



Lesson Plan: Focus on Fathers: *Hardwood*

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the 30-minute film *Hardwood*. *Hardwood* is a personal journey by director Hubert Davis, the son of former Harlem Globetrotter Mel Davis, who explores how his father's decisions affected his life. Set against the backdrop of our country's race relations in a time of social strife, this moving film is a portrait of one African American man's ultimately successful efforts to be a good father and an example of how modern society has redefined our notion of family. Now a coach for young basketball players, Mel recalls falling in love at first sight with Hubert's mother, a white woman, at a time when racism made their union impossible, and then his subsequent marriage to a black woman and the birth of their son. Both women in Mel's life, the mothers of his two sons, speak movingly about love and betrayal, and both sons speak of the pain caused by their absent father and its effect on their mothers.

This lesson provides students with an opportunity to explore and discuss the difficulties and importance of communication across generations and the larger effect of personal storytelling.

You can obtain copies of *Hardwood* for educational use from www.filmakers.com/indivs/Hardwood.htm.

OBJECTIVES:

In this lesson students will:

- Develop critical thinking skills
- Create original pieces of writing
- Practice listening and speaking, skills

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

SUBJECT AREA: English Language Arts

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: One 45-minute period and additional homework time.

MATERIALS:

- VHS/DVD of *Hardwood*, VCR/DVD player & monitor
- Internet access for student research
- Black board, white board or large paper
- Chalk and/or Markers
- Mawuli's letter to his father Mel Davis (available on POV website at: www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hardwood/special_excerpts.html)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Please bear in mind that this might be sensitive material for some students.

ACTIVITIES:

Step 1: Have students create a list of positive and negative attributes of fathers. They can compose these lists as a classroom activity or in small groups but a class list should be created and displayed in the room.

Step 2: Introduce the film: “This is a documentary a young man made about his father, while you watch I want you to write down three or four messages or life lessons the father conveys to his boys.”

Step 3: Show the film. (You can show the film in its entirety or use the following suggested clips).

Suggested clips:

Clip 1 - (08:28-12:30)

This first clip establishes Hubert, the filmmaker’s, relationship with his father and half-brother. It also demonstrates Mel’s relationship with his own father. Start the clip about two-thirds of the way into Chapter one when Hubert says (8:28): “*When I was growing up in Vancouver, some of my best friends were mixed. We all shared the same background: white moms and black dads. We were all black boys growing into men with dads who had left too soon.*”

Continue playing for four minutes until right after CHAPTER TWO: RECOLLECTIONS appears on the screen and Hubert says (12:30): “*A year after my dad moved to Vancouver, he and my mom got married. That was the first time I met my brother. He came up for their wedding. I remember thinking my brother was going to hate me. When we got back from the airport, my brother hugged me. He told me how happy he was to have a little brother. From that moment I felt loved by him.*”

Clip 2 - (17:00-20:00)

This clip begins with Mawuli: *For me and Daddy it was our conversation. It was almost like another language for us. So we would be talking about life but we would talk about it through basketball.*
Ends with Megan (20:10): *Your dad being in your life at the time he was a life-changer for you. And he knew that. That’s why he came.*”

Clip 3 - (22:43-28:28)

This final clip is very powerful and contains the emotional climax of the film.

Begins with Mel: *I don’t care how low you get, what you did, you can change. It was me who had anger, it was me who had jealousy. Nobody else could change me but me. How do you two guys feel as me as your dad?*

Step 4: Have students put a plus next to messages on their lists they think are positive and a minus by messages they think are negative.

Step 5. Read Mawuli’s letter (see Handout 1). Have students write their own letters to someone who has been an important influence in their lives. Have them include both what they learned from them and what they would like to have learned from them but haven’t yet.

EXTENSIONS:

- As preparation for viewing the film, or as part of a unit on the civil rights movement, have students research the history of interracial marriage in North America. Suggest they start their research with the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court case *Loving vs. Virginia*, that found laws against miscegenation—marriage between whites and non-whites—illegally discriminated on the basis of race. While viewing *Hardwood* have students take note of discussions about interracial marriage. After viewing, discuss the differences between attitudes towards interracial relationships in the 1960's, when Megan and Mel met, and today. As a homework activity have students prepare a report on changing laws and attitudes towards interracial marriage in the United States. Alternately, have them write a personal reflection on what they think the significance is of the changing attitudes and laws pertaining to interracial marriage, either in *Hardwood* or in their own lives.
- Students should have completed or be near completion of the novel, *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride. Discuss similarities and differences between the characters in the novel and the characters in the documentary.
- Involve students in producing their own film by turning a diary entry into a film. Talk about how a diary differs from an autobiography.

RESOURCES:

P.O.V.'s *Hardwood* Companion Site

www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hardwood

The *Hardwood* companion website offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Hubert Davis, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film.

McBride, James. *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.

McBride's mother, a white Polish Jew, raised her biracial children while dealing with isolation and criticism. Her story is profound and a must-read for those seeking to understand the racial climate in America.

STANDARDS:

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

Language Arts – Writing

1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
 - Benchmark 1: Pre-writing: Uses a variety of pre-writing strategies
 - Benchmark 5: Uses content, style and structure appropriate for specific audiences and purposes
 - Benchmark 12: Writes in response to literature

Language Arts – Reading

5. Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
 - Benchmark 1. Establishes and adjusts purposes for reading
 - Benchmark 6. Reflects on what has been learned after reading and formulates ideas, opinions and personal responses to texts

Language Arts – Listening & Speaking

- 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
 - Benchmark 3. Uses strategies to enhance listening comprehension
 - Benchmark 4. Listens in order to understand topic, purpose and perspective in spoken texts

Source: www.mcrel.org