



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Verse: The Rebirth of Poetry**

**2008  
San Francisco Film Society  
Education Program  
Study Guide**

Developed by  **JUST I THINK**

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*2<sup>ND</sup> VERSE*

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**FILM SYNOPSIS**

"2nd Verse" explores urban teen life in the San Francisco Bay Area through the rising popularity of poetry and Spoken Word. Although poetry is the unifying characteristic that brings these young people together, the film does not concentrate on their poems so much as it tells the story of their lives amid the Bay Area's melting pot of ethnic and economic backgrounds. The film shows how these teens coexist and draw strength from each other, and how these youth poets are changed by their engagement with spoken word, exploring their identity and connection to their unique California community. From a sixteen-year-old girl who lost her father to alcohol at a young age, to an undocumented teen struggling with poverty and his sexuality, to a privileged boy in San Francisco who attends one of the country's most elite private schools, "Second Verse" endeavors to initiate the viewer into a world rarely seen or acknowledged by the general population.

**FILMMAKERS****Carl Brown (Director, Cinematographer, Editor, Writer, Producer)**

In 2002, Carl moved from Brooklyn to the Bay Area, starting his own freelance video production company, Corduroy Media. His concern with social inequality, environmental racism and corporate control of information and media outlets motivates his projects with independent artists, non-profit foundations, and educational groups. He currently works with clients in the Bay Area and New York. His educational, narrative and corporate work have been broadcast on VH1 and shown at film festivals, educational conferences, and corporate training sessions. Second Verse is Carl's first feature length documentary.

**Erin Beach (Writer, Producer, Assistant Editor)**

Erin Beach is a professional photographer, videographer and journalist. In 2002, Erin produced and filmed a documentary about an inner city hip-hop dance troupe in Oakland that helps keep kids off the streets. It is currently in post-production. In 2000, Erin spent 18 days in Havana, Cuba, studying photography with National Geographic photographer David Allan Harvey. She focused on teen culture, a recurring theme in her work. Erin's photographs have appeared in USA Today, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Chicago Tribune, the Pioneer Press newspaper group, the Charleston (WV) Gazette and the Winston-Salem Journal.

Film synopsis taken from the *2<sup>nd</sup> Verse* website [www.2ndversefilm.com](http://www.2ndversefilm.com)

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*2<sup>ND</sup> VERSE***Brief History of Spoken Word in the 1990s**

(Wikipedia)

In the 1990s, the poetry scene in the United States saw an increased interest in spoken word poetry. This, however, was not the first emergence of spoken word. Spoken word, or poetry spoken aloud, was pioneered in the days of troubadours and storytellers who would recite their poetry aloud to gain recognition. It was not until the invention of the printing press that the emphasis on performance poetry shifted to publishing because of the possibility of increasing the works' availability. Again, in the 1950s and 1960s, spoken word was revived. The Beats began using spoken word to express their anti-academic beliefs, and their dislike of societal norms. Then spoken word slipped under the mainstream radar again, until the 1990s.

The strong, aggressive and, frank style of poetry in the 1990s caused for another surfacing of spoken word in mainstream society. Unlike The Beats, this emergence of spoken word was not necessarily politically driven. This movement focused more on increasing diversity among its performers, reaching out inspiring amateur practitioners, and sending messages of positivity and tolerance. In short, the movement was about bringing poetry back to the people.

**Poetry resources online:**

- Ink Tank  
[www.inktank.org](http://www.inktank.org)
- Poetology  
[www.poetology.com](http://www.poetology.com)
- Poetry 180  
[www.loc.gov/poetry/180](http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180)
- Up Words Poetry  
[www.upwordspoetry.com](http://www.upwordspoetry.com)

**About Youth Speaks ([www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org))**

Youth Speaks empowers the next generation of leaders, self-defined artists, and visionary activists through written and oral literacies. They challenge youth to find, develop, publicly present, and apply their voices as creators of social change.

