

Summer of Soul: Film and History



A Questlove Jawn

Summer of Soul

(...OR, WHEN THE REVOLUTION COULD NOT BE TELEVISED)



JOURNEYS IN FILM
educating for global understanding

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About *Journeys in Film*

Founded in 2003, *Journeys in Film* operates on the belief that teaching with film has the power to prepare students to live and work more successfully in the 21st century as informed and globally competent citizens. Its core mission is to advance global understanding among youth through the combination of age-appropriate films from around the world, interdisciplinary classroom materials coordinated with the films, and teachers' professional development offerings. This comprehensive curriculum model promotes widespread use of film as a window to the world to help students to mitigate existing attitudes of cultural bias, cultivate empathy, develop a richer understanding of global issues, and prepare for effective participation in an increasingly interdependent world. Our standards-based lesson plans support various learning styles, promote literacy, transport students around the globe, and foster learning that meets core academic objectives.

Selected films function as springboards for lesson plans in subjects ranging from math, science, language arts, and social studies to other topics that have become critical for students, including environmental sustainability, poverty and hunger, global health, diversity, and immigration. Prominent educators on our team consult with filmmakers and cultural specialists in the development of curriculum guides, each one dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the culture and issues depicted in a specific film. The guides merge effectively into teachers' existing lesson plans and mandated curricular requirements, providing teachers with an innovative way to fulfill their school districts' standards-based goals.

Why use this program?

To be prepared to participate in tomorrow's global arena, students need to gain an understanding of the world beyond their own borders. *Journeys in Film* offers innovative and engaging tools to explore other cultures and social issues, beyond the often negative images seen in print, television, and film.

For today's media-centric youth, film is an appropriate and effective teaching tool. *Journeys in Film* has carefully selected quality films that tell the stories of young people living in locations that may otherwise never be experienced by your students. Students travel through these characters and their stories: They drink tea with an Iranian family in *Children of Heaven*, play soccer in a Tibetan monastery in *The Cup*, find themselves in the conflict between urban grandson and rural grandmother in South Korea in *The Way Home*, watch the ways modernity challenges Maori traditions in New Zealand in *Whale Rider*, tour an African school with a Nobel Prize-winning teenager in *He Named Me Malala*, or experience the transformative power of music in *The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma & the Silk Road Ensemble*.

In addition to our ongoing development of teaching guides for culturally sensitive foreign films, *Journeys in Film* brings outstanding documentary films to the classroom. Working with the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, *Journeys in Film* has identified exceptional narrative and documentary films that teach about a broad range of social issues in real-life settings such as famine-stricken and war-torn Somalia, a maximum-security prison in Alabama, and a World War II concentration camp near Prague. *Journeys in Film* guides help teachers integrate these films into their classrooms, examining complex issues, encouraging students to be active rather than passive viewers, and maximizing the power of film to enhance critical thinking skills and to meet the Common Core Standards.

Journeys in Film is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

A Letter from Questlove



Dear Teacher,

There was always an educational component to *Summer of Soul*. At first, it was my own education. I couldn't believe that I had not heard about this major music festival in the summer of 1969, just weeks away from Woodstock, featuring the top Black artists of the day.

As I made the movie, it became more and more apparent that the film could, and should, also be a source of education for others. For starters, the rediscovery of the festival—the way in which it was rescued from the forgotten corners of history—contained an important lesson about the dangers of erasure. History isn't just what we know. It's also what we don't know. The more generations that were born and schooled without this festival on their radar, the more people would be operating with only a partial field of vision. An obstructed view is not a clear one.

And then there are the performances themselves, vibrant acts of Black genius that not only illuminate the singers and the bands but also those who came to Harlem to hear them. The festival and the movie sit at the heart of a living, breathing body of stories about Black life, Black living, and Black joy in the late sixties. I am thrilled that this curriculum exists to help the film do its part in explaining our shared American past—and by extension, our present.

Sincerely,

Questlove

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Q" followed by a stylized flourish.

