



# CIFF

**FILMSLAM 2019**

**43<sup>RD</sup> CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL  
STUDY GUIDE**

FilmSlam

## **FILMSLAM IS PRESENTED BY**

Bruening Foundation  
The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation  
Cuyahoga Community College  
Kiwanis Foundation of Cleveland  
Louise H. and David S. Ingalls Foundation  
Martha Holden Jennings Foundation  
Ohio Arts Council  
Rakuten OverDrive  
Tom Piraino and Barbara McWilliams  
Third Federal Foundation

## **CHINESE SHORTS PROGRAM**

### **BESIEGED**

China, 2018, 25 minutes  
Mengchen Niu

### **PENCIL**

Singapore, 2018, 16 minutes  
Gina Tan

### **COWBOY JOE**

USA, 2018, 5 minutes  
Jingjing Tian

## **CURRICULUM LINKS**

Chinese Language, Social Studies, Global Studies, English Language Arts, Art, Media Studies

## **CURRICULUM GOALS**

- Improve media literacy
- Develop critical thinking skills
- Engage in interdisciplinary learning
- Hone oral and written communication skills
- Foster global awareness and social justice

# FILMSLAM VIEWING GUIDE

## The Art of Filmmaking

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Filmmakers of both narrative and documentary films (of either short or feature length) make numerous artistic decisions throughout the filmmaking process, beginning with the conception of the film, through filming, and finally during distribution and marketing. Understanding film terms and the production process helps viewers to identify and interpret these artistic choices.

**Crew:** The people who are involved with the production of a film and who do not appear in the film. The following are a few of the numerous people that make up a film crew:

- **Producer:** The person who oversees the entire filmmaking process. The producer finds the script, hires a director, finds financing to make and distribute the film, and markets the film.
- **Director:** The person who supervises the creative aspects of a film and instructs the actors and crew.
- **Screenwriter:** The person who creates the story, action, and dialogue.
- **Cinematographer:** The person who is responsible for the camerawork and lighting.
- **Editor:** The person who selects what he/she considers are the best shots and pieces them together to produce scenes, then larger sequences, and ultimately the film.

**Development/Pre-Production:** The process of preparing the film concept, assembling the crew, and determining a budget and shooting schedule. The following are terms often associated with this phase of the filmmaking process:

- **Synopsis:** A short description of the film.
- **Screenplay:** A detailed written account of the dialogue and action of a film, often including basic camera directions.
- **Literary Elements:** Films share numerous elements with literature, including plot, characters, setting, point of view, mood, and theme.
- **Genre:** A type or classification of films with identifiable similarities. Comedies, westerns, musicals, horror films, and science fiction films are popular genres.
- **Storyboard:** A series of drawings showing the scenes, shot by shot, and transitions for a film. The storyboard gives a director a clear idea of how the film will look.

**Photography:** The process of capturing visual images with a camera. The director and cinematographer make artistic choices about the following aspects:

- **Frame:** A single photograph of the larger film strip.
- **Shot:** A unit of film or series of frames over which the camera does not stop filming.
- **Take:** The length (in terms of time) of a single shot.
- **Focus:** The variable degree (from **hard** to **soft**) to which the image is clear and sharp.
- **Camera Angle:** The placement of the camera relative to the subject. When a camera is placed above (looking down upon) the subject, the camera is at a **high angle**. When the camera is placed below (looking upwards at) the subject, the camera is at a **low angle**.
- **Range:** The apparent distance between the camera and the subject, differentiated as **close-up shots** (framing the head from the neck up), **medium shots** (framing the body from the waist up), and **long shots** (framing the entire body).
- **Composition:** The organization of subjects or objects within the frame of the film.
- **Lighting:** The use of natural or artificial illumination and shadows for the purpose of visual clarity and/or mood.
- **Camera Movement:** There are number of common types of camera movements, including **panning** (in which the camera pivots from right to left, or vice versa), **tilting** (in which the

camera pivots upwards or downwards), and **tracking** (in which the entire camera moves forwards, backwards, or sideways).

