

# DOCS FOR schools

## THE EXPERIMENTAL ESKIMOS

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE



Lead Sponsor



Generously supported by



# hotdocs

OUTSPOKEN. OUTSTANDING.

[WWW.HOTDOCS.CA](http://WWW.HOTDOCS.CA)

# THE EXPERIMENTAL ESKIMOS

Directed by Barry Greenwald

Canada | 2009 | 70 min

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of documentary film by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their classes, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some web links that provide starting points for further research or discussion. In separate packages, there will also be support materials available with information regarding general viewing and teaching principles for documentary film and the fundamental aspects of making documentary films.

### The Film

In the 1960s, the government of Canada delivered IQ tests to Inuit students living in Canada's North. Three 12-year-old boys who did well on the test were relocated to Ottawa, where they lived with foster families and attended school. Their relocation and education was part of a formal experiment to, as the government said, "disrupt northern native family ties and... destroy native culture." The government wanted to mould children so that they could give "leadership in various phases of northern development"—development dictated by the colonial government.

The experiment came with a cost, as the men struggled with the loss of their Inuit identity and resulting issues of alcohol and substance abuse and dysfunctional relationships. But it also created three men of considerable accomplishment: one of the men negotiated the hydroelectric treaty for the Cree and Inuit of northern Quebec, another became the first Inuk Member of Parliament and another negotiated the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the repatriated Constitution of Canada. Rather than destroy Aboriginal culture, the work of these "experimental Eskimos" strengthened various aspects of it. Yet all of them were accused of selling out their communities. *The Experimental Eskimos* traces the journey these men have made and the continuing effects of that journey. The three men—who only found out they were part of a formal government experiment in the late 1990s—don't regret their experiences, but, as one says, they've never gotten over it, either.

### The Filmmaker

Barry Greenwald is co-founder of the Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC), founded in 1983 to promote the voices of independent documentary filmmakers in Canada. He is the director of *Between Two Worlds*, which won the Sesterce d'Argent at the Festival International du Film Documentaire in Switzerland; *Taxi!*, which won the Silver Boomerang for Best Documentary Direction at the Melbourne International Film Festival; and *Who Gets In?*, which won the Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival. *The Experimental Eskimos*, Greenwald's latest film, won Best Documentary at the Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival. Barry Greenwald lives in Toronto.

Educational package written and compiled by  
Suzanne Methot [suzanne.methot@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:suzanne.methot@tdsb.on.ca)

## VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

There are important themes in this film that have broad implications for students and their futures. Take time to activate your students' background understanding of these themes before viewing. This will help them as they come to their own understanding and develop their critical abilities.

The following three subsections, on this page, are intended to provide you with a range of pre-viewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. They are followed by a set of questions based upon the film's larger thematic domains, some follow-up questions and quotations, sample curricular outcomes, and a page of web links for further investigation.

### Pre-Viewing Activities

Begin with the Examining Images and Making Predictions activity on page four. Have students complete the prediction chart on page five.

Show students the trailer for the film (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sUNfPvNj6A>). Have students work in small groups to answer the following questions:

- Who is the target audience for this media text? How can you tell?
- How and why does this media text appeal to its target audience?
- How does this media text appeal to you?
- What are the themes of this film?

Print several of the quotations from page eight on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or in pairs to discuss the ideas in the quotations. Ask them to share their conclusions with the large group. To get them started, ask them to think about the following:

- What do you think the main conflicts are in this film? How do you know this?
- From whose perspective is this story told? How do you know this?
- Do you agree with the ideas in this statement? Why or why not?

Set a purpose for viewing by having a discussion about one of the quotations on page eight or by reminding students about the four strands present in Ontario Native Studies curriculum: identity, relationships, sovereignty and challenges.

### Viewing Activities

Ask students to describe what they see. Ask them to withhold judgment and observe carefully. They can choose to write down or describe orally their observations. Stop the film during its blackouts if students choose to describe their observations orally.

Have students take notes on, or jot down connections to, one of the big ideas on page six of this guide.

Have students use a graphic organizer to summarize the film as they watch it. Have students draw their own organizers using the five-W format (who, what, when, where, why).

Stop the film during its blackouts and have students provide oral summaries at each point. Have them do the summaries using the five-W format.

Set a purpose for viewing. Give students some or all of the following guiding questions:

- Did the predictions you made in your prediction chart come true? Jot down information from the film that supports or disproves your prediction.
- What are the main conflicts we encounter in this film? Were the conflicts resolved at the end of the film? Why or why not?
- Who are the key characters? What characteristics do they possess that make them interesting to watch? Are the motivations of the characters clear to the viewer? What other options do the characters have and what are the consequences of their actions?
- How was the text made? What conventions or production techniques are used?