Introducing *Summer of Soul*

In the eventful summer of 1969, the countercultural music festival of Woodstock caught the nation's eye and received reams of press coverage for its celebration of drugs, sex, and rebellious youth, as well as for rock and roll. Meanwhile another major music festival was under way, running in the north end of Manhattan for six weekends—the Harlem Cultural Festival, featuring many of the top Black performers in the country and attended by thousands of enthusiastic celebrants—all largely ignored by major press outlets. Despite performances by Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Sly & the Family Stone, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Mahalia Jackson, B.B. King, The 5th Dimension, and more, the festival soon faded into historical oblivion, except in the memories of concert-goers.

Through this documentary, new generations are coming to appreciate the wide range of Black music: spirituals, gospel, rhythm and blues, jazz, soul, hip hop, and more. Music of the Black diaspora, including Afro-Cuban music, is included as well. Questlove's brilliant direction has located the music in the context of the 1960s: from the excitement of the NASA's moon landing to the devastating assassinations of pioneers and political leaders like Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., and from the optimism of the civil rights movement to the destruction of Black neighborhoods in urban rioting.

Premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in 2021, *Summer of Soul* won a Grand Jury Prize and an Audience Award. Subsequently, the documentary has been nominated for many additional film prizes and has won frequently, while receiving almost universal critical acclaim.

DIRECTED BY: Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson

PRODUCED BY: Joseph Patel p.g.a., Robert Fyvolent p.g.a., David Dinerstein p.g.a.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Jen Isaacson, Jon Kamen, Dave Sirulnick, Jody Allen, Ruth Johnston, Rocky Collins, Jannat Gargi, Beth Hubbard, Davis Guggenheim, Laurene Powell Jobs, Jeffrey Lurie, Marie Therese Guirgis, David Barse, Ron Eisenberg, Sheila C. Johnson, Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson

MUSIC SUPERVISOR: Randall Poster

EDITED BY: Joshua L. Pearson

MUSIC BY: Adam Peters

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Shawn Peters

Awards and Nominations

Sundance Film Festival Winner Grand Jury Prize – Documentary Audience Awards – Documentary	February 3, 2021
Critics’ Choice Documentary Awards Winner Best Documentary Feature Best Archival Documentary Best Music Documentary Best First Documentary Feature, Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson Best Director, Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson (tied with Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin for <i>The Rescue</i>) Best Editing, Joshua L. Pearson	November 14, 2021
National Board of Review Winner Documentary Film	December 3, 2021
Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards Winner Best Documentary/Non-Fiction Film	December 18, 2021
Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards Winner Best Editing, Joshua L. Pearson	December 18, 2021
Grammy Awards Nominated Best Music Film	January 31, 2022
Producers Guild of America Awards Nominated Outstanding Producer of Documentary Motion Pictures	February 26, 2022
Independent Spirit Awards Nominated Best Documentary Feature	March 6, 2022



Summer of Soul: Film and History

Enduring Understandings

- Although historical footage used in documentaries is typically presented as the objective truth, it is in fact carefully edited and constructed to tell a story.
- Films (especially documentaries) can contain misleading or erroneous depictions of the past, but they also offer valuable evidence of a collective history.
- The events and ideas presented by a film can be interpreted in different ways by viewers, who have divergent backgrounds and perspectives.
- Film, music, and other forms of art are extremely important in conveying a collective group identity and presenting social or political ideas.

Essential Questions

- How does Ahmir Questlove Thompson's background and identity—as a musical expert but first-time feature film director, as a Black man born in 1971, as a Philadelphia native, etc.—influence the form and content of *Summer of Soul*?
- As you analyze the sequences that use newsreel footage and photographs to document the past, how are they arranged to tell a “story”? Do you find that story accurate or questionable?
- How do Thompson and editor Joshua L. Pearson use rhythm, tempo, and tone in a musical way in their montage (the sequencing of shots to tell a story or present ideas)?
- In what ways does Thompson suggest social and political parallels between Harlem in 1969 and the United States in the 2020s?

Notes to the Teacher

Production on *Summer of Soul* began in 2018, but the back-story of the film dates from the Harlem Cultural Festival in the summer of 1969. One hundred miles south of the better-known Woodstock music festival (which was happening at the same time), the Harlem Cultural Festival gathered some of the greatest Black musicians of the era, spanning numerous genres including gospel, soul/R&B, jazz, blues, and Afro-Cuban rhythms.

