

Where Are You Taking Me?

A film by Kimi Takesue



STUDY GUIDE

LEVEL: College & Advanced High School

SUBJECT AREAS: Film Studies, Film/Video Production, Visual Arts, Anthropology, Cultural Studies
African Studies, Sociology, International Study Abroad Programs

ABOUT THE FILM: *Where Are You Taking Me?* (72 minutes)

A high society wedding, a movie set, a beauty salon, a women's weightlifting competition: these are a few of the many places in Uganda visited in Kimi Takesue's feature documentary, *Where Are You Taking Me?*

Employing an observational documentary style, Takesue travels through Uganda roaming the vibrant streets of Kampala and the rural quiet of Hope North, a refuge and school for survivors of civil war. Takesue reveals a multifaceted portrait of Ugandans, and explores the complex interplay between the observer and the observed. Throughout the journey, the film challenges our notions of both the familiar and exotic and the offers images of a diverse country, encouraging us to abandon pre-conceived notions of where we are going and what we will find.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

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WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME? STUDY GUIDE

Mention Uganda to most people and the images that come to mind are often of AIDS, poverty, civil conflict, child soldiers, ruthless dictators, and warlords. But Uganda, like most of Africa, is far more diverse, complex, engaging, and vibrant than the images in the American media would have us believe. Using the documentary *Where Are You Taking Me?* as a guide, students will have the opportunity to challenge their own expectations and preconceptions about cultures other than their own. They will also consider different approaches to documentary filmmaking and visual storytelling.

Students will:

- Discuss assumptions and stereotypes associated with Uganda and Africa
- Discuss how the media shape our perceptions of people / places
- Research and discuss the language and techniques of documentary filmmaking
- Examine and understand how the filmmaker's technical and stylistic choices impact the viewers' experience of the film
- Produce videos inspired by themes & filmmaking techniques from *WAYTM*
- Research the global child soldier crisis and create a campaign to raise public awareness

DVD of *Where Are You Taking Me?* available at: www.icarusfilms.com

Online Resources on Uganda:

- UNICEF Uganda Country Background:
http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/uganda_background.html
- BBC News Country Profile: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1069166.stm

PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What comes to mind when you think of Uganda?
- Where have you found information about Uganda & Africa? Give examples.
- What recent news stories, if any, have you seen pertaining to Uganda / Africa?
- What films or TV programs have you seen about Uganda / Africa?
- What is a documentary film? What are the differences between a narrative film and a documentary film?
- What have been the subjects of the documentaries you have seen?

- What stylistic devices are generally used in documentary? (Use of voice-over narration, still photographs, interviews etc.)
- What goals motivate documentary filmmakers?
- What attracts audiences to documentaries?
- What is an “observational” documentary and what distinguishes it from other types of documentary?
- How are documentaries funded and how does this impact their production?
- What are the typical exhibition venues for documentaries?
- What do you expect to see in a documentary made about Uganda?

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What aspects of the film stand out for you? Why?
- What are the central themes of the film?
- What were you most surprised to learn about Uganda after viewing the film?
- How did the film’s portrayal of life in Uganda/Africa compare with the images and representations you typically see?
- How is this film similar to or different from other documentaries you have watched?
- How would you describe the filmmaking style of *Where Are You Taking Me?*
- Discuss the overall structure of the film. How is the film organized?
- In what ways do the structure and rhythm of the film recreate the experience of a journey?
- Describe the editing style of the film. How is a visual rhythm created through the juxtaposition of different scenes/shots? What is the interplay between contrasting visual rhythms (meditative vs. dynamic).
- What visual and aural techniques does the filmmaker use to heighten the sensory experience for the viewer? In what ways does the film simulate the experience of being in an unfamiliar situation / place?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose not to translate the local language? What are the effects of this choice?

