

Uýra: The Rising Forest

A FILM BY JULIANA CURI



POV

DISCUSSION GUIDE





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Film Summary



While traveling through the Amazon, Uýra shares ancestral knowledge with Indigenous youth to promote the significance of identity and place, threatened by Brazil's oppressive political regime. Through dance, poetry, and stunning characterization, Uýra boldly confronts historical racism, transphobia, and environmental destruction, while emphasizing the interdependence of humans and the environment.

**“TO ALL THE FORESTS
THAT BROUGHT US HERE
AND THE MANY OTHERS
TO COME.”**

COMMON CONCEPTS & LANGUAGE

Amazon

A biome located in South America, widely known for hosting the world's largest continuous tropical forest and being one of the planet's most biodiverse areas. It is a heterogeneous and complex region, sheltering not only vast diversity of fauna and flora, but also cultural diversity in the form of traditional and Indigenous communities, which are those most affected by environmental degradation and climate change.

Ancestry

Study and analysis of lines of descent and genealogical connections within human groups. It seeks to understand the origin, evolution, and relationships of human societies over time, taking into account biological, cultural, social, and symbolic aspects transmitted through generations.

Artivism

A term derived from the combination of the words "art" and "activism" that refers to the use of a medium of expression (such as performance, music, video, painting, photography, or graffiti) to promote awareness, engagement, and reflection on current issues (political, social, and environmental themes). It is a creative language that goes beyond traditional activism initiatives, employing the infinite potential of art to evoke emotions and reflections and compel change.

Caboclo

A broad social classification referring to the rural population of the Brazilian Amazon in general. The term also may be used to refer to the children of White colonizers and Indigenous people.

Colonization

The process of occupation and exploitation (economic, political, and so on) of territories by a dominant group from outside the geographical region. Colonizers establish control over the traditional populations of these territories through the

promotion or imposition of cultural values, as well as political and economic domination.

Curupira

A legendary character in the popular imagination of Brazilian folklore, especially in the Amazon. Considered a guardian of the forest, representing an intimate connection with nature, he is described as a mischievous boy with backward feet, fiery red hair, and the ability to shapeshift.

Drag

A type of performance where people dress in highly stylized ways and perform gender in an elevated or campy manner. Performers adopting feminine or masculine personas are referred to as "drag queens" and "drag kings," respectively. While drag's main purpose has been for performance and entertainment, it is also used as self-expression and a celebration of LGBTQ+ pride. Drag is not the same as transgender (though there are many trans drag performers); it is an artistic/performative practice rather than a gender identity.

Gender, gender identity, and gender expression

Gender refers to the behavioral, cultural, and psychological characteristics that are socially constructed to express an individual's sense of identity as masculine or feminine, some combination thereof, or one not constituted by rigid categories of gender. Gender expression relates to how a person outwardly manifests, or expresses, their gender identity. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily limited to biological sex characteristics.

Intersectionality

A means to look at multiple identities. It is a term created by Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 when addressing the theme of racism in gender studies and how the two are related.

Nonbinary

People whose gender is not male or female use many different terms to describe themselves, with nonbinary being one of the most common. Other terms include genderqueer, agender, and bigender. None of these terms means exactly the same thing, but all speak to an experience of gender that is not bound by a socially, culturally, and politically mandated gender binary.

People of the forest (povos da floresta)

Traditional peoples and communities that have their own forms of social organization and that occupy and use territories and natural resources as a condition for their cultural, social, religious, ancestral, and economic reproduction, using knowledge, innovations, and practices generated and transmitted by tradition. Examples include caboclos, extractivists, indigenous communities, fishermen, rafters, quilombolas, riverside dwellers, and rubber tappers.

Quilombolas

Inhabitants of quilombos, communities built by descendants of those who resisted the slave regime that prevailed in Brazil for more than 300 years and was abolished in 1888. Their ethnic identity still distinguishes them from the rest of society and is characterized mainly by cultural manifestations (such as linguistic and religious elements) that have a strong link with Africa.

Rubber tapper

A person who extracts latex from rubber trees using a traditional technique called *sangria* (bleeding). Rubber is made from the latex collected. As the rubber tree is native to the Amazon River basin, this technique is traditional knowledge passed down from generation to generation in the area.

