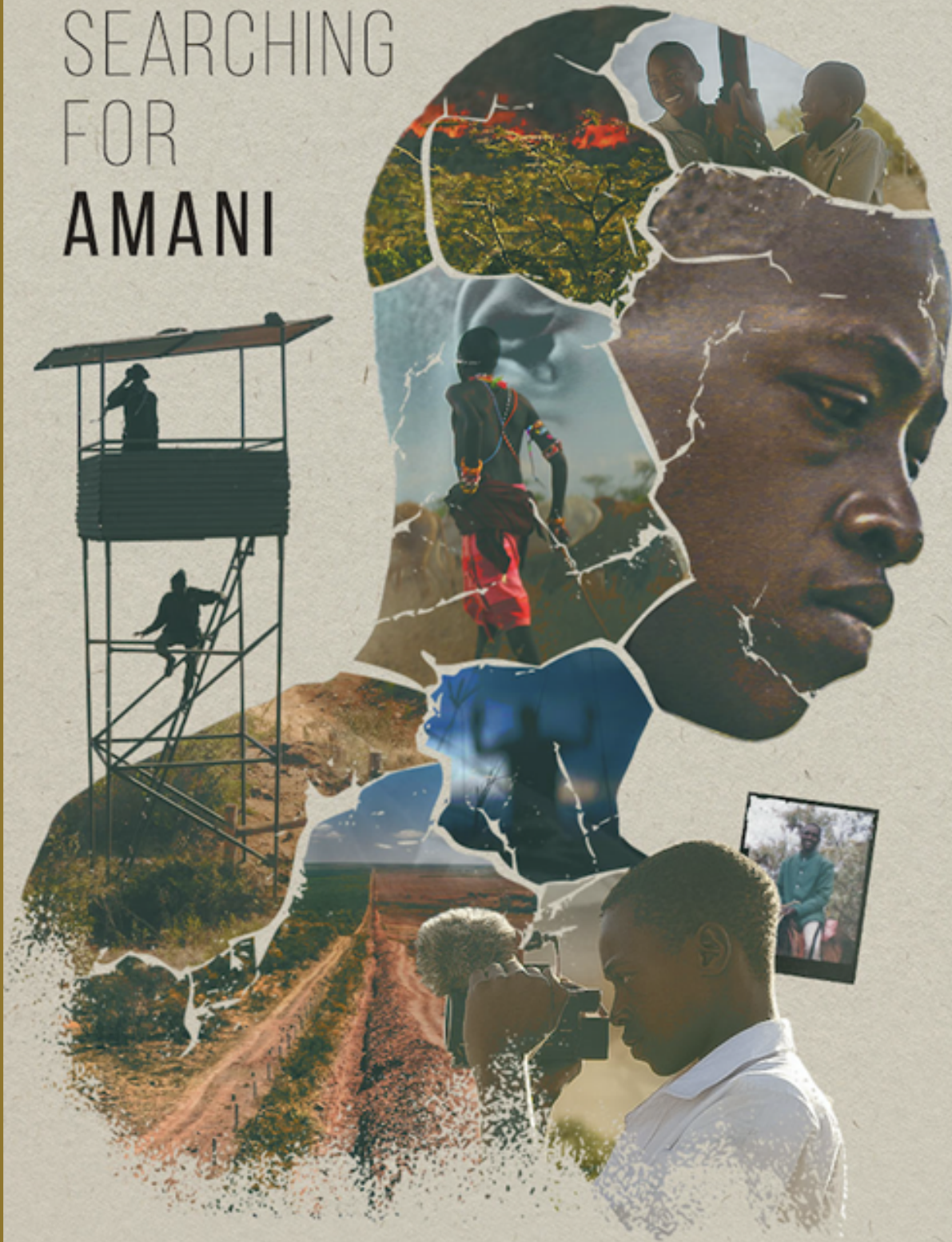


# Journalism Lesson



## SEARCHING FOR AMANI



# *SEARCHING FOR AMANI*

## Journalism Lesson



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## About the Film



**A 13-year-old aspiring journalist teams up with his best friend to investigate his father’s mysterious murder within the boundaries of one of Kenya’s largest wildlife conservancies. As a ravaging drought encroaches, his quest to find the killer shifts, and a young activist is born as the collateral damage of a warming world is revealed.**

In *Searching for Amani*, Simon Ali is a 13-year-old boy searching for justice and closure around the murder of his father. The context of Simon’s story, however, is extraordinarily complex and gives viewers a lens into many topics, including climate change, colonization, resource competition, and more.