**Other recent films about spoken word:**

- *Poetic License* (2003)
- *Poetry Live(s)* (2007)
- *Slam Nation: The Sport of Spoken Word* (1998)

Founded in 1996, Youth Speaks is the leading nonprofit presenter of Spoken Word performance, education, and youth development programs in the country. Presenters of local and national youth poetry slams, festivals, reading series, and more, Youth Speaks also offers a comprehensive slate of literary arts education programs during the school day and the after-school hours, and conducts numerous publications and youth development programs. All told, Youth Speaks works with 45,000 teens per year in the Bay Area alone, and has created partner programs in 36 cities across the United States.

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*2<sup>ND</sup> VERSE***The National Youth Spoken Word Coalition (NYSWC)**

NYSWC develops the capacity of youth spoken word organizations through resource development, training opportunities, and field-wide advocacy. NYSWC partner organizations are mutually invested in spoken word poetry as a vehicle to develop the cultural, academic and civic literacies of youth. Partner organizations reflect a diversity of grassroots, small and mid-size organizations.

Current organizational partners include:

- Young Chicago Authors (Chicago, IL)
- WordPlay Teen Writing Project (Baton Rouge, LA)
- The Minnesota Spoken Word Association (Minneapolis, MN)
- Texas Youth Word Collective (Austin, TX)
- Office of Multicultural Initiatives/Youth Speaks Wisconsin (Madison, WI)
- Urban Word NYC (New York, NY)
- Providence Poetry Slam (Providence, RI)
- Youth Speaks (San Francisco, CA)
- Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center/Youth Speaks Seattle (Seattle, WA)
- Youth Arts Collective (Ypsilanti, MI)

From [www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org)

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## What is a documentary?

- A documentary is a non-fiction work such as a film or TV program that presents political, social or historical subject matter in a factual and informative manner.

(from the American Heritage Dictionary)

## Short History of the Documentary

- The term was coined by film critic John Grierson in 1926 while reviewing Robert Flaherty's film *Moana*.
- Grierson defined the documentary as "creative treatment of actuality."
- Robert Flaherty, an American prospector, is widely considered the "father of the documentary." His feature length documentary, *Nanook of the North* (1922) follows the struggle of an Eskimo family.
- Prior to this, nonfiction cinema had existed for over two decades. The earliest works were shorts called "actuality films" which were often single shots or moments captured on film. An example

## SCREENING WITH MEANING

**Media Literacy** is the ability to analyze, evaluate and understand media messages.

The following concepts and questions provide a foundation for evaluating films (and other forms of media) with your students.

## Core Concepts of Media Analysis

- *All media messages are constructed*

Questions to ask: *Who is the producer of the message? Who is the message constructed for? (Who is the target audience?) How do you know?*

Media messages are created by producers, and everything that you see in a media message – the size, shape, and color of the actors, the camera angles, the sounds, the fonts – have been selected by the producers to achieve a desired effect. And those same producers are bringing their own views and personal histories into that message, whether they do it deliberately or not.

- *Media messages are created with a purpose*

Question to ask: *Why is this message being sent?*

Media messages can: express an opinion or point of view, educate through factual content and information, persuade an audience to buy a product or act in a certain way, or entertain.

- *Media messages are constructed use a unique language*

Question to ask: *What methods or techniques are used to attract and hold my attention?*

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of this type of film is *Workers Emerging from a Factory* (1894) by Louis and Auguste Lumière.

Very specific techniques are used in the creation of media. These techniques (lighting, sound, talent, editing choices, camera angle, design, etc.) are used to relay the intention (or purpose) of the creator/producer of the message.

Some examples of documentary forms:

- Biographical films
- Concerts or live performances
- Sports Documentaries
- Sociological or ethnographical examinations
- Nature or Science films
- Historical films

- *Media messages are representations*

Questions to ask: *What has been left out of the message? What information, perspective, or representation is absent? Who might benefit or be harmed by this message?*

It is impossible to represent an experience, perspective or any part of reality in its totality. As a result media messages are generalizations of an experience or point of view. Often times this leads to misinformation, over-generalizations, and stereotypes.

