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Reality bites: a teaching resource for viewing films about food and consumption

Teaching resource

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Black Gold



Thin



Fast Food Nation

Reality Bites

Teaching Resources for Films about Food

Including:

BLACK GOLD (Marc and Nick Francis, UK/2006)
FAST FOOD NATION (Richard Linklater, US-UK/2006)
THIN (Lauren Greenfield, US/2006)

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How to Use this Guide:

This teaching resource has been prepared for the 2006 Times BFI 50th London Film Festival. While specifically written to be used with three of the selected films in the Education Programme: *Black Gold*, *Fast Food Nation* and *Thin*, the activities and suggestions for research included here will have applications for students interested in considering film (and food) more generally.

In addition to students of film and media, this resource may be of use in relationship to curriculum areas including: PSHE, psychology, geography, sociology, citizenship, business, anthropology, economics or food technology, amongst others.

Following a brief introduction, specification references, and a list of key concepts, this guide gives suggestions for practical activities and ideas for research. These are to be used in conjunction with the films listed here, or with any other films that use food practically or symbolically – many of which are available to rent (see *Films for Further Viewing* below).

Beyond general activities, there are also specific suggestions for use with the films *Black Gold*, *Fast Food Nation* and *Thin*. Each of these contains a guide to appropriate ages, but can be altered depending on the age of the target audience.

Introduction:

Selected Films

The three films referenced in this resource were selected for the Festival Education Programme because they are powerful films that unflinchingly explore individual, local and global struggles over food. Equally, the technical choices and storytelling devices of each of the films offer an opportunity for young audiences to discuss boundaries between genres and observe how certain filmic techniques can be used to differing ends depending on the context. These films, *Black Gold*, *Fast Food Nation* and *Thin* will be described in greater detail below.

Why films about food?

This year's Times BFI 50th London Film Festival includes a significant portion of fiction and documentary feature films that centre directly on food. These films explore different aspects of food and the food industry, including production, preparation and consumption. In the selected films, food is not just a prop or an object; it becomes elevated into a symbol rivalling the main protagonists in importance, a looming figure with which all of the characters must interact.

Food has always been a central topic for filmmakers, from the early Lumiere brother footage of a baby eating its lunch in 1895, to the highly aesthetic treatment of food in cinema in the 1980's and 90's (in films such as *Babette's Feast* or *Like Water for Chocolate*), to the recent films selected here that use film as a topic for political

debate. Even films that do not focus on food directly often use it as a secondary symbol, for instance in *The Godfather*, key scenes revolve around cooking or sharing food, as does one of the film's most iconic lines ('Leave the Gun, Keep the Cannoli!').

Perhaps it is the very ordinariness of food that enables it to function so usefully as a symbol in film. Consuming food is a biological necessity, yet it is often used in more complicated ways. For instance, in the documentary *Thin*, the characters battle with severe eating disorders. Their systematic avoidance of food, and the directors sensitive interviews geared towards understanding why, paint a picture of food as emblematic of the women's' struggles for power over themselves, of their negotiation with their bodies and with a media-saturated world that privileges thinness.

Through practical activities and suggested schemes of work, this resource urges students to consider why food is used so frequently in film, and to what ends. By looking at these three films in light of their qualities as visual documents, as political proposals, and as psychological portraits, students will be offered a framework for analysis for critical viewership more generally. Suggested activities also encourage students to use these films as a starting point for their own investigations, into the global context of food production, food advertising and the use of symbols in film.

Key terms and concepts:

Film/Media Studies:

- Audience
- Representation
- Genre
- Stars
- Textual Analysis
 - Sign/signifier
 - Sound
 - Editing
- Ethics of making a documentary film
- Parody

Other key terms:

- Fair Trade
- Immigration
- Anorexia-Nervosa
- Globalisation
- Union
- World Trade Organisation
- Corporations
- Brand
- Logo
- Franchise

Specification References:

The content of this resource and the three films referenced here will introduce topics that touch on a wide variety of elements of Key Stage 4, FE and HE curricula. There are particular ties to:

- GCSE/A-level Film and Media Studies (Documentary, Hollywood, Literary Adaptations)
- GCSE/A-level Citizenship (Global Community, Immigration)
- GCSE/A-level PSHE (Eating Disorders, Self-Esteem, Workplace)
- GCSE/A-level Geography (Global Issues, Sustainable Development, Fair Trade)
- FE: Film and Media Studies, Geography, Medicine, Business, Psychology
- HE: Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Film Studies, Medicine