Key Issues

Uyra is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of particular interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Amazonian identities and realities
- Environmental degradation
- Amazonian colonization
- Ancestry and connection to (inner) nature
- LGBTQIA+ communities
- Activism and self-expression
- Climate change/climate action



Background Information

Uýra is a film about nature and ancestry—the nature of people, internal nature, the nature that we call the environment, and how we relate to all these aspects. It explores how all natures (currents and ancient) intertwine like a web, and how this interconnectedness is relevant and fundamental to understanding how problems—and solutions—arise from various places, ways of being, ways of expressing oneself, and living.

Uýra is also a film about politics, about how oppressive and archaic regimes can negatively affect our psychology and self-expression, our futures, and small details of our everyday lives in ways that imprison us. *Uýra* is also a call to action, urging us to think about how we can act to combat these ancient ideas in our environment and communities.

Uýra is a film about the right to express ourselves in the way we experience life, our ancestry, and awareness. It's also a call for us to think about what connects and interferes with what we live and how it reverberates in us and returns as action in the environment.

Above all, *Uýra* is a film about beingness—about art, potentiality, feelings, pulsation, and about how life always finds a way to flourish even in difficult and sometimes unimaginable conditions.

Let us flourish!

Amazon Biome

The Amazon biome is home to the largest tropical forest and watershed on the planet, boasting some of the greatest biodiversity worldwide. It spans over nine countries, covering more than five million square kilometers, with 60% located in the northern region of Brazil. Its vast forests significantly influence regional and global climates, sequestering around 70 billion tons of carbon.

Beyond the plants, animals, and other living beings of the forest, the Amazon possesses cultural wealth evident in its people, communities, cities, and their ways of being and living. Though sparsely populated by the standards of modern metropolises, the region is still home to approximately 22 million people. The majority reside in urban areas, yet there are still a considerable number of traditional communities scattered throughout the zone.

The Amazon is home to a diverse group of traditional peoples, also known as povos da floresta (people of the forest). These are social groups that base their way of life on sustainable extraction and use of raw materials from the forest, thus living intrinsically connected to and heavily dependent upon the biome's forests and rivers for survival.

These communities harbor great cultural wealth, including ancestral knowledge about how to use natural resources sustainably without depleting them or their natural habitat.

Amazonian Colonization and Ancestry

Colonization processes are complex and multifaceted. These layers of complexity increase over time, through struggles and generations. The initial contact between Europeans and native Amazonians dates to the pre-Columbian period. At that time, the entire territory was inhabited by an immense number of diverse Indigenous groups. When the Spanish and Portuguese arrived in the late 15th and early 16th centuries in search of wealth, a process began that was repeated in various parts of the world: wars waged against the local way of life through the imposition of external cultural elements (language, religion, values), attempts to homogenize customs, and territorial and political-financial control through the exploitation and use of natural and human resources for the benefit of the colonizers.

However, it is important to note that the density of the forest made colonization in the Amazon slower, although still profoundly impactful. Around the 19th century, especially in Brazilian territory, rubber extraction became significant, attracting migrants from other parts of the country and immigrants from abroad. Larger groups began to form in major cities, and with them, native customs of the various groups increasingly mixed. After the 20th-century rubber boom, the expansion of agriculture, livestock, and monoculture cultivation led to deforestation of the Amazon, destroying large areas and causing impact in a short period of time. That loss of natural habitats led to loss of biodiversity; changes in rain cycles, and consequently the flows of large rivers; loss of ecosystem services; and increase in territorial conflicts. The business model implemented by colonizers not only affected the way of life of traditional communities, but also threatened their cultural identities.

As a result, various socio-environmental conflicts involving governments, traditional communities, environmentalists, and entrepreneurs arose. Land ownership and improper exploitation of natural resources created an atmosphere of tension that impacted nature and people.

Today, the Amazon faces many challenges. The climate emergency, stemming from the environmental impact of years of improper exploration and colonization of global natural resources, has knocked on its door, and the point of no return appears increasingly close. Each year, nature responds more forcefully, and those first impacted are precisely those who contributed least to all these alterations: the people of the forest, who are intrinsically dependent on it.

Amazonians

Approximately 22 million people live in the Amazon, and this population is far from homogeneous. From Indigenous people to riverine communities, quilombolas to rubber tappers, caboclos to fishermen, there is a rich variety of ways of life in contact with the forest.

The popular idea that Amazonian peoples sustain a way of life where they live isolated in the forest, almost frozen in time and space, is wholly incorrect. Even though isolated small groups exist, the reality is that the overwhelming majority of Amazonians live in direct contact with a small or large city, though often maintaining roots in traditional ways. Not every inhabitant of the Amazon is deeply connected to the forest, but every single one is impacted by it.

