



High School Program

Educator Resource Guide

Portraits from a Fire

DIRECTOR: Trevor Mack

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Canada

RUNNING TIME: 92 min.

LANGUAGE: English and Tsilhqot'in

Website & Trailer



Possessing more determination than talent, teenage Tyler routinely premieres his DIY films on his reservation for a smattering of viewers who struggle to stay awake. Undaunted, he believes that his films are bound for bigger things. A discovery from the past casts new light on his family's history and may just provide answers to questions that he's long harboured.

Returning to the Tl'etinqox Reserve in BC where he grew up, director Trevor Mack delivers an accomplished, open-hearted first feature made in collaboration with his community.

With an ensemble of endearing characters, *Portraits from a Fire* offers a story of humour, heartbreak and, ultimately, healing in a coming-of-age film that introduces students to contemporary Indigenous filmmaking. We see how the work of even amateur teen filmmakers like Tyler can lead to a powerful reckoning between the past and the future, life and death, and father, mother, and son.

Primary Curriculum Interest

- Media 10
- Film and Television 11
- BC First Peoples 12
- Contemporary Indigenous Studies 12
- English First Peoples: New Media 11 + 12
- English 9

Other Curriculum Interests

- Directing and Script Development 12
- Drama 9 + 10

Read more about these curriculums at curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum

Content consideration for teachers

This film references accidental death and suicide.

If you have any questions about this film and its content, please contact VIFF at education@viff.org.

About VIFF

VIFF is the leading presenter of international cinema in Western Canada. Operating both the annual Vancouver International Film Festival and the VIFF Centre, VIFF brings hundreds of films from dozens of countries to British Columbia screens every year.

Why are film festivals important?

- Film festivals such as VIFF generally include screenings, talks, and events that serve as a catalyst for a diverse community to discover, discuss and share the creativity and craft of storytelling on screen.
- For filmmakers, showcasing their film at an international festival such as VIFF allows them to build an audience, meet other filmmakers and even win awards to help fund future films.
- It is in VIFF's mandate to encourage understanding of the world's cultures through the art of cinema.



Before Viewing

Ask students if they make videos or films in their own lives (on social media or otherwise). What stories do they choose to tell?

How do they do make these videos?
Which apps or technology do they prefer?
Have they ever tried a longer film project?

Whether fictional or factual, why do they think young people make DIY films?

After Viewing

1. How was this story told and what strategies did filmmaker Trevor Mack use? (Music, humour, flashbacks, glitching film effects for memories, using both English and Tsilhqot'in dialogue, etc)
2. Every community has its own identity. Trevor Mack intentionally filmed in his community with both experienced actors, first time actors and local community members acting for the first time. What details and scenes gave you a taste of the community's social fabric and cultural life?
3. Identify the film's main stories and themes. Do you see any connections? Why tell these stories together?
4. A family's past and present are explored throughout the film – discuss examples you recall.
5. The past shapes the present in so many ways in this film. What are some examples for different characters?
6. Have you seen many films by Indigenous filmmakers? What is the value or impact for Indigenous people to create and tell their own stories in films, as Tyler does, or as Trevor Mack has as writer and director of *Portraits from a Fire*?
7. Research and explain the term “intergenerational trauma” as a class. How did you see trauma and intergenerational trauma impacting Tyler, his father, and even the ghosts of Tyler's family in different ways? Besides loss, what other experiences could cause intergenerational trauma in families?
8. Many people deal with loss or painful experiences in different ways, what did you see in these characters? How was compassion, healing and forgiveness finally made possible?
9. What messages or ideas do you imagine Trevor Mack wanted viewers to think about after seeing this film?
10. Humour is an intentional choice and tool in storytelling. How did you see it used in this film? What parts of the story felt funny, what impact does humor have on audiences watching a film like this? How might the film have felt without it?

Activity:

The Stories that Shape Us

In small groups, share a story that had a big impact on your life or your family's life. It can be serious or lighthearted, just as long as it was impactful for your life or your family's history. (Be sure to talk to your families beforehand.) Each group then chooses one story to make into a short animation. How could you tell this story in a short video? Plan out the storyboard and consider telling the story with hand drawn stop motion animation with paper and cut paper. (We suggest filming at 24 frames per second.) There are free apps for tablets and smart phones that you can use to film each frame, and then add dialogue, narration or music after. Show your films to the class in your own small film festival. How do such impactful stories shape our lives and identities today?



Director Profile

Raised in the Tsilhqot'in community of Tl'etinqox, Trevor Mack's foundation in film work is based on the nourishment of the next generations of the Tsilhqot'in Nation. His fictional and documentary film projects range from intimate personal portraits

of his family's history to nation-bridging panoramas that the Tsilhqot'in National Government include in their ongoing negotiations over hunting, fishing, and land rights with the Province of British Columbia and Government of Canada.