FE Film/Media Studies:

| <i>Awarding body & Level</i> | <i>Level</i> | <i>Module/Topic</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---|
| AQA | AS/1 | Reading the Media |
| AQA | AS/2 | Textual topic Film and Broadcast Fiction |
| AQA | A2/1,2,4,5,6 | Films can be used for curriculum topics across modules |
| OCR | AS/1 | Textual Analysis |
| OCR | A2/6 | Media Issues and Debates (Film option) |
| OCR | GNVQ | National Certificate in Media |
| WJEC | AS2 | Media Representations and Reception |
| WJEC | A2/4 | Investigating Media Texts |
| WJEC | Film Studies | Messages and Values, Introduces curriculum topics from across schemes of work |
| Ed-Excel | BTEC | National Diploma in Media (Moving Image) |

These resources are additionally relevant to teaching following other specifications, as well as for Lifelong Learning and international courses:

- OCR, Ed-Excel, AQA – NVQ and AVCE

| | | |
|-----|-------------------|--|
| AQA | GCSE Geography | People and the Natural Environment People and the Human Environment |
| AQA | GCSE Geography | The Wider World Global Issues |
| AQA | AS Geography B | |
| OCR | GCSE Geography | People and their Needs The Global Environment |

General Activities:

For Key Stages 3 & 4:

The following activities are designed for Key Stage 4 with ties to English, Media Studies, Geography, Citizenship and PSHE. They can be easily adapted for work with older students as well, or combined with the suggested activities for FE/HE.

WHERE DOES MY FOOD COME FROM?

- Keep a diary of all the food that you have eaten in a 48-hour period
 - At the end of this period pick one food item (perhaps the food that you have eaten most frequently) and research where the food has come from
 - It may say the country of origin on the packaging, or it may only list ingredients. If it has ingredients only, use the Internet to search for a country that frequently produces that ingredient (i.e. if you have eaten lots of chocolate, search for producers of cocoa – www.geography.about.com is a good place to start)
 - Once you have a country in mind, research the following facts:
 - What is the population of the country
 - What is the average income
 - What is one unusual fact that you have discovered
 - Create a pamphlet for the country, using photographs
 - Report your findings back to the class

CREATE YOUR OWN ADVERT

- Bring one printed advertisement for food into class, it can be of any kind of food
 - Answer the following questions in groups:
 - Who is this advertisement aimed at
 - How do you think this target audience is meant to feel when they look at it
 - How do you feel when you look at it (disgusted, hungry etc)
- In groups of 3-4, decide on a different food for an advertising campaign – it may be your favourite food or one that you don't like at all
 - Using magazine cut-outs and drawings, make an advertisement for your product which is aimed at selling it to a defined audience
 - Using magazine cut-outs and drawings, make a storyboard for a television advertisement for your product, including a voice-over script
 - Have the class guess your target audience

POETRY SLICES

- Read the following excerpt from a poem called "I Am From Pink Tights and Speak Your Mind" by Djamila Moore (from the UN Cyberschoolbus website, see bibliography)

I am from awapuhi ginger
sweet fields of sugar cane
green bananas.

I am from warm rain cascading over
taro leaf umbrellas.
Crouching beneath the shield of kalo.

I am from poke, brie cheese, mango,
and raspberries, from Marguritte
and Auntie Noni

I am from Speak your mind
it's o.k. to cry
and would you like it if someone did that to you?

I am from swimming with the full moon,
Saturday at the laundromat,
and Easter crepes.

- Circle all of the references to food in the poem
 - This poem is from a series called *Where I'm from*. Why do you think the author chose to use references to food to describe where she is from?
 - Where do you think the author is describing? Is it a warm/cold place? How do you think it differs from Britain?
- Write a list of food associations that you have about where you're from – it might be the food you eat for dinner with your family or something that a grandparent cooked
 - Weave your food references into a poem, you may add illustrations or photographs
 - Present your poem to the class
 - Collate the poems and pictures/photos and put them in a magazine format, with binding, each student can take a copy of all of the poems home to their families
- Discuss: why do you think images of food are a particularly good way to talk about things like family, location, home or emotions? Can you think of other examples of poems, books or films that use food in this way?

For FE/HE:

FOOD AS METAPHOR

- Look up definitions for the following terms and provide examples for uses of each:
 - Symbol
 - Metaphor
 - Sign
 - Signifier

Using these definitions, complete the following exercise:

Anne Bower (2004) in 'Reel Food' discusses some of the more common symbolic functions of food in film.

