

TV for Untold Stories

CONTENTS

- 1 How to Use the Episode in the Classroom
- 2 Discuss Censorship
- 3 A Poem About the World
- 4 Creating an Altar
- 5 Addendum: TV and Museums

GUIDE

HOW TO USE THE EPISODE IN THE CLASSROOM

“TV for Untold Stories” is about 20 minutes long and is meant to be viewed all the way through. There are four artists featured under the overall theme of storytelling in contemporary art. For three of the artists, there is a prompt students can return to once the video is complete.

This guide is meant as a supplement to the episode. It expands on some of the ideas and artworks covered in the episode. While some of the sections could be shared directly with students for critical reading and discussion, they are meant to be additional research for teachers to incorporate the episode into their existing curriculum.

Teachers have used previous videos in a number of ways:

LIGHT - Assign the episode as homework and reflect on it as a bell ringer the following day.

MEDIUM - View the episode together in class. Break out into groups and invite each group to revisit a section of the video and complete the prompt.

HEAVY - On one day, view the episode together in class and complete the prompts in groups. On the following day, host an in-depth discussion or workshop based on one of the artworks or practices in the episode, developed on your own and aided with information from this guide.

For reference, full information about the artworks featured in the episode are collected below, along with big ideas, and prompts.

SEGMENT 1

Bani Abidi (b. 1971, Karachi, Pakistan, lives in Karachi, and Berlin, Germany)

Memorial to Lost Words, 2016
Eight-channel sound and letter installation

Episode timestamp: 1:17 - 3:40

Big idea: Bani Abidi didn’t write the letters featured in this work. She found them in a historical archive. Each letter is from a different individual writing home from the First World War. The authors are Indian soldiers—more than a million of whom were conscripted to fight for the British Crown. These letters never made it home. They were censored and never reached India. And in fact, the history of these soldiers remains largely neglected.

Prompt: In their letters, some soldiers ask for items that will bring them comfort in a time of great hardship. Do you have things like that? Small things or unlikely things that would sustain you? Tell someone about it. Share what might bring you a sense of home or resolve through trying times, if only for a moment.

SEGMENT 2

Alfredo Jaar (b. 1956, Santiago, Chile, lives in New York, NY)

All works 2014–ongoing
Framed pigment prints with light fixtures

1 100 Women (Shada Nasser)
2 100 Women (Nawal el Saadawi)

3 100 Women (Camila Vallejo)

Episode timestamp: 3:40 - 5:37

Big Idea: Alfredo Jaar didn’t take these photos—he found them mostly from press clippings. He’s researching “extraordinary stories of extraordinary women doing extraordinary work.” He recognizes it as a never-ending project—giving accomplished women the recognition they deserve.

Prompt: Have you ever felt under-recognized for your work? Or maybe...you were recognized, but then had to bear the weight of that attention. Has anyone ever asked you to hold the spotlight for others like you?

SEGMENT 3

Andrea Bowers (b. 1965, Wilmington, OH, lives in Los Angeles, CA)

My Name Means Future, 2020
Single-channel video (color, sound)
51 minutes, 6 seconds

Episode timestamp: 5:37 - 12:02

Big Idea: Andrea Bowers made this video in collaboration with Tokata Iron Eyes, who is a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and has been involved with the movement to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline since its inception. She’s sixteen years old in this video and has been an activist since the age of nine. In the video, Tokata tells her story. History can seem like a faraway story. Even though Tokata’s story is special, we’re all deeply connected to the past and the land we live on.

Prompt:

SEGMENT 4

Teen Creative Agency Apprentice Angelina Cofer interviews Leah Gipson, artist with the organization A Long Walk Home, about their ongoing artist and activism project *The Black Girlhood Altar*.

Episode timestamp: 12:02 - 21:00

DISCUSS CENSORSHIP

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) describes censorship as the suppression of words, images, or ideas that are “offensive,” happens whenever some people succeed in imposing their personal political or moral values on others. Censorship can be carried out by the government as well as private pressure groups.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines censorship as the action of preventing part or the whole of a book, movie, work of art, document, or other kind of communication from being seen or made available to the public, because it is considered to be offensive or harmful, or because it contains information that someone wishes to keep secret, often for political reasons.

DISCUSS

How would you define censorship in your own words?

Can you think of examples of censorship in the modern world?

Can you think of a situation where preventing from being seen that’s considered offensive or harmful is useful or helpful thing to do?

READ THIS EXAMPLE LETTER

from Bani Abidi’s *Memorial to Lost Words*, 2016

38th CIH
France
17th October, 1917
(Urdu)

Be good enough to tell my father to write every week. If it is too much trouble to write it at length it will do if he simply makes his thumb impression on a sheet of paper and sends it. That will satisfy me, for I do not want long letters. What I feel now is that, if I get no letter from India I have no appetite at all and feel useless for my work. How can I help this? It is not in my power to feel otherwise. It is such a long time since I saw you that my heart has gone very soft.

Kaja Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Mahomed Fazal
(Rawalpindi District, Punjab)

It may appear to you as if there is nothing obviously offensive about the content of this letter. Why do you think the British would not have wanted this letter to be delivered to India?

