

Hummingbirds

A FILM BY SILVIA DEL CARMEN CASTAÑOS AND ESTEFANÍA BEBA CONTRERAS



POV

DISCUSSION GUIDE





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Film Summary



In *Hummingbirds*, Silvia and Beba tell their own coming-of-age story, transforming their hometown on the Texas-Mexico border into a wonderland of creative expression and activist hijinks. Filmed collaboratively over the final summer of their fleeting youth, their cinematic self-portrait celebrates the power of friendship and joy as tools of survival and resistance.

Using This Guide

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *Hummingbirds* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

Tips and Tools for Facilitators

Here are some supports to help you prepare for facilitating a conversation that inspires curiosity, connection, critical questions, recognition of difference, power, and possibility.

Share Community Agreements

Community Agreements: What Are They? Why Are They Useful?

Community agreements help provide a framework for engaging in dialogue that establishes a shared sense of intention ahead of participating in discussion. Community agreements can be co-constructed and created as an opening activity that your group completes collectively and collaboratively. [Here is a model](#) of community agreements you can review. As the facilitator, you can gauge how long your group should take to form these agreements or whether participants would be amenable to using pre-established community agreements.

Opening Activity (Optional): Establishing Community Agreements for Discussion

Whether you are a group of people coming together once for this screening and discussion or a group whose members know each other well, creating a set of community agreements helps foster clear discussion in a manner that draws in and respects all participants, especially when tackling intimate or complex conversations around identity. These steps will help provide guidelines for the process:

- **Pass around** sample community agreements and take time to read aloud as a group to make sure all participants can both hear and read the text.
- **Allow time** for clarifying questions, make sure all participants understand the necessity for the agreements, and allow time to make sure everyone understands the agreements themselves.
- **Go around in a circle** and have every participant name an agreement they would like to include. Chart this in front of the room where all can see.
- **Go around two to three times** to give participants multiple chances to contribute and also to give a conclusive end to the process.
- **Read the list aloud.**
- **Invite** questions or revisions.
- **Ask** if all are satisfied with the list.

COMMON CONCEPTS AND LANGUAGE

Fronterizo/Fronteriza

A borderlander, one who lives on a national border. It is not a term just describing living in the geographical space of a border, but also the languages and cultures of the border. “Fronterize” is the gender neutral term for the concept.

Chosen Family

A group of people related not by biology, but by choice, to provide support. Chosen families are common among groups of people who have limited contact with their biological family, whether it be due to physical or emotional distance. Chosen families are common in LGBTQ+ communities and immigrant

communities meant to fulfill the love and care of a traditional family. The term also refers to the familial kinship of ballroom culture that emerged from Black, drag pageant circles in the 1970s.

Narrative Sovereignty

The right and act of sharing one’s story on one’s own terms, having both narrative and artistic power. This term was coined by indigenous filmmakers, who assert their right to tell their own stories about their own lands.

Queer

An umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender.

Reproductive Justice

A critical feminist framework that includes the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, and the right to parent a child in a safe and healthy environment.

LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

Dear Hummingbirds viewers,

Thank you so much for taking the time to watch Hummingbirds, we are so excited to share ourselves, our friendship, and our hometown of Laredo with the world. Hummingbirds is a radically joyful coming of age self-portrait. As you come along with us in the film, we hope you will feel and connect with our laughter through everything life brings our way and know you're not alone no matter what you are going through. Thank you Laredo for bringing us together, and thank you POV for helping us share our story. Thank you for watching and we hope you also feel seen and embraced by Hummingbirds.

*Love,
Silvia y Estefanía*

Participants

Silvia Del Carmen Castaños

Silvia Del Carmen Castaños, they/ them, is an independent filmmaker, activist, and transit planner for the City of Boston. Born and raised in Laredo, Texas, Silvia's first feature film, *Hummingbirds*, won the grand prize for best feature film at Berlinale Generation. They've been honored with fellowships from Firelight Media, BAVC MediaMakers, CIFF/ LEF, Doc Society, and NBCU Original Voices. Silvia is currently working on their second film, *Los Papeles de mi Mami* with support from Film Fatales and Sundance Institute.