- According to Bower, food in film can be used as a metaphor for:
 - Ethnic and Cultural values
 - Passion
 - Family love
 - Status in a community
 - Things going wrong within a society
 - Power
 - A nation or national identity
- Can you think of any other symbolic functions that you would add to this list?
- Using a film that you have seen in the Festival, or one or more films from the 'Further Viewing' section below, think of examples from the films to match up with each of the symbolic functions.
- Fill in the table (included in the appendix) with your ideas

FUNDING A FILM

- Each of the films was financed in a different way:
 - *Black Gold* was funded in part through the Sundance Documentary Fund
 - *Fast Food Nation* was funded by a more 'traditional' route, through financing from Participant Productions and BBC Films
 - *Thin* was financed by HBO (a North American network) as part of their documentary series
 - Research different types of film financing available, either through grants (such as Sundance, or through the UK Film Council, British Council etc)

- Compile a database of different funding streams available for film-makers
- Pick 3 of your favourite films and watch the credits – how were these films paid for? Where they commissioned by studios?
- What is the role of the Executive Producer with regard to raising funds?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think the film you have seen will be shown in cinemas?
 - Explain why or why not
- Two of the films included in this resource are documentaries, while one is a fiction film. Describe some reasons why directors would choose to make a documentary rather than a fiction film and vice versa.
 - Consider:
 - The nature of the subject matter
 - Financing
 - The target audience
- The following are considered some the main types of documentary films:

Expository - 'Traditional' form: Unseen speaker gives a voiced-over commentary that literally explains the images that we are seeing, often used for wildlife or historic subjects. Audience watches what filmmakers choose to prioritise.

Observational - Often a 'fly-on-the-wall' type: Appears as if the camera fell upon events and subjects are apparently unaware of the filming happening. No voice-over to tell audience what to think, or what conclusions to draw. Also known as a 'verite' style.

Interactive - Includes sequences with subjects responding to questions asked by filmmaker/s, with questions left in or edited out: Audience hears the subject's opinion, but it can undermine him/her if their views seem uninformed compared with the thinking of the filmmaker.

Reflective/Reflexive - A more experimental style: As much about the process of making a film and how reality can be constructed as the content. This can include showing the film's construction, e.g. with camera crew in shot.

- Have you seen any of these kinds of documentaries before? Where have you seen them and which did you particularly like?
- In which of these categories would you put *Black Gold* and *Thin*?

Specific Information and Activities by Film

This section offers specific information for each film, including suggested activities for GCSE and above. Fast Food Nation contains scenes from a meat factory that may not be suitable for audiences under 17.

Black Gold

(UK 2006)



Synopsis:

In a cutting-edge political documentary, directors Marc and Nick Francis have created a visually striking and insightful exploration of the global coffee trade. Within beautiful compositions, the filmmakers ask direct questions of their subjects, but allow them to speak for themselves. The story mainly follows the journey of Tadesse Meskela, representative of a co-operative Ethiopian coffee growing union, in his efforts to establish a fair-trade market for 70,000 poor farmers' goods. Tracing all aspects of the \$80 billion-a-year industry, from the planting of the coffee beans to the sip of a Starbucks customer, to the coffee price fixing at the New York and London commodities exchanges, the film gives audiences plenty to stew on.

Credits:

Directed by Marc Francis and Nick Francis

Before watching the film:

- Think about the title 'Black Gold.' What do you think this title refers to?
 - As you are watching the film, reflect on the title, what does it imply?
 - Which characters do you think would use the expression 'black gold'?
- Research the coffee industry in Ethiopia using this link:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_coffee

- Why do think that coffee is a particularly good topic to create a film about?
- What elements would you think that a film about coffee would contain (i.e. shots of a café, mugs etc)
- Think about other documentaries that you have seen.
 - How is this film similar to or different from documentaries that you have seen on television, in class or in the cinema?
- Consider the following questions for other documentaries you have seen, and then bear in mind the questions as you are watching *Black Gold*:
 - Who is doing the interviewing? Is there a reporter present? Can you hear the questions that have been asked to the subjects, or only their responses?
 - What is the 'look' of the film? What kinds of colours, angles, camera movements do the directors choose and why?
 - Who is this film aimed at?
 - What do you think of the subject matter? Is this something that you have heard about before?
 - Who is being interviewed? Is it mostly 'experts' or mostly 'normal people' or a mix?

