





NAVALNY

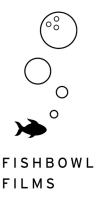
Discussion Guide

For community screenings, panels, and workshops, and for college courses and seminars













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Facilitation Guidelines

Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to create space for a viewer to have unexpected thoughts and emotions.

Journeys in Film uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy.
 Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging.
 Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect.
 Start and end meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality; only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group?
 Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?

- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that rubs you the wrong way, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication.
 Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blind spots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension, pausing as a group, and taking a collective breath together before diving back in or taking a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.

An Open Letter From the Film Team

Documentary filmmaking is the art of being in the right place at the right time, even when that moment is incredibly precarious. What began as an entirely different project with the global investigative organization Bellingcat evolved when Bellingcat journalist Christo Grozev said, "You know that Alexei Navalny guy? I might have a lead into who tried to poison him." As he said those words, we began the journey to tell a story we never could have imagined.

We began filming with Alexei Navalny in Germany in the fall of 2020 as he was recovering from an attempt on his life by the Kremlin until his detainment in Russia on January 17, 2021. While we filmed, we understood we were documenting history being made before our eyes. But we had no way of envisioning the relevance of the story in a world transformed by Russia, its war in Ukraine, and the growing and treacherous threat of authoritarianism around the world.

Three weeks after the film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2022, the world watched in horror as Russian rockets rained down on Ukraine. Meanwhile in Russia, the last vestiges of independent media were crushed, and



Daniel Roher, Director

free speech has been all but extinguished. As Russia continues its vicious war, Ukraine fights for its survival and Navalny continues to languish in a maximum security gulag while his prison sentence increases without just cause and his health rapidly deteriorates.

While documentary filmmaking is always fraught with unknown elements, the journey to getting this story into the world has not been easy. The Russian government tracked the actions of our team. Members of the film team were libeled on Russian state television, falsely accused in the Russian press of collaborating with U.S. intelligence services, and the film's digital presence has been attacked by online trolls. Because of digital security concerns, the film was kept under wraps not only during filming, but it had to be hidden from the press and the public until its premiere, which was announced as a surprise just days before the event. Hours before *NAVALNY*'s premiere, Alexei and his associates were added to Russia's official registry of terrorists and extremists alongside Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Christo Grozev, who became a significant part of our film, was prevented from attending the BAFTA awards ceremony due to security risks, and his life continues to be under serious threat, including the addition of his name to a Russian criminal wanted list.

The film has won the BAFTA, PGA, and the Academy Award for Best Documentary, in addition to the Columbia DuPont Award for investigative journalism. It has played in festivals around the world, in hundreds of theaters, and now is accessible in most countries on digital platforms. We have shared the film with government officials and other leaders in society who have come to better know and appreciate Navalny and his work. We are grateful for the film's success, but more importantly, we realize what its visibility can mean, and how crucial it is to keep audiences engaged and the spotlight on Navalny, knowing that as long as his name echoes through the global consciousness, it will be harder for those who would prefer to disappear him.

As Putin's brand of authoritarianism wreaks havoc on the world, the urgency of the message of our film is more critical than ever. For this is not just the story of Navalny and Russia, but a rallying cry to stand up against the rise of injustice, a resonant opportunity to remind the world of the importance of free speech and a free press to counter dictatorship and uphold democracy. "Evil is only able to proliferate if good people do nothing, so don't be inactive," Navalny warns us at the end of the film. Navalny is not a lone leader willing to risk his life to save the day. He must be a catalyst for the change we must make together.

Daniel Roher Odessa Rae Diane Becker Melanie Miller Shane Boris



Introducing Alexei Anatolievich Navalny



Alexei Anatolievich Navalny, a lawyer, political figure, and an anti-corruption activist, was born June 4, 1976, in Butyn, a village near Moscow. His father was in the Russian military and the family moved frequently. As a young man, he had seen himself as a liberal and backed the reforms of Boris Yeltsin, a position he later regretted because he came to view it as the beginning of modern Russian authoritarianism.