POEM ABOUT THE WORLD

Read this poem that was recited by Tokata Iron Eyes in the video *My Name Means Future* (2020):

“Sometimes when I close my eyes or even when I just think about it I realize, I don’t think that I’m okay. It’s because the things that I am forced to bear witness to, are not okay. As a child in America, I have watched discrimination in action before I knew how to say that word. I’ve been called racial slurs before I even knew what they meant. And I’ve seen corruption in my schools and in my city. It’s when my teachers leave for better paying jobs and when our relatives leave because they can no longer bear to live here. I guess you could say it’s because we don’t live here. We survive. The dreams our ancestors had of a better future for our children rests in the palm of our hands, and yet we cannot seem to grasp it. I wonder if anyone else finds it hard to breathe the air here. Can they too feel the endless sense of longing and the mistaken sense of hope. The air here is thick with it. And still, I wonder why I cannot breathe. I watch as my peers are shot in our schools, killed literally while learning how to live. I watch as their families are being torn apart. And I watch as we are massacred in the streets for the color of our skin. I watch as our mothers are assaulted on the trip home from work. And I watch as my sisters are raped by old men who have probably been assaulted themselves. I watch as my aunties go missing year after year. They are taking away my everything. How much longer until there is nothing left? I wish I could close my eyes and see flowers, and sunlight, and rainbows. I close my eyes and I am so struck by my own memories that I could choke. I feel like I live

with a constant lump in my throat. I’m always on the verge of tears, even at my happiest. The things I’ve seen, the things I know, the things I remember, they are still happening. And that is why I cannot breathe. I don’t want to watch anymore. I will not watch anymore. I am going to help my people, even if it means I will never breathe easy.”

DISCUSS

Are there any lines of this poem that stick out to you? What is this poem about? How does this poem make you feel?

BRAINSTORM

What is the world you live in like now?

What are some things you wish you saw when you close your eyes?

What is the world you would like to live in like?

How can you help make the world like the world you would like to live in?

WRITE

From your brainstorm, create your own poem exploring the world you would like to live in, or the world we live in now.

CREATE AN ALTAR

Creating altars is an intimate practice. Altars are often community of individual offerings created to honor or celebrate someone or something. Leah Gipson created altars to honor Black girls’ play, joy, ritual, and loss.

If you could create an altar for yourself, what are at least three items you would feature on the altar to honor yourself? Create this altar in a medium of your choosing. Write, draw, collage, etc.

Create an altar for someone you want to hold space for or celebrate. Create this altar in a medium of your choosing. Write, draw, collage, etc.

What do you wish for Black girls?

ADDENDUM: TV AND MUSEUMS

In our “TV” episodes, “TV” stands for “tour video” and reflects the lo-fi television style we’ve adopted. Museums and television, or more specifically video and broadcast technology, have a bit of history together.

By the 1970s, the gap between the technological capabilities of artists and mass-media makers had collapsed. Video cameras had just become inexpensive enough to be affordable, and so there was a widespread sense that, all of a sudden, everyone could make video that could be broadcast to television sets across the country. That access was no longer just the purview of television studios financed by media barons.

In January 1974, the Museum of Modern Art in New York held a conference called “Open Circuits: An International Conference on the Future of Television.” Artists, writers, critics, and media professionals all came together to dream about how this new, widely accessible broadcast medium would change how people experienced art. Artists like Nam June Paik and Joan Jonas talked about their early experiments with video. Theorists quoted philosophy to predict how the medium would change the next decades. Experts previewed how the technology might evolve. David Ross, who at the time was the director and curator of video art at Long Beach Museum of Art, talked about TV and museums.

In his section, Ross took “a speculative look at the application of video in the reformation of one of our culture’s most anachronistic institutions, the art museum.”¹ He shared several ways art museums of the time were taking advantage

of video technology and television broadcast capabilities:

At the Greenville County Museum, in South Carolina, they use a video-equipped bus (called Sam) to bring videotapes out into the community for viewing, and to produce tapes with children in various neighborhoods. [. . .] Coming closer to defining the traditional museum approach to television, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts has, since 1954, produced a wide variety of broadcast educational television programs based upon their own collection and general topics in art history.²

The purpose of these efforts was accessibility. At times, Ross’s words feel as if they were speaking to this current moment and not to an audience decades ago. He speaks intentionally about the importance of museums making their collections and exhibitions available to the public, even if some are “unable to avail [themselves] of the museum’s service by visiting the museum’s building” or if the museum’s educational services need to be accessed when the museum’s building is shut down. That kind of accessibility, for Ross, is not just an opportunity. It’s a mandate:

The notion of museum interaction with television is primarily based upon a societal model which requires that institutions dealing with information have the responsibility and should have the capacity to make the results of their activity accessible to their entire community. For the artist, this relationship is inevitable: for the museum it is imperative.³

¹ David Ross, “Video and the Future of the Museum,” in *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*, edited by Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 114.

² Ross, 114–15.

³ Ross, 115–16.

Given the kinds of media and communications technology available today, how could museums be more accessible to their public in the future?