Estefanía Beba Contreras

Estefanía "Beba" Contreras, she/ her, is a filmmaker, musician, photographer, and tattoo artist born in Mexico and raised in Laredo, Texas. Beba directed and created original music for *Hummingbirds*, which won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Film at Berlinale Generation 2023 and toured festivals all over the world, winning awards and critical praise. She is a 2021 NBCU Original Voices Fellow and 2023 Firelight Fellow. Beba makes music under the name Andromeda – you can find her songs, including the soundtrack of *Hummingbirds*, on Spotify

Key Issues

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

- Immigration
- Reproductive Justice
- Borderlands
- Undocumented Joy
- Queer Youth
- Activism
- Narrative Sovereignty

Background Information

Contextualizing Abortion and Immigration Laws in Texas

In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war between Mexico and the United States. Mexico ceded 55% of its territory, including present-day Texas. The treaty guaranteed citizenship, safety, and property rights to Mexicans living in that territory. However, by the 19th century, only one of those proved to be true - despite becoming citizens, many Mexicans lost their land and found themselves in a hostile environment.

Although the border has moved to the south of Texas, it is not the only place where people can be subjected to random and arbitrary stops and searches. The federal government claims the power to conduct warrantless stops within 100 miles of the U.S. border. According to the U.S Customs and Border Protection official website, these checkpoints are there to “detect and apprehend... individuals attempting to travel further into the interior of the U.S.” as well as illegal narcotics. For undocumented people living on the U.S. side of the border, this means that moving away from the border is not possible without further risk of deportation. It is important to note that post 9/11 immigration laws have made the patrolling of borders much stricter.

In 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, resulting in 21 states banning or restricting abortions earlier in pregnancy. As of 2024, abortion is completely banned with a few limited exceptions. As a result, people travel outside of Texas for the procedure – according to Guttmacher’s Monthly Abortion Provision Study in 2023, 35,500 Texas patients traveled for abortions. Currently, there are no active abortion clinics in Laredo, Texas, and at the time *Hummingbirds* was filmed, patients seeking abortions would have to travel to San Antonio or Houston. The option to travel outside of Laredo and outside of Texas is extremely risky for undocumented migrants who would have to go through a checkpoint.

Similar to post-1848 treaty laws when Mexican Americans with U.S. citizenship did not commonly have access to property or safety, for undocumented Mexicans living on former Mexican territory today, these basic rights are still out of reach.

Queer Joy and the Importance of Chosen Family

Chosen families are groups of people related not by blood or biology, but by choice, to provide support. Historically, chosen family groups have been very common among LGBTQ+ communities as people may have strained relationships with their families after coming out. Likewise, the concept of chosen family is also very present and relevant for migrant communities. Communities of people who have been separated by migration have histories of finding and creating chosen family in the cities and communities they have migrated to. These networks of support are a form of mutual aid and community care for those who may be living in differing degrees of precarity.

It's important that in this intersection - migrant queer chosen families - people see and feel joyfully represented. Too often people focus on strained or separated relationships, however, queer formations and different structures of community and relational styles are sources of life-giving care and connection, worthy of celebration.

Narrative Sovereignty and Background Information on the creation of *Hummingbirds*

Narrative sovereignty is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing that prioritize the right and authority people have over their stories and relationships to land. *Hummingbirds* asserts the right of the people in borderlands to tell their own story, and for the dominant narrative to be determined by fronterizes themselves. For example, *Hummingbirds* departs from typical views of the U.S.-Mexico Texas border which tends to depict borderlands as a place of violence, trafficking, and travel - and depicts it as a place where people can also live and exist joyfully

Hummingbirds is a result of a collaborative apprenticeship model of filmmaking. The first-time filmmakers were mentored by industry professionals in all roles - producers, editors, co-directors. Additionally, the team believed in people of all roles sharing view-points and backgrounds like those of the directors; the *Hummingbirds* team is predominantly Mexican American, Texan, queer, women/non-binary, and fronterize.