He earned a law degree from the People's Friendship University of Russia in 1998, plus another degree in economics at the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation. (A fellowship at Yale University followed in 2010.) After earning his law degree, he worked for several Russian companies. More important to him, however, were his political activities. As he matured, he assumed a political philosophy, as one book described, "reminiscent of democratic, center-right politicians in the West." 1

In 2000, Navalny married Yulia Abrosimova. They eventually had two children, a daughter and a son. Arrested during protests in 2011 and 2012, Navalny called on Russians to unite against Putin and eventually joined the People's Alliance political party;

¹ Morvan Lallouet and Ben Noble, *Navalny: Putin's Nemesis, Russia's Future?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

he was then generally considered the most prominent opponent of Vladimir Putin. In 2020, like other opponents of the Russian leader, he was mysteriously poisoned. Navalny became ill during a flight to Moscow; only an emergency landing of the plane and immediate medical attention prevented his death. When this guide was originally written (in April 2023), Navalny was a prisoner in permanent solitary confinement at Penal Colony #2, a notorious prison about 150 miles from Moscow, and was identified by Amnesty International as a "prisoner of conscience." In December 2023, Navalny went missing for more than two weeks while being transferred to a maximum security penal colony north of the Arctic Circle. Alexei Navalny died as a political prisoner in the Polar Wolf penal colony on February 16, 2024.

The film NAVALNY begins with an interview of Alexei Navalny by film director Daniel Roher, right before his flight back to Russia after a period of recovery from the poisoning in Germany. Facing the likelihood of arrest, he nevertheless returns to his country with his wife and a planeload of reporters. The film reviews the events of the last few years — the attempt on his life, the rescue efforts of Russian and German doctors, and the attempts of a team of reporters and computer sleuths to locate the would-be assassins and to prove their guilt. The film reveals a masterpiece of detective work, and the documentary is all the more poignant because of Navalny's current imprisonment and mistreatment.



Navalny and Putin

Why would Alexei Navalny voluntarily return to Russia? This is the first question that most viewers ask when contemplating Navalny's current situation. Faced with the certainty of a trial and a long prison term, why would he leave the safety of Germany?

A full answer would have to begin with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, when Navalny was just a teenager. Faced with economic difficulties and ethnic divisions, the Soviet Union in that year saw many of its 15 constituent republics declare themselves independent. Eventually, several of these former Soviet republics became part of the European Union, and there seemed to be a broader movement towards the West, European integration, and even NATO.

Since he became president in 1999, Vladimir Putin appears to have had two main goals. One is to secure and preserve his own political regime, with accompanying autocratic policies and significant corruption. The second is to build a "sphere of influence" that will protect Russia from perceived external enemies. Simply put, Putin would like to restore the Russian Empire. This includes incorporating Ukraine, which has warm-water ports, huge mineral resources, modern industrial power, and fertile fields that produce vast amounts of the world's grain supply. For many years he was popular with many Russians because of an improvement in the standard of living and the promise of stability. Propaganda and state-run media also supported his image with the Russian people.

Navalny has opposed Putin on several counts. His Anti-Corruption Foundation, the FBK, has launched investigations and made numerous claims about the alleged corruption of many of Putin's officials and friends. The organization, with offices all over Russia and the biggest volunteer corps of any political organization in the country, has actually proven corruption and successfully petitioned nations for sanctions and the

freezing of assets. (Maria Pevchikh, now the chair of the FBK, and Russian activist Georgy Alburov received the Redkollegia award for their investigation into the corruption that created "Putin's Palace."²) In addition to exposing corruption, they also seek legal action against those they are accusing. Navalny has spoken out frequently and employed social media effectively to oppose the Russian invasion of Ukraine, his father's homeland.

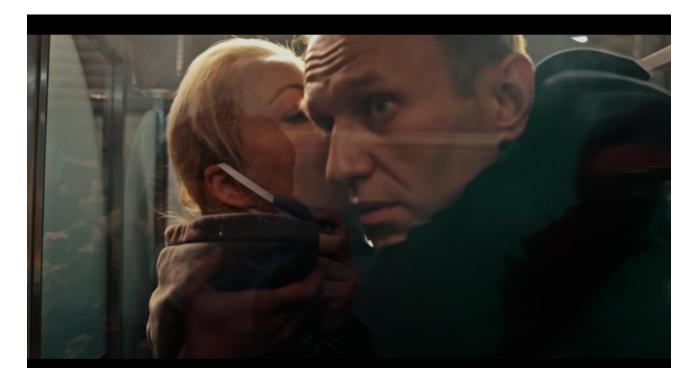
Another issue of concern for him is the rise in Russian mortality, particularly that of working-age men, which has been well-documented.