Activities:

YOUR STORY

- The directors of *Black Gold* described how they became interested in telling this story after hearing on the news about a famine in Ethiopia. After hearing the news report, they were motivated to go out to make a film that would raise awareness of this disaster.
 - Read through one of the newspapers in your local area and make a list of the local news items that you find the most interesting to you
 - Pick one issue that you would like to make a film about, either because you think it is a good or a bad thing
 - Make a list of the relevant issues, consider:
 - Location (where has this taken place?)
 - Personalities involved
 - If you have any personal connection to the story
 - Research the issue further, are there different perspectives on the issue than the one given in the newspaper?
 - Make a list of where you would go first for further information (i.e. the library, the police station, whom you would interview first)
 - Read this brief article on writing a treatment on the ITVS website (<http://www.itvs.org/producers/treatment.html>) and write a brief treatment for your film

- If your school has the technology, make a film about your topic. If you do not have a camcorder, make a photo essay using a still camera (a disposable camera is fine) illustrating your topic

BALANCING POLITICS IN DOCUMENTARY

- The directors of Black Gold have written:

'From the beginning we wanted to make a film which, while having a political purpose, was not overly polemic; a film which was observational - giving the viewer the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about what they are experiencing.'

'But ultimately the film was made to urgently remind people that as consumers we are at the very center of a globalized economy that is undermining the lives of millions of people every day.'

- They describe their motivation to make a documentary with a 'political purpose' but yet be 'not overly polemic.'
 - Do you think they succeeded?
 - How important is it to you that a documentary be 'unbiased'?
- Read this article (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0602/p01s02-ussc.html>) and discuss the following questions in groups:
 - Do you think there is such a thing as 'objectivity' in non-fiction media?
 - Comment on the following quote from director Robert Greenwald (Outfoxed, Wal-mart). Do you agree or disagree with Greenwald's statement? Write a brief essay explaining your answer.

'Is it my job to tell the story that everyone is already getting over and over 24/7? I don't think so...In a democratic system you want to hear something that hasn't been told.'

GIVE A MAN A FISH

Many of the audiences who have seen Black Gold have written to the filmmakers asking how they can help the farmers depicted in the film

- Read the following discussion on the forum section of the Black Gold website (<http://www.blackgoldmovie.com/forum/index.php?action=vthread&forum=6&topic=9>)
 - Do you think people should give money to the farmers?
 - In his response, director Marc Francis quotes the famous proverb "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, give him a net and he'll eat forever."
 - What do you think this sentence is trying to express?
 - Can you think of examples of giving a fish versus giving a net in your own life?

- What do you think is the benefit or the harm of giving financial donations to the farmers? Discuss this in relationship to homeless people in your neighbourhood
- Research other ways that you could get involved with Fair Trade campaigns (a useful place to start is Oxfam's website, www.oxfam.org.uk)
 - Can you think of other ways that you could get involved with assisting the coffee farmers?
- Write an article for your school newspaper describing ways of getting involved with Fair Trade campaigning.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Do you think the filmmakers were 'fair' to all of their interviewees? Do some people come across more likeable than others?
 - Compare and contrast the interviews with the Starbucks worker to the farmers in Ethiopia. Did you respond to certain characters more than others?
- What do you think the different locations added to the film? (Ethiopia, Seattle, Mexico etc) Why do you think the filmmakers chose to film in these different countries?
- Read the following article on the use of Qat (<http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/research/story/0,,1140928,00.html>)
 - What are the effects of this substance?
 - Is Qat legal in Britain? Do you think it should be?
 - Do you think you would sell this plant if it were the best way to make money?

Fast Food Nation

(UK, USA 2006)



Synopsis:

Taking his own meticulously researched bestseller as the starting point, Eric Schlosser (with director and co-writer Richard Linklater) dramatises his expose of the junk food industry by centring it around the Midwestern town of Cody. Midsized and otherwise unremarkable, the only distinctive thing about the town is the huge meatpacking plant, where cynical business practices and the exploitation of illegal Mexican migrant workers are the order of the day. Our first impressions of the town come by way of Don Henderson, a marketing rep for a major burger chain, sent to investigate contamination in the company's meat supply. Pretty well everyone he meets there has some connection with fast food, whether working in the industry, profiting from it or protesting against it. The ensemble nature of the film allows for some standout performances in crucial but relatively minor roles (Bruce Willis and Kris Kristofferson all but steal the show), whilst Greg Kinear's mild mannered investigator is an amiable guide. As his eyes are opened, so too are ours. Whilst the social critique is never strident, the inclusion of graphic scenes from the slaughterhouse serves to press home the film's properly subversive intentions.