The festival was launched by charismatic music promoter Tony Lawrence and took place in Harlem's Mount Morris Park (now known as Marcus Garvey Park). John Lindsay, then mayor of New York City and a white progressive, and the city's parks department gave the festival their blessing, in part because they were worried about the tense racial and political climate in Harlem in the summer of 1969. The area's residents were plagued by insufficient public resources, an influx of drugs, police brutality, and other issues, and were still reeling from the assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965 and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. Riots had taken place in Harlem following the murder of Dr. King the previous year, and city officials were hoping that a free public event like the Harlem Cultural Festival could prevent the outbreak of further violence.

Despite the magnitude of the festival, no funds were allocated to recording it for posterity. Independent television director Hal Tulchin, a veteran of commercials and game shows, decided to record the festival “on spec,” meaning he had no producers or financial backing but hoped someone would buy the footage afterwards.

Tulchin's footage was shown on a very limited basis after the festival, contradicting *Summer of Soul's* claim that no one had seen it from its filming in 1969 to production of the film in 2018; some of the performance footage was featured in two hour-long TV specials in 1969 and some foreign

broadcasts in the 1970s. However, it is true that Tulchin's recordings (which amounted to about 40 hours) and the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival itself remained largely unknown in the United States for many years.

In 2003, film archivist Joe Lauro discovered Tulchin's footage and contacted him, hoping to buy the rights to it and collaborate on a project. A year later, in 2004, they enlisted filmmakers Robert Gordon and Morgan Neville and conceived a potential documentary, even receiving a \$1 million offer from producer Robert Fyvolent of Newmarket Films. However, the various parties could not agree on the direction of the project and no contract was ever signed.

Following Tulchin's death in 2017, Fyvolent and producer David Dinerstein resurrected plans for the film and sold the rights to Fox Searchlight, who then brought Ahmir Questlove Thompson on board as director. While originally conceived as a relatively straightforward concert film, Thompson soon realized that the political context of the Harlem Cultural Festival—and its parallels to American society in the 2020s—required a broader approach with historical footage and interviews with musicians and original festivalgoers.

Production was delayed due to COVID-19 since numerous interviews had to be postponed, but *Summer of Soul* was finally released to positive public and critical reception in 2021, winning the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival that year. It has been lauded for the thrilling musical performances, its themes of racial awakening and the ways art and political turbulence interrelate, and its depictions of Black joy and artistry in an American context. *Summer of Soul* can be read as a concert film, a historical documentary, a political commentary, and a personal statement on the role of music in Black American culture.

Here are some resources you might find helpful:

"Why the Watershed 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival Was Overshadowed for 50 Years," History.com, August 13, 2021
<https://www.history.com/news/harlem-cultural-festival>

"The Story Behind the Harlem Cultural Festival Featured in *Summer of Soul*," Smithsonian Magazine, February 1, 2007
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/black-woodstock-summer-of-soul-146793268/>

"An answer to 'pain porn': Questlove on celebrating Black joy with *Summer of Soul*," Los Angeles Times, June 29, 2021
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2021-06-29/questlove-summer-of-soul-documentary-black-joy>

"*Summer of Soul*: How Questlove Tells a Story of Black Music and Culture Almost Erased from History," Variety, December 14, 2021
<https://variety.com/2021/artisans/awards/summer-soul-questlove-editing-1235133563/>

"Questlove Discusses His Must-See New Doc, *Summer of Soul*," NPR, July 2, 2021
<https://www.npr.org/2021/07/01/1012294452/questloves-summer-of-soul-tells-the-story-of-6-concerts-in-harlem-in-1969>

"Actually, the Revolution Was Televised," Book & Film Globe, July 29, 2021
<https://bookandfilmglobe.com/film/summer-of-soul-lost-footage/>

Part 1 of the lesson includes watching the full documentary *Summer of Soul*. (The running time is 117 minutes, so plan your class time accordingly.) Provide an intro to the film by asking students what they already know about Harlem, America in the 1960s, and/or the various musical artists and genres featured in *Summer of Soul*. Encourage students to take notes while watching the film, paying particular attention to its depiction of the historical period, its editing and sound design, the various interviews featured alongside the musical performances, and the film's various themes.