In a major Amazonian city, there are many people who have never set foot in a forest. The typical inhabitant of a large Brazilian Amazonian city is the result of colonization and the intermingling of forest peoples with foreigners (mostly Europeans) and Brazilians from other states, who,

in turn, descend from a mix of people from different countries, such as Portugal, Spain, Angola, Congo, Nigeria, Italy, Germany, Poland, Japan, Lebanon, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

Recognizing the diversity of population groups, their cultures, and their ways of expressing themselves through art, religion, rituals, collective experiences, sexualities, affections, bodies, and ethical-moral values validates and strengthens identities and marks the importance of diversity in a world regulated by increasingly homogenous and unattainable standards that are often validated by social media.

In the Amazonian context, ensuring the protection of traditional populations and their territories is fundamental to maintaining the standing forest in the promotion of just and sustainable development.

Artivism and Drag in the Amazon

In current popular culture, the image of a drag queen is typically that of a heavily made up person wearing extravagant clothes and engaging in exaggeratedly feminine behavior.

But many traditional Amazonian populations do not employ the dichotomous gender system used in most of the rest of the world. Indeed, quite the opposite.

The drag depicted in the film is a form of artivism. This type of relationship between art, politics, and sexual and gender diversity is not new. Various social movements (such as feminism and Black empowerment movements) have used art and cultural products as strategies to attack sexism, racism, and xenophobia. More recently, artivism has frequently focused on climate injustice. The urgency of artivism from local perspectives has increased. A native artistic language can be a powerful tool for increasing understanding.

Artivism challenges us to leave our comfort zone of homogenized, colonized, and sterile languages and values and explore the fluidity and infinite possibilities of being and expressing.

Using art not just to express ourselves, but as a tool to drive local change and enhance global education, we can begin to envision a future that previously often seemed unattainable. We will get there not simply in our collective imagination, but through everyday dialogue that shapes us.

**“But the impossible is coming,
and the unimaginable is due.”**

Uýra Sodoma

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DISCUSSION PROMPTS and ACTIVITIES

The discussion prompts, which follow the order of appearance in the film, are an invitation to dialogue. Please select discussion questions that are relevant to your community.

Starting The Conversation

Grounding Yourself and Starting the Conversation

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with partners before starting a group discussion.

Reflect on the feelings you experienced while watching the film and what parts of your body or memory they may have activated. Sit with yourself for a few minutes of quiet, breathing into those spaces and allowing the feelings to flow through you. If it feels useful, take a moment to close your eyes.

- What were your immediate thoughts after viewing the film?
Did you gain any new insights?
- Were there specific scenes or moments that challenged your initial expectations or reinforced your initial feelings toward the film?
- Did your emotional response to the film impact your overall appreciation of the storytelling and its message?
- What felt familiar? What felt unfamiliar? How and why?

OPENING ACTIVITY (optional)

Before starting the film, we suggest a brief activity (15 minutes) to produce a word cloud. It can be produced online or written on a board, cardboard, the floor, or even on a sheet of paper. Facilitators who have access to a computer and internet can use an online word cloud tool and share a link/code with participants so they may access it via computers or smartphones/tablets. Regardless of the resources you have, it is ideal for each participant to contribute at least one word.

Encourage participants not to overthink but simply spit out the first word that comes to mind.

Ask each participant to choose and answer in one word one of the following questions, or choose just one question to ask each participant if that will work better in the time you have available:

- What is the first feeling that comes to mind when you think about your ancestry?
- How would you classify your relationship with the environment in which you live?
- If you could use only one form of art to express yourself, what would you choose?

ART AND ACTIVISM QUESTIONS

- What about Emerson's approach to activism was new for you?
- How did this film encourage you to consider the relationship between art and activism?

- What were some of the most beautiful moments in the film? Why were they so impactful to you?
- How do Emerson's many identities and experiences manifest in their art and performance?
- How did you see communities developing through creative practice?
- What did this film teach you about the relationship between art and experiences of belonging?
- What was striking about the relationship between humans and the natural world in this film?
- In the film, Emerson says, "When we make art from our backyard, our forests, our stories, we understand that voices are important. They carry the voices of all those who came before us."
- In what ways can place-based, or land-based, art more deeply connect us to our homes or homelands?
- What voices does land carry?
- What is your relationship to place?

ANCESTRY QUESTIONS

- Have you ever explored your personal ancestry? If so, what did you learn?
- What are your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents' origins? In what ways have they shaped your life and your identity?
- Where did your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents live? How do the environments that they were raised in impact you and

your relationships (to them, to family, to your own identity, to place)?