Credits:

Directed by Richard Linklater
Screenplay by Richard Linklater/Eric Schlosser
Produced by Jeff Skoll
Cinematography by Lee Daniel
Edited by Sandra Adair

Cast

Patricia Arquette – Cindy
 Bobby Cannavale – Mike
 Paul Dano – Brian
 Lewis Guzmán – Benny
 Ethan Hawke – Pete
 Ashley Johnson – Amber
 Greg Kinnear – Don Henderson
 Kris Kristopherson – Rudy
 Avril Lavigne – Alice
 Esai Morales – Tony
 Catalina Sandino Moreno – Sylvia
 Glen Powel Jr – Steve
 Lou Taylor Pucci – Paco
 Ana Claudia Talancón – Coco
 Wilmer Valderama – Raul
 Bruce Willis – Harry

Before watching the film:

- Think of your last visit to a fast food restaurant. How did you feel when you walked in? What did it smell/look/sound like? What did you order? How did you feel after eating the food?
 - Count the number of times you have been to a fast food restaurant in the last month. If you have gone frequently, think about why. If you have not gone at all, think about why not.
- Watch at least one of Richard Linklater's other films (i.e. *Slacker*, *Before Sunrise*, *Dazed and Confused*, *Waking Life*).
 - Why do you think Linklater is known as the 'filmmaker of Generation X'?
 - What do his films all have in common? (look for actors, types of dialogue, situations etc)
 - Bear some of Linklater's recurring themes and favourite actors in mind when watching *Fast Food Nation*

Activities:

TEEN WORK

In Chapter 3 of Eric Schlosser's book *Fast Food Nation*, he describes the daily life of Elisa Zamot, a real teenager who works at McDonalds in Colorado Springs, Colorado (read the excerpt in the appendix below).

- With Schlosser's description of Elisa in mind, think about a typical workday for you or someone else your age.
 - If you have had a job, write a narrative of the schedule of your work and what you have done at work. Include what time you had to wake up and when you went to bed, what kinds of tasks you completed along the way.

- If you have not had a job, arrange an interview with someone in your family or one of your friends, try to find someone around your age. Create a questionnaire asking them about their typical workday and write it into essay form.
- Visit the following website:
(<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/teenagejobs.htm>)
- Do the types of jobs that you've described match up with this description? How would you change this description of the kinds of jobs that teenagers in Britain have. Come up with a website that you would use to explain to visiting students the types of jobs that teens have in your area.

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

- Remembering the description of Elisa Zamot (see appendix), consider the character of Amber in the film
 - List 3 personality traits and 3 physical traits that Schlosser describes for Elisa
 - List 3 personality traits and 3 physical traits of the character of Amber in the film
 - How do these characters compare?
- If you were casting for the part of Amber, what other actresses might you pick for the role? Bear in mind the personality and physical traits that you have listed above and justify your choice

BRANDING

In the book of *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser writes, "*Franchises and chain stores strive to offer exactly the same product or service at numerous locations. Customers are drawn to familiar brands by an instinct to avoid the unknown. A brand offers a feeling of reassurance when its products are always and everywhere the same*" (5).

- Write definitions for the following terms:
 - Brand
 - Logo
 - Franchise
- Keep a journal of all of the logos that you encounter for a week, keep count of logos that you see more than once
 - Do any of these brands have products that are related to the local area? (i.e. having a Chicken Tikka burger in the UK but not in the USA)
 - Why do you think that franchises would introduce new products for certain areas? Do you think these products are successful?

- Consider the following image, on a blank sheet of paper write down all of your associations with this image



- Now look at the following image and write a list of your associations



- Think about the two images together, does having seen the second image change your opinion of the first?
- In one sentence, sum up what you think the intention is of the use of the logo in the first and second images?
- How would you respond to the second image if you were part of the McDonald's marketing team?
- Look up the word 'parody.' Do you think the second image is an example of a parody? Justify your answer in an essay.

IMMIGRATION IN THE PRESS

- Examine the sheet of recent headlines regarding immigration in Appendix C
 - Read each headline and think about its 'literal' meaning – what is the author trying to say?
 - Think about its 'hidden' meaning, what is implied by the tone and word choice in each of the headlines?
 - Write a summary of the treatment of immigration in the UK press, do you think it is positive or negative, fair or unfair?
 - How do you think different media outlets deal with the unwritten rule to tell both sides of the story?

POLITICS OF DOCUMENTARY

- Recently, some critics have accused filmmakers with strong left-leaning political ideologies of producing political propaganda instead of 'balanced films.'
 - Do you think that Fast Food Nation is an example of propaganda (look up this term if you are not familiar with it)?
 - Do you think that the media has to cover both sides of all issues?
 - In response to similar critiques, documentary filmmaker Robert Greenwald, director of controversial films such as *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch and the War on Journalism*, and *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* has said:

'Is it my job to tell the story that everyone is already getting over and over 24/7? I don't think so...In a democratic system you want to hear something that hasn't been told.'