The film takes place one year after Simon’s father, Stephen Ali, is killed. At that point, no official investigation has taken place. As such, Simon and the Ali family decide to seek out the truth of what happened for themselves. They are driven by a need for justice, which gives way to a desire for peace (*amani*) for themselves and their community. As an aspiring journalist, Simon interviews multiple people familiar with his father’s case in an attempt to learn more. He investigates within the boundaries of Laikipia Nature Conservancy, one of Kenya’s largest private wildlife conservancies, where his father worked as a tour guide and was known for many years as a peacemaker. Simon’s father moved his family to a small farm in the south of Laikipia to escape the encroaching drought that was quickly turning the north of Laikipia and the rest of northern Kenya into desert. He hoped that doing this would ensure that his children had a better childhood than he did. As the drought continues to rage across Laikipia, less and less pasture is available to the Indigenous pastoralist communities in that region.

As a result of this scarcity, many of the pastoralists are forced to invade farms and fenced-off private land like the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, which is among the last green areas in northern Laikipia. However, due to various reasons (which will be highlighted in this guide), local pastoralist families are denied access to the land for grazing, leading to violent clashes between them and the nature conservancy due to resource competition.

Through the film, viewers are able to learn alongside Simon about the life and death of his father, sparking reflections and conversation about the changing environment, conservation, and community equity in a time of a humanitarian crisis.



## This Land is Your Land?

### Enduring Understandings

- Colonialism has greatly impacted boundaries and borders over the course of human history.
- Thriving societies encourage investigation and journalists asking tough questions.
- Citizen journalists play an important role in our increasingly connected world.

### Essential Questions

- Who are the native inhabitants of the land we use today?
- How do our government institutions honor and respect those Indigenous and native peoples?
- What is the current state of those Indigenous and native communities?

### Notes to the Teacher

As highlighted in *Searching for Amani*, land is an important aspect of the human experience. The desire to build empires has led to greater contact and conflict between nations. Specifically, colonization introduced concepts of land ownership and capitalism into regions that had previously ordered themselves around serving the public good. Conflict over land is not unique to Kenya; it has a very long global story.

This lesson was created for journalism classes, journalism after-school film clubs, service-learning educational spaces, and other spaces looking to engage in activities related to gathering and reporting information. Therefore, the lesson assumes students have some background on the fundamentals of journalism and have been introduced to basic journalism skills. However, the following resource may be helpful if a review or introductory material is necessary: United States Department of State Teachers Corner: Journalism: <https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/teachers-corner-journalism>

This lesson asks students to research the Indigenous inhabitants of the land where their school is located using the Native Land Digital website. Native Land Digital is an Indigenous-led, Canadian not-for-profit organization, which creates space where non-Indigenous people can learn more about the lands they inhabit, the history of those lands, and how to actively be part of a better future. Students will explore the social, political, and economic characteristics of those communities. Students will also research how the government institutions recognize and respect those communities. Using that research, students will prepare a press conference interview. Modeled after the daily White House press briefing, students will have the opportunity to interview a school leader. Before beginning the lesson, the teacher should reach out to either a school or district leader to find a willing participant for the press conference. This lesson can be completed in a physical library as a research activity or as an internet search activity. It is recommended that this lesson be completed after viewing the documentary.



### Common Core Standards addressed by this lesson

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7**

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9**

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.2**

Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; summarize complex concepts, processes, or information presented in a text by paraphrasing them in simpler but still accurate terms.

Journeys in Film supports Sustainable Development Goals.  
**This lesson connects to the following United Nations SDGs.**



Reduce inequality within and among countries



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Learn more about teaching with SDGs:  
<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material>.