Sources:

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DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The discussion prompts, which follow specific chapters of the film, are an invitation to dialogue. These questions should be open-ended, requiring critical engagement on the part of the viewer. There should be 4-6 prompts, each prompt with 3-6 questions. The Discussion Prompts always begin with “Starting the Conversation” which asks broad questions to the group as a warm-up. The discussions around the questions should last for 20 minutes.

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 a partner before starting a group discussion.

- What are you feeling?
- What moments inspired you? Did any moments challenge you?
- How would you describe *Hummingbirds* to someone who has not seen it?

Combating stereotypes

- What was different about this film than others you have seen about the U.S-Mexico border?
- What was different about this film than others you have seen that feature queer friendship?
- How did this film depict care? How did this film depict difficult moments? How did this film depict joy? What resonated with you about these narratives?

Queer Joy as Resistance

- What are some moments in the film where joy was apparent in Silvia and Estefania's relationships and lives?
- Can you think of ways that resisting harmful policies, laws, or ideas can be creative and fun?
- Why is it important for joy to exist alongside struggle? How can activism be more fulfilling and effective when done in community?
- Were there any moments that conjured memories from your own life in this film? How did those moments impact you?
- In what ways did the young peoples' relationships affirm their experiences and identities despite outside forces that stand to devalue them? Share some examples.

Filmmaking

- The film was made by first-time filmmakers mentored by industry professionals, what stands out to you about this style of filmmaking?
- Have you seen other films that practice narrative sovereignty? How does this influence the dynamics of storytelling in the film?
- Have you ever considered making a movie about yourself?

- What stories would you like to tell about your friends or about the place you grew up?
- Does your personal background impact how “worthy” you feel about your own stories and whether they are worth sharing with the world? In what ways?



OPENING/CLOSING ACTIVITY

OPTIONAL

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.

Before the film

After welcoming community members and folks watching *Hummingbirds*, invite them to reflect on why they are here, and to participate in a short meditation. You may use this example, or adapt it to the needs of the audience.

"Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Unclench your jaw, maybe move your head side to side gently. Think about the sun touching your face gently in the summer. See your favorite sunny memory from the place you grew up in.

With your eyes closed, feel the distance between you and the people sitting around you. Before we begin, think about what a safe film-watching space looks and feels like and how you will contribute to that environment. Why are you here? What interests you about *Hummingbirds*? Is there anything you are hoping to learn or understand by watching the film?"

After the film

Before discussion begins, invite the audience to ground themselves and be in their bodies in order to prepare for being with their community. You can use this example, or again, adapt it to the needs of your audience.

"If comfortable, close your eyes and take a deep breath. Unclench your jaw, maybe move your head side to side gently. Place your hand over your heart, or hold your hands - let's take a collective deep breath.

With your eyes still closed, take a moment to check in with yourself. What are you feeling? What are you thinking?"

OPENING/CLOSING ACTIVITY (cont.)

Invite your audience to have a collective moment of silence, slowly asking them to open their eyes and engage with themselves and one another for the rest of the discussion guide. Invite people to step in and out of engagement as they see necessary.

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 are you feeling?
- What are your first impressions of *Hummingbirds*?
- What moments resonated with you?

POST-SCREENING SURVEY

After watching the film, please fill out this short DocSCALE survey. DocSCALE is a mobile feedback tool that enables filmmakers to collect viewers' reactions, take-aways, and insights

docscale.itvs.org/survey/hummingbirds



Or text HUMMINGBIRDS to 415-223-8013

Resources

Abortion Finder Find trusted abortion service providers near you in all 50 states

Hummingbirds The film's official website

All Above All Organization education policymakers and the public about the harm of abortion bans. The link here includes more information and a factsheet for immigrants seeking abortion care.

Gender Spectrum Gender Spectrum works to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens. They start with the child, then radiate outwards, working with adults and institutions that affect all children to create gender-inclusive environments from birth through young adulthood.

GLAAD As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.

The Montrose Center The Center is "home" to dozens of LGBTQ-affirming social and civic organizations, and offers affordable rental space for

meetings and events. They are based in Texas.