**Sound Design:** The process, completed during or after filming, of capturing, creating, and interweaving dialogue, sound effects, and music. The following are terms associated with this process:

- **Soundtrack:** The recorded sound of a film, including dialogue, sound effects, and music.
- **Voiceover:** A voice of a narrator, generally not seen but heard on the soundtrack of a film.

**Post-Production/Editing:** The process, typically after filming has concluded, of combining shots, scenes, and sequences with the soundtrack. The following are terms associated with this phase:

- **Cut:** The distinct, abrupt transition from one frame to another.
- **Fade Out/Fade In:** A technique in which a shot gradually darkens until a new one emerges from the darkness.
- **Dissolve:** A technique in which one image gradually transitions into another image in such a way that the viewer can temporarily see both images at the same time.
- **Flashback:** A sequence of a film that shows events that happened prior to those already shown.
- **Title Sequence:** Written material at the beginning of a film, usually including the names of the people involved in the production of the film (the director, producer, screenwriter, cinematographer, featured actors, etc.) and sometimes called the opening credits or titles.
- **Intertitles:** Text displayed on the screen in between photographed shots or superimposed over a photographed image.

**Distribution/Marketing:** The process of selling and supplying films to exhibitors, including mainstream theaters, art house theaters, film festivals, television networks, and websites.

### **A Short History of Filmmaking: Short Films**

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The earliest films, usually consisting of a single shot, were undoubtedly short, rarely lasting more than a minute. While films gradually increased in length at the turn of the twentieth century, only “prestige” films—including biblical epics and films showcasing boxing matches—exceeded an hour. In the 1910s, the feature-length film grew in popularity, but short films of multiple genres (comedy, melodrama, educational, animation, etc.) remained part of mainstream exhibition programs for several decades. Screened before feature films, short films offered major Hollywood producers an arena to evaluate new talent, try out new technologies, and attract diverse audiences. During the 1950s, the screening of short films in mainstream theaters rapidly declined, but the concurrent rise of international film festivals and the popularization of television provided new exhibition venues. According to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences®—who annually recognize the Best Documentary Short, Best Live Action Short, and Best Animated Short—a short film does not exceed 40 minutes. Today, the Internet has facilitated the resurgence of short films, and young and established filmmakers continue to refine their craft through abbreviated fare.

**Sources and Suggestions for Further Reading:** Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010); David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010); Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema’s Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Harper Cossar, “Bobby Jones, Warner Bros., and the Short Instructional Film,” in *Convergence Media History*, edited by Janet Staiger and Sabine Hake (New York: Routledge, 2009); Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

## **PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITY**

Assess the students' experiences viewing short films. Which short films, if any, have the students seen? Discuss, for example, SNL Digital Shorts, Comedy Central Short Form, or other shorts they may have watched on YouTube, Vimeo, or Facebook. Watch one short film as a class. Identify the various artistic choices the filmmaker made. Encourage students to consider how these choices affect their interpretation of the film and its message.

## **MAKING THE MOST OF POST-SCREENING Q&As**

FilmSlam offers a unique opportunity for teachers and students to interact with filmmakers and/or local experts on the subject of the films screened. While teachers and students should feel comfortable asking any question inspired by their viewing of the films, the following questions (and many others) may help viewers understand the production process, how the subject of the film is important to their local community, and/or how they can get involved in local organizations.

What inspired the filmmaker to make a film on this subject?

What does the filmmaker hope audiences will take away from the film? (After the Q&A, consider if the filmmaker's answer aligns with or differs from your reaction to the film.)

How did the filmmaker get funding for the film?

How did the filmmaker assemble the production team? How big was the production team?

How long did the film take to produce?

Where else has or will this film be screened?

How or why is the subject of this film important to the students' local community?

How can students get involved?

## **POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES/PROMPTS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION\***

### **Besieged** (Mengchen Niu, 2018)

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Think about a time when you felt competitive with a relative or friend. What inspired that feeling? How did you deal with your competitiveness? How did your competitiveness affect your relationship? Write a journal entry reflecting on these questions.