- 1. According to the film, what are Navalny's reasons for opposing Putin?
- 2. Why do you think Navalny put his freedom and life in jeopardy by returning to Russia after he was poisoned? In his position, would you have done the same thing? Why, or why not?
- **3.** How serious a problem is corruption in Russia? What could be done about it?
- **4.** Do you think Putin's goal of protecting the Russian homeland by surrounding it with neutral or subject territories is a judicious one for Russia? Explain your answer.
- 5. Do you think significant political change is possible in Russia now? Why, or why not?
- 6. Rewatch the first four minutes of the film, when Navalny is sitting alone onscreen and talking to the director. What do you learn about Navalny himself from these few minutes? How does this scene hint at what is to come? How effective an opening is this for the film? How did you feel after watching it?

² https://time.com/5934092/navalny-putin-palace-investigation/



Navalny under Attack



Alexei Navalny's poisoning as shown in the film was not the first time that he had been attacked. In 2013 and 2014, he was convicted of fabricated embezzlement charges and given suspended prison terms; he was placed under house arrest. He was also given short prison sentences for unapproved protests about corruption. He was attacked twice in 2017 outside his office in Moscow and sprayed in the face with a chemical dye, losing 80 percent of the sight in his right eye.

Navalny is not the only critic of the Russian government who has been the victim of attacks. Alexander Litvinenko was poisoned with a radioactive agent and died in 2006. Former deputy prime minister Boris Nemtsov was assassinated in 2015. Russian press minister Mikhail Lesin died of blunt force trauma to the head while making a deal with the FBI in 2016. Ukraine war critics Pavel Antov and Ravil Maganov "fell" from their hotel windows in 2022. Shortly after Navalny's poisoning, *The Washington Post* even published a story about poison being the "weapon of choice in Putin's Russia."

- 1. Why did Alexei Navalny go to Siberia in 2020? How and when was he poisoned? Why do you think the would-be assassins chose to poison him when he was scheduled for a long flight? How was he saved?
- 2. Why wasn't Alexei Navalny's wife allowed to see him in the hospital? How did she respond? How would you describe her, based on what you have seen of her in this film?
- 3. Why was Alexei Navalny taken to Germany to be treated? Why do you think he was permitted to leave Russia?
- 4. How do you think this assassination attempt (and other described attacks on Alexei Navalny) affected Yulia and their children? What impact would these events have on the father/child relationship?
- 5. How did Western government leaders respond to this attempt on Alexei Navalny's life? Do you think their response was adequate? Why, or why not?



Enter Bellingcat



Traditional journalists rely on traditional means for getting leads and following them up. They cultivate sources, get to know as many people in a particular field as possible, and develop relationships of trust with them. Many reports have a "beat," a particular geographic area or subject matter focus that they specialize in.

In contrast to traditional journalists, Bellingcat describes itself as the "Global Investigative Journalism Network." According to their website, the members of Bellingcat are "an independent investigative collective of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists brought together by a passion for open source research." They cite investigations into subjects that range from "the shooting down of flight MH¹² over eastern Ukraine to police violence in Colombia and the illegal wildlife trade in the UAE."³

Using advanced technology and journalists in more than 20 countries, the journalists of Bellingcat have identified Ukrainian separatists as suspects in the 2014 shooting down of a passenger aircraft, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, over Eastern Ukraine; they have found suspects in the poisoning of an MI6 double agent and his daughter; and they have targeted Mexican drug lords and corrupt political officials.

The name of the foundation, "Bellingcat," which is supported by donations from the European Union and philanthropic organizations, comes from a medieval fable. In the story, mice all agree that putting a bell around a cat's neck will render him harmless, but none of the mice are willing to take the risk. These investigative journalists seem to be willing to put themselves at risk to get the story and identify bad actors and corruption.

³ https://www.bellingcat.com/about/who-we-are/



- 1. Why do you think investigative journalists like those of Bellingcat are willing to take risks that others avoid? What are their motives?
- 2. What do you learn from the film about the journalist Christo Grozev? How does he go about investigating the steps by which Alexei Navalny was poisoned? How convincing are his discoveries? Why?
- 3. Do you approve of Grozev's unconventional journalistic method of paying for information from the "dark web"? Why, or why not?
- **4**. How important is the profession of journalism to a functioning society and to the global community?
- 5. Do all journalism outlets take their obligations to tell the truth seriously? Do you know of any exceptions? How do most Americans feel about the reporting they read, watch, or hear?



The Situation Today

The Ukraine War is inflicting horrific carnage on Ukraine, but at a steep price for Russia. In February 2023, *The New York Times* estimated that the number of Russian soldiers killed or wounded in the war is approaching 200,000. Convicts have been recruited from prisons and put in the front lines, along with other poorly equipped and minimally trained soldiers. Thousands of other men of fighting age have avoided the war by taking refuge in neighboring countries.