- Write a response to Greenwald's argument, either agreeing or disagreeing with his statement

FOR DISCUSSION:

- This film features an all-star cast, including Bruce Willis and Ethan Hawke. Why do you think these actors would have chosen to make this film if they could have been paid more for other roles?
 - Do you think the presence of these stars will affect the audience for the film?
 - Do you think the film would be marketed differently if there were not famous actors in the film?
- Consider the last scene of the film, when Sylvia is introduced to the kill floor. Why do you think the director chose to include such graphic footage?
 - Do you think that this scene will change the audience for the film?
 - Write a film review for your school paper including a discussion of this scene and whether you think it should have been included.
- How were the Mexican immigrants in the film portrayed?

- Think of 10 adjectives you would use to describe the representation of characters such as Coco, Sylvia, Raul and Benny
- Compare the representation of Mexican immigrants in this film with some of the articles about illegal immigration in the UK, how do these portrayals diverge?
- Why do you think the director chose to have the characters speak in Mexican Spanish with subtitles instead of just having them speak English with Spanish accents as often happens in Hollywood films?
- What can you tell about director Richard Linklater's political ideology through watching this film?
 - Pay close attention to his choice of subject matter and his portrayal of characters at different ends of the spectrum. For example, compare the characters played by Bruce Willis and Catalina Sandino Moreno (Sylvia), which is more sympathetic and why?
 - Do you think film is a good way of expressing political ideology? Do you think that you can help create political change by making or watching films?

Thin

(USA, 2006)



Synopsis:

As the sensationalist and exploitative scrutiny of women's bodies reaches unprecedented levels, and when the near epidemic number of Western women who restrict their eating is an open secret, this candid and considered documentary is timely indeed. Acclaimed photographer Lauren Greenfield gained unprecedented access to a Florida residential treatment centre, and used it to chronicle the experiences of four young women between the ages of 15 and 30 who have been habitually starving themselves to life threatening degrees. Over a six month period Greenfield observes their attempts at recovery through the daily rituals of the centre and its treatment methods, as individual dramas unfold and group dynamics evolve. Her non-intrusive and non-judgemental approach clearly gained the participants' trust, and gives the film an immediacy and intimacy which is all the more remarkable given that concealment is one of the key characteristics of dysfunctional eating. None of this makes for easy viewing, but this is a powerful and important film, allowing us to witness at close hand the complexities of this persistent and damaging illness.

Credits:

Directed and Produced by Lauren Greenfield

Before watching the film:

- Think about other documentaries that you have seen. How is this film similar to or different from documentaries that you have seen on television, in class or in the cinema?

- Consider the following questions for other documentaries you have seen, and then bear in mind the questions as you are watching *Thin*:
 - Who is doing the interviewing? Is there an interviewer present? Can you hear the questions that have been asked to the subjects, or only their responses?
 - What is the 'look' of the film? What kinds of colours, angles, camera movements do the directors choose and why?
 - Who is this film aimed at?
 - What do you think of the subject matter? Is this something that you have heard about before?
 - Who is being interviewed? Is it mostly 'experts' or mostly 'normal people' or a mix?
- Consider the following brief definition and statistics about eating disorders from www.bbc.co.uk/health:

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders develop as outward symptoms of inner emotional or psychological problems. They become the way that people cope with difficulties in their life. Eating, or not eating, is used to help block out painful feelings. Without the right help and treatment, eating problems may continue throughout life.

Facts and statistics

- Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are most common among girls and young women, generally developing between the ages of 15 and 25. However, they can occur at any age - even as young as seven or eight - and affect boys and men, too. Ten per cent of all sufferers are male.
 - With appropriate treatment, recovery from eating disorders can be achieved in less than five years.
 - According to figures published in February 1999 by the Mental Health Foundation, approximately 20 per cent of all adolescents have some form of mental health problem, including eating disorders.
- Keep this definition and statistics in mind while you are watching the film

Activities:

Key Stage 3:

MAKE A POSTER

- Using the websites www.edauk.com and <http://www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk/> research Eating Disorders, their symptoms, causes and what happens if you have one
- Using photographs, words and designs, create a poster for your school wall about eating disorders, you can pick one of the following topics:
 - Where to go for help if you think you have an eating disorder

- The symptoms and causes of eating disorders

WRITE A LETTER

- Write a letter to a friend who might have an eating disorder.
 - What would you tell this friend about how this makes you feel?
 - What advice would you give them?
 - What would you want them to do next?