- How would this story be different if told from the perspective of another character in the film (e.g., the government of Canada)?

Have students jot down three questions for discussion that the film raises in their minds.

## Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss students' predictions from the Examining Images and Making Predictions activity. Discuss the differences between Inuit society and the dominant Canadian society as seen in the images. How is this theme carried through the film?

Have a large-group discussion guided by the question for discussion that student jotted down while viewing the film.

One of the characters in the film says that to be a successful Inuk, a man would work toward owning his own dog team, being a good hunter and getting his own kayak. Have students create a Venn diagram showing the things that are seen as essential for achieving success for men and women in their own communities. Compare and contrast Inuit society with the students' ethnic or geographical communities.

Have students build a conceptual map showing the web of ideas, topics and associated sub-topics in the film. Ask students to create questions they think will represent the important issues.

Using information and the questions students created in the previous activity, ask students to make interconnections among textual elements. This should take the form of an argument, including a thesis statement and

evidence from the text.

Have students make a final judgment about the text based on the argument they created in the previous activity. Students will learn that their evaluations and feelings are informed by description, analysis and interpretation.

Ask students to reflect on the processes of description, interpretation and evaluation they completed during the viewing and post-viewing activities. Did these steps help inform their ideas?

Ask students to write a personal reflection to summarize what they have learned.

For further ideas around how to explore this documentary, use the guiding questions on page six.

## PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITY: EXAMINING IMAGES AND MAKING PREDICTIONS

Below you will find images taken from the film. View each one and use the organizer on the following page to record what you think these images are telling us about in the film. Use clues from the image as well as your own experience to support your answer.



IMAGE A.



IMAGE B.



IMAGE C.



IMAGE D.

**PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITY: IMAGE AND IDEA ORGANIZER**

	My prediction	Clues from the image	Ideas from my own experience
<b>Image A</b> Dog Team			
<b>Image B</b> Inuit Boy			
<b>Image C</b> Inuit Mother and Child			
<b>Image D</b> The South			

## THE BIG QUESTIONS/IDEAS/THEMES

### Multiple Perspectives

What is the subject of this film? Can you determine the filmmakers' perspective on this subject? What evidence can you find in the film to support your view?

How does this film help you analyze and interpret points of view about issues that concern people?

Does the filmmakers' perspective foster respect for diversity and an inclusive society? If so, how?

### Identity

Whose story is told in this documentary? Whose story is not told? How does this story, and the way it is told, help you understand your own community/life?

How do the people in this film identify with their community? What are the common bonds among the people in this film? What challenges do they face in expressing their identity?

What film techniques do the filmmakers use to convey the identity of the people in this film?

### Citizenship

What insights does this documentary offer about the ideals of good citizenship in the community depicted in this film?

How does the film deal with issues of freedom, equality, human dignity, and individual and collective rights and responsibilities?

### Change and Continuity

How does this film help you understand a community's values and its attitudes towards an issue at a particular time?

What changes do the people in the film experience? What causes those changes? What are the consequences of those changes for the people in the documentary?

### Culture and Community

Which aspects of a people's culture does this film focus on? Why do you think the filmmakers focused on those aspects?

How do the images, themes and message of this film help you understand the filmmakers' attitude towards the subject? What do you think might have been the intended audience's attitude towards the documentary subject?

### Individuals, Societies and Economic Decisions

What economic systems are at work in this film? What are some of the causes and effects of the economic decisions made by the people in the film's community?

Does money play a part in the decisions being made in the film and what does it tell you about their local culture?

### Power and Governance

What system of government control do we see in this documentary? How is power distributed within this society? What are the implications of that distribution on issues affecting the people's well-being and freedom?

### Global Connections

What global issues are addressed in this film? What is the filmmakers' point of view on the opportunities and challenges of those issues?

Adapted from NFB Documentary Lens: <http://www.nfb.ca>

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Additional Pre- or Post-Viewing Activities

Have students write a letter to the characters who appear in the film. What are your feelings about the characters? What do you think about the government's experiment?

In small groups, have students plan a national political campaign for one of the characters profiled in the film. They should focus on questions such as the following: What qualities of the candidate should be emphasized? Which should be downplayed? How much emphasis should be placed on issues of sovereignty, relationships and challenges within the Aboriginal community? How much emphasis should be placed on the candidate's image? How should funds be raised? How should the campaign budget be split among various media (including community-based media)? How often should the candidate appear on television? In public?