The political costs of the war for Putin are difficult to assess. Polls vary: Some say 75 percent of Russian citizens support the war, and others than only 25 percent do. The government controls media throughout the country and its propaganda machine is very effective. Western news sites that might counter propaganda have been blocked. Anti-war demonstrators have been arrested and imprisoned, and criticizing the Russian military can result in heavy fines or even jail. Russia has had to turn to other nations, like China and Iran, for military equipment and supplies. After one year of the war, the United Nations General Assembly voted 141 to 7 to condemn the Russian incursion into Ukraine, with 32 nations abstaining.

The economic costs to Russia have been staggering as well. *Forbes Ukraine* estimated that Russia spent \$82 billion in the first nine months of the war, roughly a quarter of the national budget. Domestic sectors have been seriously hurt by Western sanctions and oil and gas sales, a primary source of income, hit a 14-month low in September.

Despite all these costs, Putin seems determined to continue the war in his efforts to rebuild the former Soviet Union and to assure his place in history.

And Alexei Navalny is still in prison.

- 1. What do you learn about life in Russia today from the film *NAVALNY*? Based on what you see in the film, is Russia now a true dictatorship?
- 2. What is propaganda? How has it been used to support the Russian government and its war in Ukraine? Do we have propaganda outlets in this country?
- 3. Do you think Russia can win its war against Ukraine (and NATO)? If not, what steps should Russia take to end the war?
- **4.** Do you think Putin is serious about the possibility of using nuclear weapons in this war?
- 5. How has Russia's invasion of Ukraine affected Russia's relationships with other countries? With international organizations?
- **6.** Has Alexei Navalny's return hurt Putin, or has it helped him?
- 7. What advice do you think Alexei Navalny would give Putin about all of the above? What do you think Navalny would do if he were in Putin's place?



In Alexei Navalny's Own Words

Which of the following quotations do you find most compelling? Are there others that you disagree with? Explain your answers.

"Once again, the Russian government is destroying our future with its own hands just in order to make our country look bigger on the map. But Russia is big enough as it is. Our objective should be preserving our people and developing what we have in abundance."

"Everything will be all right. And, even if it won't be, we'll have the consolation of having lived honest lives."

"Putin needs to terrorize his own elite. He is more afraid of those in his own surroundings than any protests; there are people there who are at least as critical as I am because they see up close that the system doesn't work. He wants to silence them."

"Nobody wants a political prisoner, but a political emigrant is no problem."

"Putin and his advisers don't understand the power of public opinion in the West. They believe in conspiracy theories and that someone is orchestrating a malicious campaign against Russia. They don't realize that even conservative politicians have to react when newspapers and artists express their concern on such an issue."

"I've been reading this little book. It's called the Russian constitution. And it says that the only source of power in Russia is the people. So I don't want to hear those who say we're appealing to the authorities. Who's the power here?"

"I'm on the very blackest part of the blacklist."

"Politics is traditionally a male domain in Russia.

Until now, women have only been accessories. Now, female protest groups are emerging — not because men came up with the idea, but through their own efforts. That's something new for Russia."

"In Russia, an authoritarian leader is running the country. You can't fight Putin with elections because he controls them. That's why demonstrations are the most effective approach. Unfortunately, Russia has sunk to this primitive level."

"People hate politicians. And I can understand why."

"When men are arrested without any legal basis and for political reasons, it's merely a routine, everyday occurrence in Russia, and hardly anyone has any sympathy."

"Certain people have wanted to put me behind bars for a long time now. That's part of my work. If I were afraid, I couldn't do what I do."

"Putin is not Russia. And if there is anything in Russia right now that you can be most proud of, it is those 6,824 people who were detained because — without any call — they took to the streets with placards saying 'No War.' They say that someone who cannot attend a rally and does not risk being arrested for it cannot call for it. I'm already in prison, so I think I can."

"We cannot wait any longer. Wherever you are, in Russia, Belarus or on the other side of the planet, go to the main square of your city every weekday and at 2 p.m. on weekends and holidays. But we must, gritting our teeth and overcoming fear, come out and demand an end to the war. Each arrested person must be replaced by two newcomers."

"Everything has a price, and now, in the spring of 2022, we must pay this price. There's no one to do it for us. Let's not 'be against the war.' Let's fight against the war."



