the documentary, which perspective do you agree with the most?
- How would you compare Everything's Cool to the article you read before the screening?
- Is Everything Cool objective or does the film have a bias?
- How will you change the future of global warming?

Form

- Who were the main characters in the film?
- What images do you remember most?
- How is the story told? Is there a narrator? How was the film edited?
- Was old and new footage used in the film?
- How would you describe the interviews (lighting, locations, camera angles)?
- What are the aesthetic/visual differences between documentary films and fiction films?
- If you were to make a film on global warming, what would you do?

Related Films

- 11th Hour (2007)
- An Inconvenient Truth (2006)
- Manufactured Landscapes (2006)
- Radiant City (2006)
- Global Warming: The Signs and the Science (2005)

Further Reading

Watt, Sheila (2001) [The Greenhouse Trap](#) Beacon Press Boston

Nordhaus, William (2007) [Managing the Global Commons](#) MIT Press Boston

Cline, William R. (2007) [Economics of Global Warming](#) Peterson Institute Washington DC