HEALTHY EATING

- Using magazines, cut out photographs of different kinds of food, make sure you have food from all of the following categories: fruit, vegetable, meat, dairy, wheat, starch/carbohydrate and dessert
 - Put all of the food out on the table in front of you, and place a plate on the table as well
 - One by one, consider the foods in front of you, which ones do you consider healthy and why?
 - Do you think that there are certain foods that are unhealthy, even if you like them? What could you do to make eating those unhealthy foods more healthy?
 - Read the website <http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=888&docid=7267> for feedback on what is considered healthy eating

Key Stages 4 & 5

DIARY ENTRY

- Consider the character Brittany in the film. Think about what she looks like, what she says about her eating disorder and her home life, what her relationship with her mother is like.
 - Write a diary entry as if you were Brittany
 - What do you think about during the day?
 - What are your experiences at school, at home, in other activities?
 - Do you have many friends?
 - Are you in a relationship?
 - How has your eating disorder affected your social interactions?

ANALYSING IMAGES

Before making *Thin*, director Lauren Greenfield worked as a photographer. One of her major works was a book called 'Girl Culture, which included photographs of young women from all across the US.

- Consider the an image from Greenfield's *Girl Culture* book (on the website at <http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/girlcult/greenfield16.html>)
 - Write thought bubbles for each of the characters that express what they are thinking at this exact moment

- Write a film scene with a dialogue between these two girls. Make sure to set the scene and establish the relationship between the two.
- Now read Greenfield's excerpt from an interview with Sheena, aged 15, who is looking in the mirror in the photograph:

"I want to be a topless dancer or a showgirl. I think it'd be fun, dancing with my tits showing off. It's like a goal. If I can accomplish being that, then I can accomplish anything."

- Is this similar to the statements you had made in your thought bubble and dialogue? Why or why not?
- Write a response to Sheena's comment; do you support her goal?
- After writing about this picture in particular, return to the website and read Lauren Greenfield's artist statement about the project, where she writes:

'The body has become a primary expression of individual identity for girls in contemporary American culture... The photographs explore the relationship between girl's inner lives and emotional development, and the material world and popular culture.'

- Do you think that these photographs achieve her stated goal?
- Do you think that the same statement could be made about the portrayal of the women in *Thin*?
- Do you agree or disagree with Greenfield's statement?
- Write a film review for *Thin* making reference to the above statement, how much do you think this film is in response to a certain way of thinking?

(NB: There are extensive teaching resources for use with the book *Girl Culture* available from Lauren Greenfield's website, visit: <http://www.laurengreenfield.com/girlculture/index.html> and click on the 'learn' link)

WOULD IT BE DIFFERENT IN ENGLAND?

- Research the NHS provision for people with eating disorders
 - List the types of care that are available to you if you have an eating disorder
 - Is this affected by gender, age or income?
 - How do you think the story of this film would be different if it were to take place in the UK instead of in the US?

FOR DISCUSSION

- Many eating disorder websites include the phrase: 'It's not about food, it's about feelings'
 - Do you agree with this statement?

- Do you think that *Thin* can be discussed in response to this statement?
- Do you think it holds true for the characters portrayed in the film?
- In the media almost all of the people suffering from eating disorders are women. Do you think that men and boys can have eating disorders as well?
 - How might the symptoms or consequences be different for boys versus girls?
- Read the following excerpt from Lauren Greenfield

(from <http://www.filmthreat.com/index.php?section=interviews&id=1062>)

How did you decide on the four female subjects in your film?

I tried to follow girls beginning with their first day of treatment. This was particularly difficult because it meant the subject had to agree to being filmed for the project before meeting me in person. One of the girls who ended up being featured in the film, Shelly, decided she would entertain a phone conversation with me about this possibility...We talked and I told her she could give it a try and was free to stop anytime if she did not like it. She agreed and her first day at Renfrew was actually our first day of filming... Besides Shelly who was planned ahead of time, the “casting” was an intuitive process where we followed the characters that we were interested in and hoped they would work out. At that point, we did not know if the film would follow one character or multiple characters. There was not a premeditated plan in that sense. We just followed the stories, the drama and the characters we were attracted to—keeping a particular eye on those we followed from the beginning.

- How do you think you would respond if you were approached with such a request?
- Why do you think Greenfield chose her main characters? What characteristics do they have in common and how do they differ?
- Greenfield has unprecedented access to her subjects throughout the film, why do you think the hospital and the women granted her such remarkable access?
- How do you think the subjects would feel watching the film?
 - How do you think the subjects who were filmed but didn't make it into the final film would feel? Do you think that participation in a film like *Thin* would have positive and/or negative effects on the subjects?