After watching *Summer of Soul*, teachers may choose to lead a freeform classroom discussion in which students share their immediate thoughts and reactions. Students will then read the article [“Why the Watershed 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival Was Overshadowed for 50 Years”](#); the reading provides additional information not featured in the film (or even, in some cases, contradicted by it), which encourages students to start thinking about the role of documentary films in achieving historical accuracy. Students will complete **Handout 1** after reading the article and discuss their responses either in groups or as a class.

Part 2 asks students to do a close analytical reading of a brief, early scene in *Summer of Soul*. The scene in question lasts less than a minute but features numerous brief shots culled from historical photographs and film clips, rapidly edited together to convey the chaos and tension of American race relations in the 1960s. Teachers may want to share the website [“What is a Montage?”](#) with students beforehand, as it provides an overview of the aspects of film editing. It is suggested that students do this activity individually at home, allowing them to focus on each individual shot or clip (and the soundtrack accompaniment). Reactions are then discussed in groups or as a class.

The third part has students writing a one- to two-page review of the film (or longer if the teacher chooses) consolidating the ideas and responses that have been discussed so far. Students are encouraged to write about whatever appeals to them in *Summer of Soul*, but a series of questions/topics is included to spark and guide their thought process. A handful of reviews from reputable online sources are included; teachers may choose to assign these readings before students write their own reviews as a source of inspiration, or (recommended) the reviews may be discussed afterwards so students can think about what they may have missed in *Summer of Soul* or what they disagree with. Students are encouraged to read their reviews aloud in class and to use this assignment as a template for further film or book reviews.

A few extension activities are also provided to advance the discussion even further. *Summer of Soul* provides a wealth of themes related to the creative arts, racial and cultural identity, the role of history in modern society, and the duty of a documentary film to provide accurate representations. Students are encouraged to participate (respectfully) in classroom discussions based on their own thoughts, feelings, and interpretations.



Common Core Standards addressed by this lesson

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that the listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Duration of lesson

5–6 class periods, including time to view the film

Assessments

Class discussion

Completion of **Handout 1: The Harlem Cultural Festival: Guided Reading Questions**

Completion of **Handout 2: Scene Analysis: 1969 Was a Change in Eras**

Film review

Materials needed

Summer of Soul film

Projector, whiteboard, or shared screen

Internet and word processor access

Handouts 1–3

Teacher Resource 1: Answer Sheet for Handout 2

“Why the Watershed 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival Was Overshadowed for 50 Years” by Karen Juanita Carrillo at

<https://www.history.com/news/harlem-cultural-festival>

“What is a Montage?” at

<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-a-montage-definition/>

Various online film reviews (optional, see handout)

2. Watch *Summer of Soul* (available on Hulu) however works best for your class: on a projector, whiteboard, shared screen, etc. Encourage students to take notes while viewing the film on whatever themes and ideas stand out to them.

3. After watching *Summer of Soul*, the teacher may lead a freeform class discussion in which students react spontaneously to the film. It is important to encourage students to develop their own responses to and critical interpretations of the artwork they experience; leading a class discussion that prioritizes students’ immediate thoughts engages their creativity and individuality.

4. Assign the “Why the Watershed 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival Was Overshadowed for 50 Years” reading at <https://www.history.com/news/harlem-cultural-festival> and distribute **Handout 1**. This article and the included guided reading questions provide additional context about the Harlem Cultural Festival and encourage students to start thinking about how *Summer of Soul* departs from historical authenticity, and the role of documentary films in accurately portraying their subject(s).

Suggested answer(s):

- a. The Harlem Cultural Festival actually began in 1967 (which *Summer of Soul* never mentions) and, over the next three years, grew into a major event for Black residents of Harlem. Tony Lawrence was a charismatic singer, actor, and music promoter from St. Kitts who organized the festival. John Lindsay was the mayor of New York City at the time, a white progressive who sought approval from the city’s Black residents (though he was known to have “genuine concern” for the needs of inner-city communities). August Heckscher was the New York City parks commissioner and a lifelong advocate of public affairs and the arts, supporting the Harlem Cultural Festival and its staging in Mount Morris Park.