### Duration of Lesson

Two to three class periods

### Assessments

- Completion of research handout
- Interview questions

### Materials

- Classroom with video and sound projection capabilities
- Native Land Digital: <https://native-land.ca/>
- Katie Couric on how to conduct a good interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eOynrl2eTM>
- White House press briefing: <https://www.youtube.com/live/FYZzti-Gyz4g?si=0XMBh9Qb-0O4B6gQ&t=2021>
- Full class copies of:  
**Handout 1: Native Land Research**  
**Handout 2: Interview Tips**

### Procedure

#### **Part 1: Research**

1. Introduce the lesson to the class. Today they are going to be researching the Indigenous inhabitants of land they use.
2. Distribute a blank copy of **Handout 1: Native Land Research** to each student.
3. Introduce the Native Land Digital resource.
4. Students will use a computer and navigate to the Native Land Digital website and research.

**5.** Students will enter their school's address into the search bar. Using the results from the search, the students will begin completing **Handout 1**. Note: The Native Land Digital site provides additional information on the results screen, but students may need to source additional resources to complete the full handout.

**6.** Once students have completed the handout, either have them research a location of their own choosing or select another from the list of extension activities.

**7.** Once all students have completed the handout, lead the class in a discussion about the information they uncovered.

**8.** Ask students to contribute answers to the prompts on the handout.

- a. Who are the Indigenous inhabitants of the land?
- b. What do we know about the social organization of this community?
- c. What do we know about the political organization of this community?
- d. What do we know about the economic structures of this society?
- e. How did contact with settlers impact this community?
- f. What is the current condition of the Indigenous community?
- g. Does your school or school district have any recognition or acknowledgment of the Indigenous inhabitants of the land where your school sits?

**9.** Before transitioning to the next segment, lead students in a discussion of the activity:

- a. What were the parallels around colonialism and land ownership between *Searching for Amani* and the research from this activity?
- b. How did settler colonialism disrupt ideas about communal use of land?
- c. How does capitalist ideology perpetuate conflict in *Searching for Amani* and in the research you have done?

**10.** Introduce the preparation segment of the lesson: Students will prepare for a press conference with a school official.

**11.** Play Katie Couric interview video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eOynrl2eTM>

**12.** Hand out and walk students through **Handout 2: Interview Tips**.

**13.** Introduce the press conference structure to students using a clip from a White House press briefing:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/FYZZtiGyz4g?si=0XMBh-9Qb-004B6gQ&t=2021>

**14.** Introduce students to the school or district leader who will be participating in the press conference.

**15.** Students need to brainstorm a list of questions to ask a school leader related to the recognition of Indigenous inhabitants of the land where their school sits. Examples

- a. How does our community recognize the existence of Indigenous peoples?
- b. What is the process for getting the district to adopt a land acknowledgment?

**16.** Student questions do not need to be from one specific perspective, but they should be well-informed.

## **Part 2: Press Conference Interviews**

**1.** At a future class period, the teacher opens the press conference by introducing the school leader. The school leader responds to questions prepared by the students.

**2.** At the close of the press conference:

- a. Inquire about what students learned.
- b. Why is it important to ask big questions?
- c. What role should citizen journalists like Simon play in investigative reporting?
- d. How does work like this amplify the stories of and respect toward Indigenous communities?
- e. Ask if students want to pursue any related action to recognizing Indigenous peoples in their local area.