Have students write a journal entry on the following: Were you born into a different society or culture than the one you now live in? Is it possible to retain your cultural or ethnic identity when you are living in a dominant/dominating society?

Have students write a journal entry on the following: What is the role of family in any culture or society? What are the consequences to the individual when the family unit is broken? To the culture or society?

Have students write a persuasive essay or have a formal debate on the following: What relationship is there between the government's experiment and the difficulties these men have had as adults? What relationship is there between the experiment and the successes these men have had as adults?

Have students conduct a "hot seat" activity where they interview someone from the government of Canada—e.g., an MP, the minister of Indian Affairs or the prime minister—about the relocation experiment. Students will gather in a circle with a chair in the middle. The student sitting in the chair plays the role of the government official. The rest of the class interviews him or her. Students may use ideas from any pre-viewing, viewing or post-viewing activity, or questions from the big ideas section to guide their interview questions.

### Additional Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Questions

Take another look at the picture of the Inuk boy from the Examining Images and Making Predictions activity. What are the juxtapositions that make this image so effective in communicating the theme of the film?

Peter Ittinuar's father was a special constable with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Eric Tagoona's father was an Anglican minister. All three of the men's families encouraged their children to read English-language books and speak the English language. What effect might these factors have had on the boys' ability to do well on the IQ tests? How might these details have been factors in their removal from their communities? In their success in the dominant society?

The government of Canada chose boys with a "predominance of... white characteristics" for relocation. What kind of characteristics do you think these would be? Do you think these characteristics appear only in the dominant Canadian culture? What other kinds of characteristics might be valued in other cultures?

The IQ tests given to the Inuit students contained questions that did not make sense within Inuit culture (e.g., questions about gardening). In your experience, how do government and school documents that reflect the dominant society put people from non-dominant cultures at a disadvantage?

Take another look at the picture of the highway from the Examining Images and Making Predictions activity. Contrast it with the image of the dog team. What inferences can you make about the differences between Inuit culture and the dominant Canadian culture?

"It can be argued that such a directed educational program will disrupt northern native family ties and will rapidly destroy native culture. We must follow through with the natural consequences of that program." This statement is repeated three times during the film. Why did the filmmaker choose to do this? What effect does the repetition have? Is the viewer's understanding of the situation the same every time?



## Quotations From the Film to Explore

*"It can be argued that such a directed educational program will disrupt northern native family ties and will rapidly destroy native culture. We must follow through with the natural consequences of that program."* Why would the government of Canada want to destroy Aboriginal culture? What would the consequences be? How might those consequences benefit the government of Canada?

*"It took decades before I could tell my story as I lived it."* The forced removal of these men from their communities damaged them emotionally and psychologically. Why would they find it difficult to talk about their experiences?

*"There have been good, beneficial, positive stretches of our lives... but each and every one of us struggled with negative things."* What opportunities were created by the removal of these men from their communities? What were the negative effects?

*"I got the impression... that the life we were leading up until then was defective, that Inuit life was somehow not a complete life and somehow had to be adjusted to some other form of living."* What could make a person think that their life they were leading was "defective"? What effects might this have on a person's identity? What effects might it have on their relationships with people within their ethnic or cultural community?

*"Children of the territories with average or better intelligence... and a predominance of... white characteristics should be given the opportunity to develop."* What assumptions about Inuit culture are contained in this statement? Do Inuit children "develop" in the same way as non-Aboriginal children?

*"My first impression of the city was how tidy everything was. Straight lines, square corners, cement roads and its artificial, antiseptic orderliness."* Isn't an Inuit dog team "orderly" in its own way? How does language affect our beliefs and assumptions?

*"We lived, ate, slept and breathed life as Qallunaat [white] children. But we were always aware that we are not Qallunaat."* What does this quotation say about inclusion? Exclusion?

*"If it's not going to be done in my generation, I have my son standing behind me, who will take up the fight with your sons and your sons' sons."* What does this say about the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Canadian government?

## EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, University Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyze themes related to sovereignty, as portrayed in media works by Aboriginal creators.</li> <li>• use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Native Studies: Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, University/College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe relationships among language, culture and identity.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how Aboriginal identity is linked to the physical environment.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the influences on Aboriginal societies that have an impact on their sense of identity.</li> <li>• describe Aboriginal perspectives related to issues of identity and sovereignty.</li> <li>• explain the need to promote dialogue and reconciliation in the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships that characterize an Aboriginal world view.</li> <li>• describe how Aboriginal peoples adapt to external forces.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain how Aboriginal peoples' links to the land and to a sustainable environment are part of their cultural identity.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the varying perspectives on Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination.</li> <li>• describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, College Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyze images in media works related to Aboriginal identity.</li> <li>• compare, through analysis, relationships presented in media works by Aboriginal creators.</li> <li>• analyze themes related to sovereignty, as portrayed in media works by Aboriginal creators.</li> <li>• identify and assess solutions to challenges suggested in media works by Aboriginal creators.</li> <li>• use a variety of electronic primary and secondary sources to gather and assess information and develop ideas for writing.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Workplace Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples.</li> <li>• describe relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples as a result of actions taken by the federal and provincial governments.</li> <li>• describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives.</li> </ul>

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
<p>Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Workplace Preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe images in media works related to Aboriginal identity.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of relationships presented in media works by Aboriginal creators.</li> <li>• identify issues of sovereignty, as presented in media works by Aboriginal creators.</li> <li>• describe the challenge of achieving personal well-being.</li> <li>• identify challenges addressed in media works by Aboriginal creators.</li> </ul>
<p>Grade 11 English: Media Studies, University Preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.</li> <li>• identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.</li> </ul>
<p>Grade 11 English: Media Studies, College/Workplace Preparation Grade 12 English: Media Studies, University/College/Workplace Prep</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.</li> <li>• identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.</li> <li>• reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding media texts.</li> </ul>
<p>Grade 11 English: Media Studies, Open</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.</li> <li>• deconstruct a variety of types of media texts, identifying the codes, conventions and techniques used and explaining how they create meaning.</li> </ul>
<p>Grade 12 Native Studies: Aboriginal Governance: Emerging Directions, University/College Preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the historical context that underlies current relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the government of Canada.</li> </ul>
<p>Grade 12 The Arts: Exploring the Arts, Open</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe the concepts (elements, principles, styles, genres and techniques) used in various art forms.</li> <li>• analyze and interpret others' productions, demonstrating an understanding of the process of critical analysis.</li> <li>• analyze aspects of cultural identity found in productions.</li> </ul>
<p>Grade 11 The Arts: Media Arts, Open Grade 12 The Arts: Media Arts, Open</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe how various concepts (elements, principles) and techniques and procedures are used in the works of others.</li> <li>• evaluate the aesthetic components of media productions, demonstrating an understanding of the process of critical analysis.</li> <li>• analyze the impact of media productions on themselves and their communities.</li> <li>• analyze the function of media art in society.</li> </ul>

## WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

### About the Film, Inuit People and the Issue of Forced Relocation

A *New York Times* article explores the relocation of an Inuit community.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/10/world/igaluit-journal-the-day-the-eskimos-were-cast-into-darkness.html?pagewanted=1>

The University of Saskatchewan provides information about government policy in the Canadian North.

<http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/northern/content?pg=ex01-3>

The official website of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national Inuit organization in Canada.

<http://www.itk.ca>

A synopsis of the film and brief bios of the men profiled in the film.

<http://www.whitepinepictures.com/eskimos.html>

### About the Filmmaker

An interview with director Barry Greenwald in *The National Post*.

<http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/theampersand/archive/2009/05/10/q-amp-a-with-hot-docs-director-barry-greenwald-on-experimental-eskimos.aspx>

Biographical information on director Barry Greenwald and details on his other films.

<http://www.socialdoc.net/greenwald/home2.html>

### Various Links for Lesson Plan Ideas, Media Awareness, Critical Literacy and Documentary Films

The Association for Media Literacy: This Canadian website examines how media impacts and influences culture.

<http://www.aml.ca/home>

Using Documentaries in the Classroom: This teacher librarian's personal website contains excellent resources for teaching with documentary films.

[http://www.frankwbaker.com/using\\_docs\\_in\\_the\\_classroom.htm](http://www.frankwbaker.com/using_docs_in_the_classroom.htm)

Media Awareness: A Canadian non-profit media education and Internet-literacy resource library.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

Center for Media Literacy: A U.S. website which provides several resources for making, understanding and criticizing media.

<http://www.medialit.org>

The National Film Board of Canada website: On this site is an area with teaching resources and short documentary films that can be used as teaching aides.

<http://www.nfb.ca>

Hot Docs Looking at Documentaries: A teaching guide that sets out questions designed to help teachers include the study of documentary film in their curriculum.

[http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs\\_for\\_schools/2010\\_docs\\_for\\_schools\\_selections/](http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs_for_schools/2010_docs_for_schools_selections/)