Why doesn't Yang say that he saw Victor at the audition? Why doesn't Victor tell Yang where he was in the afternoon?

Describe the relationship between Yang and Victor. Why is their relationship strained? Do you think that they truly care for each other?

How do Yang and Victor cope with family pressure? Can you relate to feeling pressure from your family to live up to certain expectations? Explain.

What does Yang learn at the end of the film? Do you think he regrets his previous actions? Do you think he'll attempt to mend his relationship with Victor?

In the scene in the recording studio, how does the filmmaker use **editing** and **sound design** to create suspense?

Discuss how the filmmaker uses Yang's audition dialogue as **voiceover** in the scenes after the audition. What does this artistic decision suggest about the similarities and/or differences between Yang and the film character he hopes to play?

### **Pencil** (Gina Tan, 2018)

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Choose a character (Joanne, Wen Xin, or Guo Yao) in the film, and write an internal monologue from his/her perspective. What motivates his/her actions? How does he/she respond to the actions of the other characters? How has he/she changed by the end of the film?

Describe the friendship between the two young girls. Give specific examples of Joanne's actions that later make Wen Xin suspicious of her.

Why don't Joanne and Wen Xin confess to being late? Why doesn't the prefect Guo Yao identify them as the culprits?

Although Wen Xin clearly disapproves of Joanne stealing, why doesn't Wen Xin tell on Joanne?

Why does Joanne say that, if Wen Xin was a prefect, she would likely tell on Joanne?

Do you think that the reason Joanne stole the eraser—to pay off the Guo Yao and protect Wen Xin—justifies her actions?

### **Cowboy Joe** (Jingjing Tian, 2018)

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What do you think the future holds for Joe? Will he become a cowboy? How will his relationship with his father develop? Write the sequel to COWBOY JOE in the form of a short story or screenplay.

Why does Joe want to be a cowboy? What do cowboys represent?

What does the father say in an effort to convince Joe to stay in New York and give up his dream? How do you think these comments make Joe feel? Are they effective?

What future does the father envision for his son?

Discuss the father's statement, "Dreams are for kids."

How does the filmmaker use **sound design** to convey Joe's outlook on the future? Consider specifically the transition from the sound of offscreen music to the sounds of traffic and people on the street.

\*Definitions for terms in **bold** can be found in the FilmSlam Viewing Guide.

## **CHINESE LANGUAGE SHORT PROGRAM**

**71 minutes**

*Some films selected to screen in FilmSlam may contain strong language, unusual humor, and/or challenging topics and themes.*

### **Besieged**

Mengchen Niu

CHINA, 24 min.

Two Chinese immigrant half-brothers audition for the same prestigious film role. In a vicious effort to win the role, the elder brother stealthily sabotages the younger throughout their audition process. *Besieged* vividly depicts the darkness of jealousy threaded within sibling rivalry.

### **Drum Wave**

Directed by Natalie Erika James

AUSTRALIA, 11 min.

A young pianist is forced to confront her fear of motherhood when she marries into a remote island community with bizarre fertility rituals.

### **Pencil**

Directed by Gina Tan

SINGAPORE, 15 min.

Set in 90s Singapore, *Pencil* tells the story of two best friends whose friendship is tested due to an incident.

### **A Farewell**

Directed by Yifei He

CHINA, USA, 12 min.

When her grandfather's death reveals her family's hidden Muslim past, a young Beijing girl goes in search of her roots despite her family's disapproval.

### **Whale Fall**

Directed by Yiyuan Yuan

USA, 3 min.

After the death of a whale, its corpse will become oasis for hundreds even thousands to live. Same as the death of a man - his word and love will continuously affect next generation that follow. As a great writer, that is how my grandfather affected Chinese literature and me after his death.

### **Cowboy Joe**

Directed by Jingjing Tian

USA, 6 min.

*Cowboy Joe* is about a Chinese cowboy who stands up to his father for the first time and the consequences that he must deal with as a result.