## **Optional Elements**



### Extension Activity

1. If the teacher would like students to work in groups or provide additional research locations, they can choose additional sites from this list or of their choice:
  - a. The White House (Washington, DC)
  - b. United Nations Headquarters (New York City)
  - c. Sydney Opera House (Sydney, Australia)
  - d. Walt Disney World (Orlando, Florida)
  - e. Golden Gate Bridge (San Francisco, California)
2. **Practicing Discourse** — Student groups could argue for or against ideas presented in the film. Topics for discussion could include European ownership of Kenyan land, the controversial nature of land management practices at conservancies, the sustainability of the pastoralist way of life, the safety of Indigenous workers at nature conservancies, etc.
3. If your school or local community does not have a formal land acknowledgement, students can work to get school or district leadership to adopt one. Native Land Digital offers a resource on drafting land acknowledgements:  
<https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement/>

### Additional Resources

Native Land Digital Teacher Guide

[https://native-land.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/teacher\\_guide\\_2019\\_final.pdf](https://native-land.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/teacher_guide_2019_final.pdf)

People Not Mascots

<https://peoplenotmascots.us/index.html>



## Native Land Research

Location:	
Who are the Indigenous inhabitants of the land?	
What do we know about the social organization of this community?	
What do we know about the political organization of this community?	
What do we know about the economic structures of this society?	
How did contact with settlers impact this community?	
What is the current condition of the Indigenous community?	
Does your school or school district have any recognition or acknowledgment of the Indigenous inhabitants of the land where your school sits?	



## Example

Location: <i>Westfield High School, 4700 Stonecroft Blvd., Chantilly, Virginia 20151</i>	
Who are the Indigenous inhabitants of the land?	<i>Manahoac</i>
What do we know about the social organization of this community?	<i>They live in villages with palisade walls, and their homes are dome-shaped structures of bark and reed mats. These Monacan ancestors hunt deer, elk, and small game, and they leave their villages every year to visit their hunting camps.</i>
What do we know about the political organization of this community?	<i>The Manahoac are sometimes viewed as a confederacy of tribes, or as a single tribe composed of several subtribes.</i>
What do we know about the economic structures of this society?	<i>They are an agricultural people who grew the “Three Sisters” crops of corn, beans, and squash, and domesticated a wide variety of other foods, including sunflowers, fruit trees, wild grapes, and nuts.</i>
How did contact with settlers impact this community?	<i>Appeared to want little contact with the English. Very little documentation by the settlers about this tribe. Exposure to foreign diseases and physical violence greatly reduced the size of the tribe.</i>
What is the current condition of the Indigenous community?	<i>Monacan Indian Nation is a federally recognized sovereign tribe, headquartered on Bear Mountain in Amherst County. The Monacan Nation, headquartered in Amherst County, has survived almost four hundred years since the first settlers landed at Jamestown. Today the tribe numbers over 2,000 people, as more descendants discover their heritage and return to Amherst to celebrate their Indian culture. The tribe operates numerous programs designed to assist tribal members and to educate the general public. It has paid off its land purchase on Bear Mountain and acquired new parcels as well.</i>
Does your school or school district have any recognition or acknowledgment of the Indigenous inhabitants of the land where your school sits?	<i>No, but a video about the school’s history documents how the land passed through wealthy Virginia families.</i>



## Tips on Interviewing

**TIP #1: BE WELL-INFORMED.**

Research the basic background information regarding the person or activity you intend to cover.

**TIP #2: BE PREPARED.**

Write a minimum of 10 open-ended questions before the interview.

Sample open-ended questions:

What do you think...

Why do you think...

How do you feel about...

Can you tell me about...

Closed questions (questions that can be answered with a single word or short phrase) are good for checking the facts.

**TIP #3: BE PROFESSIONAL.**

Be on time for interviews and dress professionally. Maintain eye-contact.

Conduct your interview in person or through video or audio call, NOT via email or text.

Take thorough notes or record the interview (with permission).

Ask for clarification as needed.

**TIP #4: BE FLEXIBLE.**

It is important to have your questions scripted, but sometimes a subject's answers can lead you in new directions.

Be flexible enough to follow the most interesting parts of the story.

**TIP #5: BE PATIENT.**

When your subject stops talking, don't immediately fire off the next questions. Pause and give the subject time to think and perhaps add more detail.

**TIP #6: BE COURAGEOUS AND ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS.**

Establish rapport, then approach the difficult topic carefully. Reestablish a friendly relationship by asking neutral questions.

**TIP #7: BE GRACIOUS.**

Say thank you after the interview and send a follow-up thank-you letter.

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