Procedure

Part 1: Viewing *Summer of Soul* and Reading About the Harlem Cultural Festival

1. As an introduction to the film, ask students what they already know about Harlem, American society in the 1960s, and/or the musical artists and genres featured in *Summer of*



- b. Artists and genres included B.B. King (blues); Nina Simone, Stevie Wonder, David Ruffin, Sly and the Family Stone, and Gladys Knight & the Pips (soul/R&B); the Staples Singers, the Edwin Hawkins Singers, and Mahalia Jackson (gospel); Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, and Herbie Mann (jazz); Mongo Santamaria (Afro-Cuban rhythm); and The 5th Dimension (pop/vocal harmony). Such eclectic genres represented the diverse community of Harlem and the thriving nature of Black and international music from the African diaspora at the time.
- c. Harlem was the symbolic capital of Black American life, which had experienced riots in 1967 and in 1968 following the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was the location of the artistically fertile Harlem Renaissance and presented the idea of the “New Negro,” who was more militant and self-advocating. It had been home to Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), W.E.B. DuBois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro-American Unity, Father Divine’s Peace Mission movement, and Audley “Queen Mother” Moore’s Committee for Reparations for Descendants of U.S. Slaves.
- d. In addition to the recent assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. King, the late 1960s were defined by the marches and protests of the civil rights movement. At the same time as the Harlem Cultural Festival, the Apollo 11 mission landed on the moon, despite the plethora of issues that arguably took greater precedence in American cities. Meanwhile, 21 members of the Black Panther Party were charged with trying to bomb and attack the police in lower Manhattan (they were eventually acquitted),

and the activist Young Lords Party was leading a “Garbage Offensive” in East Harlem whereby they collected trash that was proliferating on the streets due to neglect from the city’s sanitation department.

- e. Answers will vary but may include: the festival began in 1967, instead of launching in 1969; it was difficult to convince city officials to host the festival in Harlem; or the particular role of the Young Lords Party in Harlem. In general, the wealth of detail providing in this article is cursorily covered in the film.

- 5. After students complete the handout, discuss their answers in class.

Part 2: Scene Analysis

- 1. As an intro to this activity, teachers may discuss various facets of film style, such as editing, composition, and sound design. Of particular use may be the article “[What is a Montage?](https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-a-montage-definition/)” available at <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-a-montage-definition/>.
- 2. Distribute **Handout 2**, which asks students to closely analyze a brief, early scene in *Summer of Soul* that provides a rapid, chaotic overview of racial tension and political turbulence in the U.S. in 1969. Students should be assigned this activity to complete at home since it involves a close reading that would be difficult to do as a class.
- 3. Students will be asked to log as many shots/clips as possible in a brief clip less than a minute long. Despite the brevity of this clip, there are numerous shots and pieces of footage used, so students should not be expected to log every single piece of content. See **Teacher Resource 1** for a sample answer sheet.

4. After completing their scene analyses, students should share their shot logs, as well as their follow-up responses to the questions in class or among groups. While discussions will vary, they should emphasize how film form instills political and thematic concepts in various ways and should debate whether or not documentaries are obliged to cover their historical subjects accurately (which presumably they should) or in-depth (which is subject to argument).

Part 3: Write a Film Review

1. Ask students to write a one- to two-page (or longer) review of *Summer of Soul*. Students should be encouraged to incorporate all the ideas that have been discussed so far while presenting their own unique ideas and interpretations. These reviews should follow the format of persuasive essays, incorporating a thesis statement, supplemental evidence, conclusion, and so on.

2. After writing their reviews, students may volunteer to read their work (in whole or in part) as a class or among groups. This should open up a (respectable, supportive) debate in which the various thematic and formal aspects of *Summer of Soul* are discussed. Reviews will of course vary widely, but could discuss the degree of historical accuracy of the film, its political themes and how they relate to modern American society, the more personal theme of how Black artistry and culture are formative to young people's development (presumably across a diverse range of student perspectives and identities), and the major role that music and other creative arts play in formulating political and cultural ideals.

3. Assign an assortment of *Summer of Soul* reviews from reputable online critics as a follow-up activity. Some examples of prominent reviews are provided in **Handout 3**. Students can then discuss new concepts or ideas in these reviews that they hadn't thought about before or critical interpretations that they disagree with. (Alternatively, teachers may choose to assign these articles before students write their own reviews, as a guide and inspiration for their own writings.)