Bibliography:

Jane F. Ferry, *Food in Film: A Culinary Performance of Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2003)

Gaye Poole, *Reel Meals, Set Meals: Food in Film and Theatre* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999)

Anne L. Bower *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004)

Djamila Moore poem Appears in *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice, Volume 2*. Edited by Bill Bigelow, Brenda Harvey, Stan Karp, and Larry Miller. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools. 2001. <http://www.rethinkingschools.org>

Films for Further Viewing

Babette's Feast (USA, 1987)
The Godfather (USA, 1972)
Big Night (USA, 1996)
Super Size Me (USA, 2004)
Eating (USA, 1990)
El Norte (USA, 1986)

Films by Richard Linklater:

Slacker (USA, 1991)
Dazed and Confused (USA, 1993)
Before Sunrise (USA, 1995)
Waking Life (USA, 2001)
The School of Rock (USA, 2003)
Before Sunset (USA, 2004)

Films by Robert Greenwald:

Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism (USA, 2004)
Unconstitutional: The War on Our Civil Liberties (USA, 2004)
Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price (USA, 2005)
Iraq For Sale: the War Profiteers (USA, 2006)

Appendix A:
Food as a Symbol

| <i>Film</i> | <i>Type of Food</i> | <i>Symbolic of.../A metaphor for...</i> | <i>Description of Scene</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| Sample: Fast Food Nation | Hamburger | Power and corruption, contamination | When the Mickey's executive first eats a 'Big One' the hamburger is the symbol of the power food chain and his loyalty to it. When he eats it after hearing about the contamination it becomes a metaphor for the corrupt corporation and the 'dirty politics' of fast food. |
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*Appendix B:****Excerpt from Eric Schlosser's Fast Food Nation (pp 67-8)***

Every Saturday Elisa Zamot gets up at 5:15 in the morning. It's a struggle, and her head feels groggy as she steps into the shower. Her little sisters, Cookie and Sabrina, are fast asleep in their beds. By 5:30, Elisa's showered, done her hair, and put on her McDonald's uniform. She's sixteen, bright-eyed and olive-skinned, pretty and petite, ready for another day of work. Elisa's mother usually drives her the half-mile or so to the restaurant, but sometimes Elisa walks, leaving home before the sun rises. Her family's modest townhouse sits beside a busy highway on the south side of Colorado Spring, in a largely poor and working-class neighborhood. Throughout the day, sounds of traffic fill the house, the steady whoosh of passing cars. But when Elisa heads for work, the streets are quiet, the sky's still dark, and the lights are out in the small houses and rental apartments along the road.

When Elisa arrives at McDonalds, the manager unlocks the door and lets her in. Sometimes the husband-and-wife cleaning crew are just finishing up. More often, it's just Elisa and the manager in the restaurant, surrounded by an empty parking lot. For the next hour or so, the two of them get everything ready. They turn on the ovens and grills. They go downstairs into the basement and get food supplies for the morning shift. They get the paper cups, wrappers, cardboard containers, and packets of condiments. They step into the big freezer and get the frozen bacon, the frozen pancakes, and the frozen cinnamon rolls. They get the frozen hash browns, the frozen biscuits, the frozen McMuffins. They get the cartons of scrambled egg mix and orange juice mix. They bring the food upstairs and start preparing it before any customers appear, thawing some things in the microwave and cooking other things on the grill. They put the cooked food in special cabinets to keep it warm.

The restaurant opens for business at seven o'clock, and for the next hour or so, Elisa and the manager hold down the fort, handling all the orders. As the place starts to get busy, other employees arrive. Elisa works behind the counter. She takes orders and hands food to customers from breakfast through lunch. When she finally walks home, after seven hours of standing at a cash register, her feet hurt. She's wiped out. She comes through the front door, flops onto the living room couch, and turns on the TV. And the next morning she gets up at 5:15 again and starts the same routine.

Appendix C: Headlines about immigration in Britain

The 'outsiders' who are really doing the business

The Guardian

August 13, 2005

'Immigrant' can imply hostility

The Guardian

April 23, 2005

Public wants much harsher immigration policy, says poll

The Times

July 08, 2006

A million migrants in 2yrs

The Sunday Times

August 20, 2006

Immigration: This island's story

Independent

23 August 2006

Whites' anxiety over race

The Sun

25 Aug 2006

The real reason why Britain needs immigrants

Independent

27 August 2006

Immigrants in Oz 'must fit in'

The Sun

September 02, 2006

Population 'could hit 70m unless we get a grip on immigration'

Daily Mail

July 12, 2006

NHS open to abuse by illegal immigrants, claims former minister

Daily Mail

August 23, 2006

Stop blaming migrants - exploitation is the problem

Guardian

September 12 2006