Discussion Questions

- *How are documentary films different than fiction films?*
- *How are they different than the news?*
- *How is watching a film about a social issue different than reading about it?*

- *Different people experience the same media messages in different ways.*

Question to ask: *How might different people understand this message differently than I do?*

You get out of a media message what you bring to it. Who you are (your age, race, class, experience) greatly affects your point of view and how you will interpret any given media.

- *Media have embedded values and perspective.*

Question to ask: *What values, lifestyles or points of view does this message reinforce or support?*

No media message is completely objective. The author or producer of any message is going to be influenced by his/her own point of view, beliefs, and value system.

*2<sup>ND</sup> VERSE***CLASSROOM USE**

To enrich the students' experience, we recommend pre-viewing and post-viewing activities for **2<sup>nd</sup> Verse**. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the study guide to meet their own learning objectives for their students.

**Grade Levels**

This film is recommended for middle and high school students.

**Subject Areas**

Language Arts

Media Studies

Visual and Performing Arts

**Pre-Viewing**

You can share the film synopsis and introduce information from Screening with Meaning.

**Post-Viewing Discussion**

To help facilitate discussion, the following questions are broken up into 3 categories: thinking/feeling questions, knowledge questions, and media literacy questions.

Thinking/Feeling Questions:

- How did this film make you **feel**?
- Why do you think this art form has become so important for young adults?
- Many of the featured young poets had to overcome obstacles. How do you think this affects their art?

Knowledge Questions:

- What is **spoken word poetry**? Compare and contrast it to the traditional poetry form.
- What is a **slam**? What is the history of that word?
- The Bay Area is known as the birthplace of spoken word. What is the relationship between the environment and the art form?

Media Literacy Questions:

- What characterizes a **performance film**? How is this film different from/similar to a performance film? How is viewing a live performance different from viewing a recorded one?
- What is its significance in the title of the film?

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**Post-Viewing Activities**

From Just Think’s curriculum *Flipping the Script*

**Finding Your Voice Activity:**

Have students select one of the following writing exercises.

**I Am Poem**

- 1) Students write down five words they would use to describe themselves.
- 2) On the board, the teacher creates a table like the one below, listing six broad categories across the top. (We have suggested some categories, but feel free to use whatever titles you like.)
- 3) Students copy the table into their notebooks.
- 4) The class as a whole calls out and fills in each of the columns with descriptive words.
- 5) Students copy those words into their notebooks and circle four of the words in each column. Those words, combined with their original five words, will compose their poetic pallet.
- 6) Students then use these words to create a poem. (They can use any other words as well, but they must use the words that they wrote down and circled.)
- 7) The first words of the poem must be: "I am..."

Animals    Musical Instrument    Mythical char    Weather    Places  
 Colors


*Note: For more advanced work, change "I am" to "I was" or "I will be." Also, the students can use for their pallet the words that they did not circle.*

**Community Voice**

Many writers find the material and inspiration for their work in their communities. The environment informs their voice, prompting them to observe and chronicle life around them. This writing exercise is intended to have students draw on their communities for their own work, encouraging them to notice the people and events that make up their everyday lives. What observations can you make about your own neighborhood? What makes your neighborhood unique? Where could you be most inspired to write? Why?

*2<sup>ND</sup> VERSE***The List Poem**

Asheena, a youth poet, describes her writing process this way: "Sometimes I'll just sit on the train and write what I see. Not necessarily a poem, I'll just write:

a man with blue pants

a red hat

a little girl cries

her mother puts a pacifier in her mouth."

Following this model, students create a list, writing down descriptive phrases. The list should describe elements of their community, whether it is their street, the school cafeteria, or their corner market.

From that list, students then construct a poem. To help get students started, you may find it helpful to offer some writing prompts:

- "Everyday on the way to school, I see..."
- "During the school day, I hear..."

**A Poem for My Generation**

Students write a poem to their peers. What message would they like to convey to other teens around the country?