4. After students write their own review, have them read a sampling of reviews online; numerous reviews can be found at https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/summer_of_soul. After reading, have them answer this question: Were there are any points discussed in these reviews that you didn't think about while watching the film? Do you agree or disagree with these critics? Why?

5. As an option, teachers may choose to publish students' reviews on a school-related blog or digital learning management system. If schools have a newspaper or other publication, reviews may be published in that format as well.

6. As a final wrap-up activity, lead students in a class discussion about *Summer of Soul*, its various themes, the formal style of the film, and the political or cultural ideas it attempts to convey. This discussion should incorporate the Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions listed at the beginning of this lesson plan; of course, the discussion can lead in numerous other directions as well.

Extension Activities

1. In-Character Interviews: Have students respond to interview questions as though they are festivalgoers featured in *Summer of Soul*. As an option, other students can set up the film production equipment to record interviews, including the camera, microphones, sound recording equipment, and lighting setups. (Adobe Education Exchange has a high-quality introductory lesson on digital video production at <https://edex.adobe.com/digital-video>.) Recorded interviews can then be edited by students into a short film that might include film clips and other historical footage found online.

Questions might include:

- a. What was your favorite musical artist or performance, and why?
- b. Did this film/festival make you feel more connected to your classmates? Why or why not?
- c. Do you think your own personal identity or background made you feel a certain way about the music performed in the film/festival? If so, why?
- d. Do you have aspirations to be a musician, and if so, does *Summer of Soul* feature any role models for you?
- e. Why do you think this festival was so significant for the people who attended it in the summer of 1969?
- f. On the other hand, why do you think this footage sat, mostly unused, for almost 50 years, and has been overshadowed by Woodstock and other music festivals?

2. Documentaries and “The Truth”: Assign an additional documentary film for viewing and ask students to analyze how it conveys the impression of an objective truth (or, more rarely, how it acknowledges that it may be skewed or biased). As with *Summer of Soul*, students will write a one-to two-page review summarizing the film’s style, themes, and level of historical accuracy after viewing the film independently.

Some options for further viewing and analysis:

- a. *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922)
“*Nanook of the North*,” by Patricia R. Zimmermann and Sean Zimmermann Auyash
<https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-film-preservation-board/documents/nanook2.pdf>
- b. *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988)
“*The Thin Blue Line: A Radical Classic*,” by Charles Musser
<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/3500-the-thin-blue-line-a-radical-classic>
- c. *Bowling for Columbine* (Michael Moore, 2002)
“Why Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine* matters now more than ever,” by Sophia A. McClennen
<https://www.salon.com/2019/10/19/why-michael-moores-bowling-for-columbine-matters-now-more-than-ever/>
- d. *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005)
“*Grizzly Man*, Herzog’s Human Nature Tale,” by Scott Simon
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4778191>



(Film Studies)

The Harlem Cultural Festival: Guided Reading Questions

a. Describe how and when the Harlem Cultural Festival started and who was involved. Who were Tony Lawrence, John Lindsay, and August Heckscher? What were their roles in the festival's founding?

- b. Who were some of the musical artists that played at the festival? What were some of their musical genres? Why do you think it was important that various genres were represented?



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Lesson (Film Studies)

Handout 2

Scene Analysis: 1969 Was a Change of Era

Directions: Closely watch and listen to the scene in *Summer of Soul* which begins with the voiceover “1969 was a change of era in the Black community” and ends with the appearance of the title onscreen. (This scene plays from 5:53–6:47.) Then do the activity below.

1. Log as many photographs/film clips as possible during this segment; the footage moves very quickly, so you may not be able to list everything. Note the duration in seconds and what is playing on the soundtrack (music, voiceover, etc.). Describe the main idea/tone that each piece of footage tries to convey. One example is done for you. Use additional paper if needed.

Visual Description	Duration	Sound Description	Idea/Tone
Stevie Wonder drumming	2 seconds	Synchronous music	Quick, exciting, chaotic



2. Describe the editing style of this montage (the assemblage of distinct shots to convey an event or idea). How long do most of the images last? What is the overall tone of this scene?
3. What can you conclude about the civil rights movement, race relations, and other political events in America from this short clip?
4. What do you think are the positive or negative impacts of constructing this scene in this way?
5. Compare this brief scene to the longer historical overview provided from 10:30–12:50 (set to the Chambers Brothers' "Uptown"). How do these two sequences compare and contrast?