Resources for Further Study

Books

Morvan Lallouet and Ben Noble, Navalny: *Putin's Nemesis, Russia's Future?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

Alexei Navalny and Adam Michnik, *Opposing Forces: Plotting the New Russia*. (London: Egret Press, 2017)

Online Resources

Background Information on Navalny and Putin

Alexei Navalny Fast Facts (CNN). Includes a detailed timeline of his life before and after the assassination attempt. https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/18/europe/Alexei-navalny-fast-facts/index.html

Eugene Rumer, "Putin's Long War" from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/09/putin-s-long-war-pub-88602

Alexei Navalny: Russia's jailed vociferous Putin critic https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16057045

Data on the health crisis and life expectancy in Russia https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/
PIIS0140-6736(17)30195-2/fulltext

Website of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation https://acf.international/

Navalny's 15-Point Tweet about Ukraine
http://www.dupuyinstitute.org/blog/2023/02/20/
Alexei-navalnys-15-point-tweet/

Masha Gessen, "Why Alexei Navalny Returned to Russia" https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/ why-Alexei-navalny-returned-to-russia

Assassinations and Assassination Attempts

Other assassination victims:

https://www.businessinsider.com/list-of-people-putin-is-suspected-of-assassinating-2016-3

https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/09/a-brief-history-of-attempted-russian-assassinations-by-poison/

https://www.euronews.com/2022/09/22/accidental-defenestration-and-murder-suicides-too-common-among-russian-oligarchs-and-putin

Washington Post article on use of poison for assassinations https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/08/21/why-poison-is-weapon-choice-putins-russia/

Bellingcat and Investigative Journalism

Bellingcat's official website, which contains a fascinating list of topics currently being investigated. https://www.bellingcat.com/

A biography of Christo Grozev from the International Center for Journalists

https://www.icfj.org/about/profiles/christo-grozev-bell-ingcat

An explanation of why Christo Grozev was excluded from the BAFTA film awards ceremony for security reasons https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/17/europe/christo-grozev-baftas-navalny-documentary-intl/index.html

The website for the International Center for Journalists https://www.icfj.org/

The Committee to Protect Journalists reports on the number of journalists killed in 2022 https://cpj.org/reports/2020/12/murders-journal-ists-more-than-doubled-killed/?gclid=CjOKCQiAutyf-BhCMARIsAMgcRJQ4JIDUYQ-D1zNbdvqvgB ncDTow-jWUQE3qFFyceXlqopl1DzeayYlaAurSEALw wcB



The Situation Today

Putin's autocratic vision is for a "Russian World" https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/07/politics/putin-totalitarjanism-russia-ukraine-what-matters/index.html

The real costs of Russia's Ukraine War https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3756097-re-al-costs-of-russias-ukraine-war/

Russian casualties after one year of war https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/us/politics/ukraine-russia-casualties.html

The United Nations votes to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine

https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/un-approves-non-binding-resolution-calling-for-russia-to-leave-ukraine

Center for Foreign Relations, "How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? Here are Six Charts."

https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-aid-has-us-sent-ukraine-here-are-six-charts?gclid=Cj0KCQjwz6ShBhCMARIsAH-9A0qUQ-O5Z0OFW67MvLE-iYPhDw36LZ4gQE8QYtO18Ue-DuPHVA1JQTwkkaAmZlEALw_wcB

Alexei Navalny Twitter Handle

@navalny

https://twitter.com/navalny



Film Credits

Music by Marius DeVries

Director Daniel Roher

Cast Alexei Navalny, Yulia Navalnaya, Maria Pevchikh,
Christo Grozev, Leonid Volkov, Kira Yarmysh,
Clarissa Ward, Tim Lister, Fidelius Schmid

Producers Diane Becker, Shane Boris, Melanie Miller,
Odessa Rae

Executive Producers Amy Entelis, Maria Pevchikh,
Courtney Sexton

Supervising Producer Alexandra Hannibal

Social Impact Executive Producers Geralyn White Dreyfous,
David Fialkow, Nina Fialkow, Jim Schwartz, Susan Schwarz

Cinematography Niki Waltl

Editors Maya Daisy Hawke, Langdon Page

This discussion guide for the film *NAVALNY* was written by Eileen Mattingly of Journeys in Film.

For additional free materials for teaching and learning with films, see http://journeysinfilm.org.

Image Credits

Page 1: NAVALNY film poster

Page 5: Headshot of Daniel Rohrer, provided by the filmmakers

Page 6: Image from the film NAVALNY

Page 8: Image from the film NAVALNY

Page 9: Image from the film NAVALNY

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