- Does anything about your past feel like a grounding space for you?
Are you inspired by your personal past in any way?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions.

- What did you feel when you finished watching the film?
- What environments and ancestral experiences shaped you?
- How do you view the importance of conservation in the Amazonian context?
- How do you feel your individual expressions intertwine with expressions of nature around you?
- How can the empowerment, experiences, and identities of local communities promote real change?

TAKING ACTION

If the group is having trouble generating their own ideas, these suggestions can help get things started:

- *Amazônia de Pé (Standing Amazon)* is a Brazilian movement to protect the forests and people of the Amazon. It is a network of hundreds of organizations and thousands of activists in all regions of the country. The network's main objective is to shepherd the Amazonia de Pé bill (a popular initiative to protect the public forests of the Amazon and those who best know how to protect it—indigenous peoples, quilombolas, riverside communities, small extractivists and conservation units) into law. Learn more at [Amazônia de Pé](#).
- Consume and discuss *alternative LGBTQIA+ art and stories*. See the *RESOURCES* section for a different, alternative, and anti-colonial selection.

Teaching Guide

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students/participants will have the opportunity to engage in free expression while connecting with their inner ancestral essences and the natural environments in which they live.

MATERIALS

MAKEUP
FABRICS
NATURAL MATERIALS (SUCH AS FORAGED LEAVES, TWIGS, AND SHELLS)

Time Required:

From 90 minutes to 120 minutes, depending on the number of participants. If there are a large number of participants, we suggest dividing into groups. This activity can also be a 180-minute workshop, in which case we recommend a break before the presentations and final questions.

Activity

This activity is a pocket version of the workshop mentioned in the film. You can perform a song (in its entirety or an excerpt), part of a film, a poem, a painting, or just speak or move freely.

While you choose the art you will perform, we suggest you take a few minutes to connect with your inner nature and be inspired by the final minutes of the film. Close your eyes and take 10 deep abdominal breaths.

Part 1 - *Forage for materials in nature*

Part 2 - *Assemble the costumes and prepare the art to be presented*

Part 3 - *Presentation (before presentations, sit silently for 5 minutes to connect with your feelings)*

Part 4 - *Sharing the experience*

Reflection Questions:

- What is the first feeling that comes to your mind when you start your presentation?
- How do you classify your relationship with the body in which you live?
- How do you classify the relationship between your mind and the environment in which you live?
- Do you feel free to express yourself?
- Do you feel empowered when you express yourself in ways other than the usual?

**“I see myself as a canvas,
as art, and I express it.”**

Mafel Soares

Resources

To research and explore:

Museu da Diversidade Sexual

This São Paulo museum dedicated to sexual diversity explores memory, art, culture, acceptance, appreciation of life, agency, and development of research involving the LGBTQIA+ community.

Native Land

Native Land is an app to help map Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages.

Observatório Quilombola

Interactive and interdisciplinary space dedicated to the collection, organization, and analysis of information relating to traditional Black communities of African religion (terreiros), quilombola communities, and rural Black communities in their local and regional contexts, as well as relevant policies.

Povos Indígenas no Brasil

List of Indigenous peoples in Brazil divided by ethnic groups and their relationships. Can be filtered by linguistic family and by state.

To read:

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To listen to:

[“Amazonas Moreno” by Raízes Caboclas.](#)

[“Arreda” by Gaby Amarantos.](#)

[“Festa do Tubarão” by Dona Onete.](#)

[“Flutua” by Johnny Hooker.](#)

[“Peles Vermelhas do Brasil” by Boi Bumbá Garantido.](#)

[“Ruka” by Nelson D.](#)



Credits & Acknowledgments



About the Author

Natália Wagner is a biologist, environmental educator, born and raised in the Amazon. She holds a master's degree in Freshwater Biology from the National Institute for Amazonian Research (INPA) and is a former substitute professor at the University of Amazonas State (UEA). She has been working on socio-educational projects in schools, universities and with traditional communities in Amazon since 2009. Currently working as executive coordinator of projects in the Education for Sustainability Program at Foundation for Amazon Sustainability (FAS). She's been working for many years to spread and promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with an emphasis on climate change (13), quality education (4), sustainable use of terrestrial (15) and aquatic natural resources (15).

DISCUSSION GUIDE PRODUCERS

Courtney B. Cook, PhD | *Education Manager*, POV

C. Rees | *Education Editor*, POV

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