Teacher Resource 1

Scene Analysis: 1969 Was a Change of Era (Answer Sheet)

Directions: Closely watch and listen to the scene in *Summer of Soul* which begins with the voiceover “1969 was a change of era in the Black community” and ends with the appearance of the title onscreen (this scene plays from 5:53–6:47). Then do the activity below.

1. Log as many photographs/film clips as possible during this segment; the footage moves very quickly, so you may not be able to list everything. Note the duration in seconds and what is playing on the soundtrack (music, voiceover, etc.). Describe the main idea/tone that each piece of footage tries to convey. One example is done for you. Use additional paper if needed.

Visual Description	Duration	Sound Description	Idea/Tone
Stevie Wonder drumming	2 seconds	Synchronous music	Quick, exciting, chaotic
Close-ups of Black Americans looking at the camera	4 seconds	Voiceover: “1969 was a change of era for the Black community.”	Defiant, vibrant
News clip of Black man speaking to camera	3 seconds	Monologue: “The whole thing is a re-evaluation of our history and our culture.”	African heritage; political
Protest march with Black Power flag	1 second	Music continues	Infusion of art and politics
People dancing	1 second	Music continues	Excitement, infusion of art and politics, movement
Clips of people in the crowd at the festival	2 seconds	Voiceover: “The styles were changing.”	Beauty, joy, and defiance; how clothes, hair, makeup, etc., convey politics
Shots of Black activists, including the Black Panthers and their flag	3 seconds	Voice-over: “Music was changing and revolution was coming together”	Defiance; political activism and revolution (without much detail)
Shots of various Black politicians, activists, and speakers	6 seconds	Voice-overs, one after the other, as music continues: “Black power! ... We need it now ... The revolution is not gonna stop ... In 1969 ... We want a new life!”	Various modes of Black activism and revolution coming together, somewhat chaotically
Black woman in red dress dancing on a street filled with rubble	1.5 seconds	Drumming continues	As politics continue to be turbulent, art/music/dancing continues

2. Describe the editing style of this montage (the assemblage of distinct shots to convey an event or idea). How long do most of the images last? What is the overall tone of this scene?

Answers will likely describe how the shots are extremely brief and edited rapidly together, with most images lasting two or three seconds or less. The overall tone conveyed is one of chaos and excitement, change and agitation.

3. What can you conclude about the civil rights movement, race relations, and other political events in America from this short clip?

Answers will likely explain that they viewed brief snippets of protest marches, Black culture from the 1960s, and so on, but these topics are not covered in much depth during this sequence.

4. What do you think are the positive or negative impacts of constructing this scene in this way?

Their answers may explain that while this brief introductory scene provides an exciting and intriguing overview, it reduces most of the events depicted in the source footage to attention-grabbing images without much explanation.

5. Compare this brief scene to the longer historical overview provided from 10:30–12:50 (set to the Chambers Brothers' "Uptown"). How do these two sequences compare and contrast?

Answers will vary, but the later sequence goes into greater detail about the plethora of conflicts and political events that defined divisiveness in America in the late '60s, from the Vietnam War to numerous political assassinations to activist groups like the Black Panthers. Answers will likely vary regarding how convincing or powerful such sequences are.



Handout 3

Write a Film Review

Directions: After watching *Summer of Soul*, students will write their own one- to two-page review of the film. They are encouraged to offer their own thoughts/responses, but should also address these themes/questions:

1. An opening title claims that after the footage of the festival was filmed in 1969, it “sat in a basement for 50 years. It has never been seen. Until now.” But as an article in the *Boston Globe* explains, that’s not entirely true. (See <https://bookandfilmglobe.com/film/summer-of-soul-lost-footage/>). What do you think is the purpose of this inaccuracy, and do you think it positively or negatively affects the movie?
2. Through historical photographs and film clips, *Summer of Soul* portrays a tumultuous time defined by the civil rights movement, racial tensions, political resistance, and other societal issues. Do you think the film suggests any parallels to the time in which it was made (2021)? Did *Summer of Soul* make you reflect upon your own society? If so, how?



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