



Lesson Plan: *Following Sean*

OVERVIEW:

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the film *Following Sean*, a reflective look at how life in San Francisco in the turbulent 1960's has influenced two families: the filmmaker's and that of a four-year-old boy who was the subject of a short film made by the filmmaker in 1969. This lesson looks at clips of that short film in its historical context and asks students to conduct a video interview that reflects modern times.

Note: The filmmaker's version of *Following Sean* contains scenes with nudity, strong language, people using drugs, and other content that would be inappropriate for use in the classroom. To avoid such content, be sure to record the PBS broadcast version off-air or request the "broadcast version" of the film from the P.O.V. lending library.

P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing skills and note taking strategies to understand and interpret a video clip.
- Create video shorts that feature a brief interview with someone who can describe the details of an experience that represents modern times.
- Discuss what historical information can be drawn from first-person accounts, and how multiple accounts of the same type of experience or having an experience in a different time period might affect how an account is perceived.

GRADE LEVELS: 9-12

SUBJECT: Journalism, U.S. History, Geography, English, Visual Arts

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Handout: Viewing Guide (PDF file)
- Handout: Interview Project Planning Sheet (PDF file)
- Method (varies by school) of showing the class a video clip from the P.O.V. Web site for *Following Sean*, or have a copy of the film and a VHS/DVD player and monitor
- Video cameras and editing software (optional)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: Two 50-minute class periods (assuming that projects are completed outside of class)

SUGGESTED CLIP:

Clip: Sean and The Haight (length: 10:10)

The clip begins at the start of the film. The clip ends at 12:23 with "...and his whole family had become a symbol. And it was all my fault."

BACKGROUND:

Filmmaker Ralph Arlyck first met Sean while living as a graduate student in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood at the height of the 1960's. On the third floor of Arlyck's building was a come-one-come-all crash pad apartment from which the precocious four-year-old Sean would occasionally wander downstairs to visit and talk. One day Arlyck turned on his camera, and Sean's casual commentary on everything from smoking pot to living with speed freaks was delivered in simple sincerity, resulting in a famous 15-minute film. In *Following Sean*, Arlyck returns to San Francisco to find out what happened to Sean and his family. As he tells their story, Arlyck finds that he is examining his life as much as theirs. The result is a film that shows complex family dynamics, influences on life choices, and common themes relating to work and life activities.

ACTIVITY:

1. Set the stage for the lesson by having Scott McKenzie's rendition of "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers In Your Hair)" playing in the background as students come into class and get settled.
2. Tell the students the name of the song, who performed it, and that it was a big hit in the United States and Europe in 1967 (#4 on the Billboard Hot 100 list in the U.S. and #1 in Europe). Also, point out some of the lyrics, such as those that say that, "If you're going to San Francisco, you're going to meet some gentle people there" or the part that says, "There's a whole new generation with a whole new explanation...people in motion." Explain that this song is credited with bringing thousands of young people to San Francisco during the late 1960's and is often associated with the "hippie" culture of the time.
3. Next, tell students that you are going to show them a brief video clip that introduces them to filmmaker Ralph Arlyck, who moved to San Francisco in the late 1960's and took some film classes. One film project featured Arlyck's four-year-old neighbor Sean, whom students will see at the beginning of the clip. Then, pass out the Viewing Guide handout to focus student viewing and play the clip.
4. After watching the video, ask students what they think about Sean's upbringing and the hippie culture shown in *The Haight*. Discuss what Arlyck meant when he said some audiences of his short film viewed Sean and the Haight as, "Canaries in the mineshaft." Why was Sean considered by some to be a symbol of the era?
5. Explain that students will be creating video shorts of their own that feature a brief interview with someone who can describe the details of an experience he or she has had that you think represents modern times. Some examples of such experiences might be going through airport security, preparing family dinner, attending a school dance, etc. (Note: If capturing such interviews on video isn't possible for your class, feel free to modify the lesson to have students submit audio recordings, written transcripts, visual displays with pulled quotes, or feature stories for the school newspaper.)

6. Pass out the Interview Project Planning Sheet and go over any instructions related to whatever school resources might be used to complete the assignment. Also, give students an appropriate deadline for turning in the project.

7. On the day projects are due, ask some volunteers (as many as time permits) to share a 3-5 minute highlight of their video short with the rest of the class. Point out effective production and interview techniques, and discuss what the class could learn about modern times from the experiences shared in the interviews. In what way might this person's account have been different from that of another person with the same or similar experience? What value do multiple accounts of an experience have when producing a news story or historical record? How might this person's experience have been different, say 10, 30, or 50 years ago? What historical factors would account for these differences? What about 50 years into the future?

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS:

Students can be assessed on:

- Completion of the Viewing Guide.
- Completion of the Interview Project Planning Sheet.
- How well the video short meets the requirements of the project.
- Contributions to class discussions.

EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS:

- Watch the broadcast version (See the lesson's Overview) of *Following Sean* in its entirety. Then do one or more of the following activities:
 - Create a timeline that indicates both key events in history and those in the lives of people featured in the film. Discuss how historical events might have influenced the life choices of Sean and his family, as well as the filmmaker.
 - Identify what the characters share in common with one another, and where there are differences.
 - Discuss the attitudes about work expressed by various characters in the film. What do students think is the appropriate balance between work and life activities? Do their parents agree or disagree with student perspectives?
 - Create a soundtrack that could accompany the various scenes shown in the film during different time periods.
- Have students interview a parent (or person of interest) and create a map that shows the different places where this person has lived. Number each location in order from birthplace to current residence and create a narrative that describes key events that took place in each location and the reasons for moving to the next place. How do students think a map of their lives will look 30 years from now?

RESOURCES:

Digital Video Basics

<http://digital-video-101.classes.cnet.com/>

Take a free online course on digital video production from the experts at CNET.

Digital Video In The Classroom

www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/pages/listdigitalpa.html

This list of links connects you to online video editing sites, production tips, glossaries, and more.

STANDARDS:

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/.

Geography

Standard 6: Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.

Language Arts

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

U.S. History

Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Visual Arts

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts.

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in broadcast journalism, secondary education, and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource Web site (now PBS Teachers), and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.