

Pre-viewing & Viewing Introduction for Teachers

Aleut Story is 90-minutes, not including bonus scenes. For the typical, 50-minute class, it is recommended students view the film over the course of three class periods. This allows students to complete the Film Worksheets.

Day One—viewing time 25 minutes

Segment One/*The Untold Story* (14 minutes)

Segment Two/*Invasion, Evacuation, Relocation* (11 minutes)

Day Two—viewing time 30 minutes

Segment Three/*The Camps* (19 minutes)

Segment Four/*Hardest Childhood Days* (11 minutes)

Day Three—viewing time 31.5 minutes

Segment Five/*Home At Last* (8 minutes)

Segment Six/*Seeking Simple Justice* (17 minutes)

Segment Seven/*Restoration* (6.5 minutes)

PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

Documentaries represent a unique genre of filmmaking. Although documentary films and feature films may use some of the same equipment, creative techniques and storytelling devices, there are critical differences between the two types of film.

1. What is a documentary film? List some of the characteristics of a documentary film?

Possible Answers:

- Documentary filmmaking is a broad category of visual expression and includes experimental work.
- Generally, documentaries are considered a creative work of non-fiction.
- Among other things, documentaries record and present actual events, profile real people and places, portray historic events.
- Documentaries may explore ideas, offer opinions, and seek to generate public interest or action.
- Documentaries may use a variety of elements such as interviews, location footage (e.g. film or video taken as an event happens, or where the event happened), archival footage, still photographs, artificial scenes referred to as dramatic re-enactments or reconstructions.

2. An increasing number of documentary films are incorporating dramatic re-enactments or scenes of historical events performed by actors. What do you think of this creative approach?
- Do you like or dislike the use of dramatic re-enactments or portrayals in documentary films?
 - How do dramatic re-enactments or portrayals help or hinder viewers understanding?
 - How can you tell the difference between actual footage and dramatic re-enactments?
 - How “real” do you think a documentary should be? Should actors, special effects or studio sound effects be used?
 - Would you be more or less inclined to question the accuracy of a documentary film if it includes dramatic re-enactments, special effects or studio sound effects?

When renting or buying a DVD, often the first thing we look at is the packaging. Take a good look at the cover and then answer the following questions. (If viewing a copy recorded off air, answer only questions 6, and 8—10)

3. What information does the DVD cover provide about the film?

Possible Answers:

- Title of film
- Production Company
- Production Credits
- Major Underwriters
- Presenting organization
- Distributor
- Description of film
- Key talent (Narrator, Music)
- Images suggesting story or content, e.g. 1940s era American flag, family standing on a dock, mountains

4. Using only this information, what might you conclude about the film?

Possible Answers:

- The film is about a group of people in Alaska known as Aleuts, during a time of war. They were sent to internment camps in Southeast Alaska. They faced difficult challenges, and were engaged in a long struggle for civil rights.
- It is probably a true story (nothing on the package says it is, in fact, a true story).

- The flag and the clothing of the people suggest an earlier time, probably the 1940s.
 - In the title, the use of the orthodox cross in the word “Story” suggests there may be a special cultural element to the film.
 - Narrator Martin Sheen and musician Mary Youngblood have both won major awards and may help attract viewers.
 - Who helped pay for the film (Aleutian Pribilof Restitution Trust, Rasmuson Foundation, Paul G. Allen Family Foundation).
 - The film received support from national public television (CPB and NAPT)
5. What information isn't on the cover that you'd like to have?
6. Does the information on the cover make you want to know more? Why or why not?
7. Based only on the film's title, what might you expect to learn from the film?
Possible Answers:
- Who or what are Aleut
 - Aleut History
 - A single story about the Aleut
8. Based on what you know from the cover, and your understanding of documentaries, list three concepts, ideas or experiences you expect to see explored in the film:
Possible Answers:
- Aleut Americans' wartime experience
 - Aleut American civil rights struggle
 - How one or both of those experiences affected Aleut Americans, individually and as a group
 - How Aleuts influenced American political and social policy, culture, and history
9. Before beginning this unit of study, did you know anything about Aleut Americans? If yes, briefly describe.
10. Do you know anyone who has experienced war, or been held in a government relocation facility? Briefly describe how this affects your expectations for the film?
11. Think about what you know about American citizens' efforts to protect their constitutional rights. Relate this to your expectations for the film in a short paragraph.

VIEWING

Documentary films chronicle the lives of real people. However, the central characters are often “cast” much like actors in a feature film. Documentary producers and directors seek out people they believe will do the best job telling a given story.

The script provides a framework for the story. Often, a narrator reads part of the script in order to present facts and other information. The script also includes excerpts of interviews with subject experts and people having first-hand knowledge of an event.

Information is presented in a variety of ways—by the narrator, in interviews with subject experts, and through interviews and activities with central characters.

Visual elements such as location cinematography, archival footage and photographs, maps and text on screen also present important information. Music provides important cues as well.

Dramatic elements such as music, lighting, text on screen, re-enactments, special camera effects, and editing are also used to create a compelling story.

As you view the film, watch and listen carefully. Consider the central characters and the many, different dramatic elements and how they were intended to shape your understanding of events.

To complete the worksheets, you will need to recall facts, events, people and places—as well as discuss some of the basic film techniques used to tell the story. You’ll also be asked to reflect on how the film made you feel, whether it challenged any of your views, and how knowledge of the Aleut experience might be useful today.

Your film worksheets may be used as a reference when working on related *Aleut Story* lesson plans.