National Network of Abortion Funds find an abortion fund local to your state

PFLAG PFLAG is the first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people, their parents and families, and allies. With nearly 400 chapters and 250,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas across America, PFLAG is committed to creating a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed.

The Trevor Project The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people.

Teaching Guide

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Participants will be able to engage in reflecting upon the stories and narratives told in *Hummingbirds* and build their own narrative. The results of this activity will hopefully encourage further engagement and learning of the topics in the film, as well as visualizing and archiving their own lives, as well as building networks of care.

MATERIALS

- PAPER
- WRITING UTENSILS
- NOTECARDS
- STICKY NOTES
- *HUMMINGBIRDS* FILM

TIME REQUIRED

90 MINUTES

Essential Questions

- How do we build narratives?
- How can we support each other to exist joyfully, even among difficult experiences and marginalized identities?
- How can we consider and reconsider our networks of care? How can we invite reflective practices into our lives that help us “come of age” as we age?

Activity

Post-Film Reflection - 10 minutes

After participants watch the film, the facilitator asks them to silently reflect on the narratives in *Hummingbirds*. *Hummingbirds* share experiences through a lens of joy and resilience.

Let's reflect:

- How did this film depict care? How did this film depict difficult moments? How did this film depict joy?

Participants are encouraged to raise their hand and answer these questions out loud.

Building and Rebuilding our Own Narratives - 20 minutes

Silvia and Estefanía experience two different cultures and languages in one place. As fronterizas, they embody living both of them at all times. In the film, they are also experiencing a multitude of identities and experiences: being queer, young, of different migration statuses, and both have experienced having abortions – all in the context of Laredo, Texas. While some may read or think through those experiences negatively, Silvia and Estefanía depict a fuller image of that in *Hummingbirds* - acknowledging difficulties while also grounding each other in joy. In this way, they are able to just live!

Teaching Guide (cont.)

What are identities, experiences, and places you embody everyday?

On a paper, ask participants to copy down the following chart and fill it in.

	What are stereotypes or misconceptions about this?	What is your personal experience with this? How do you embody it in everyday life joyfully?
Identity/Experience/Place 1:		
Identity/Experience/Place 2:		

Networks of Care- 20 minutes

We begin by adding a section to the above chart and asking participants to reflect on their community.

			Who do you know who shares this identity or experience? Who supports you through these experiences? How do they support you/how do you support one another?
Identity/Experience /Place 1:			
Identity/Experience /Place 2:			

Teaching Guide (cont.)

Drawing your Family - 20 minutes

As children, we were asked to draw and visualize our families. As we come of age or become adults, how can we build space to reconsider and imagine these? Who are our networks of community that help us?

Participants are given a paper and utensils. Participants individually reflect on what their family system looks like answering the question - who is in your chosen family? For folks who don't have one or are working on one, encourage them to write the characteristics of people they would like to be in their chosen family. *Ask participants to exclude their names here.*

Gallery Walk - 10 minutes

Participants post their Chosen Family Drawing on the wall. Participants write affirmations on each other's drawings.

Closing Reflection- 10-20 minutes

Invite participants to take 10 minutes to reflect upon the activity, considering the questions below:

- How do you build your own narratives?
- How can we support each other to exist joyfully, even among difficult experiences and marginalized identities?
- How can we consider and reconsider our networks of care? How can we invite reflective practices into our lives that help us "come of age" as we age?
- Did any of these activities challenge you?

At the ten minute mark, invite people to share should they feel compelled to.

Credits & Acknowledgments



About the Author

Leslie Benavides, Producer, Co-Editor

Leslie Benavides, *she/her*, is a multimedia artist who was born and raised in southeast Houston. She has a BA from Brown University in Urban Public Policy. HLeslie was a Sundance/WIF Strategy Intensive Fellow and a part of the inaugural cohort of the NBCU Original Voices Fellowship and participated in VdR Industry Works in Progress. Her work has been supported by Sundance, IDA, Field of Vision, Ford Foundation | JustFilms, SFFILM, Doc Society, and Chicken & Egg Pictures, among others. *Hummingbirds* is her first film.

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