- Using the opening shot as an example, discuss what the long take (as distance and duration) offers as a documentary strategy.
- How does the filmmaker's choice of framing/composition present familiar and everyday situations / events in a "new" way? (e.g., Chapter 1: Opening long static shot of people moving within the frame; low camera angles as people walk towards camera going to work.)
- How does the filmmaker introduce new characters and settings? How does the filmmaker reveal the context of a scene to the audience? Give some examples from the film. (e.g., Chapter 4 Open Market: Fabric Seller).
- This film is an example of "observational documentary" and does not rely on voice-over narration and interviews. What do you consider the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?
- In what ways does the camera act as an observer? In what ways does it act as a catalyst?
- Recall the different sections of the film when the presence of the filmmaker is obvious. How do those sequences provoke a consideration of documentary ethics?
- Assess the integration of the traumatic memories/voices of the child soldiers into a film that is largely observational in style.
- What are the benefits and limitations of a filmmaker documenting a culture other than his/her own? What are some of the issues you think a filmmaker needs to consider while making a cross-cultural project?
- What does this style of filmmaking reveal to us about Uganda that might not be possible through a more conventional documentary style?
- Why do you think the filmmaker decided to call the film *Where Are You Taking Me?*

ASSIGNMENTS:

1) Observational Video Collage:

Where Are You Taking Me? uses an observational documentary style to explore daily life in Uganda.

Using the film as an inspiration, students will pick a neighborhood and create their own five-minute observational videos documenting scenes of everyday life. The challenge of this assignment is for students to "see" and record familiar surroundings from a new perspective.

Using digital video cameras, students will employ filmmaking techniques of *WAYTM*—*long takes, strategic framing, slowly revealed context, creative juxtaposition*-- to look at everyday life from a new perspective.

2) Deconstructing media reports about Uganda and Africa

What do we think of when we think of Africa? Do we see a vast continent of 55 countries, with varied and complex political and economic landscapes? Do we imagine millions of multi-faceted individuals from hundreds of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds? Or, perhaps we see a single idea of Africa as a place of military conflict, poverty, famine, disease, and corruption.

Students will examine the prevalent media representations associated with Africa and speculate on the impact that these images have on our expectations of, and preconceptions about, this continent and its people.

- Students will pick a popular American news source (network television news, daily newspaper etc.) and monitor the source for one week listing all stories about Africa and their topics.
- Analyze whether the week's news stories fall into the five categories of military conflict, poverty, famine, disease, and corruption or address different issues and topics.
- For the same time period locate an African news source, from the same country, and describe events reported upon that were ignored by the American source you monitored.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why do American media producers primarily broadcast and publish negative images of Africa? What factors could be motivating the prevalence of this type of coverage?
- What are the consequences of American audiences seeing only negative images of Africa?
- Compare and contrast the representations of Africa in news reports with the images that were presented in *Where Are You Taking Me?* What are the similarities and differences?
- How is the goal of the documentarian similar to or different from the role of the journalist?
- When members of a community are consistently represented in the media as victims, what impact does that have on the subject and the audience? How do these representations influence the way that we engage with each other?

3) Call To Action- The Child Soldier Crisis:

The use of children as soldiers has been universally condemned, yet between 2000--2010 hundreds of thousands of children have fought and died in conflicts around the world. In northern Uganda, nearly two decades of conflict between the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have created a humanitarian crisis that has had a profound impact on the lives of Ugandan children. Tens of thousands of children have been abducted and forced to commit atrocities often against their own communities.

As illustrated in *Where Are You Taking Me?* the children who survive bear profound emotional scars.

Although the plight of child soldiers is a global and growing crisis, few Americans are aware of the scope of the issue.

- Students will focus on one country in the world impacted by the global child soldier crisis and create a campaign to raise public awareness about the causes and consequences of this issue.
- Students will research:
 - The social, political, economic, and cultural roots of the crisis
 - The short and long-term ramifications for individuals and communities who have been most deeply affected by the issue
 - The impact the issue is having on a national and global scale
- Students will develop a survey to gauge public awareness about the issue, and when possible, videotape interviews with members of the public (family, friends, fellow students, etc.).
- Students will create *Call to Action Guides* that provide information and resources on how to get involved and feature the work of organizations that are addressing the issue.

Additional Resources

BOOKS

Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States (2010)

Scott Gates & Simon Reich, Editors

Current global estimates of children engaged in warfare range from 200,000 to 300,000. Children's roles in conflict range from armed and active participants to spies, cooks, messengers, and sex slaves. *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* examines the factors that contribute to the use of children in war, the effects of war upon children, and the perpetual cycle of warfare that engulfs many of the world's poorest nations.

The Price of Stones: Building a School for My Village (2010)

Twesigye Jackson Kaguri

When Twesigye Jackson Kaguri returned to his native village in Uganda after college, he was compelled by the dire circumstances of his village's AIDS orphans to build a school and provide them with tuition-free education. *The Price of Stones* tells the story of the long road to the founding of the Nyaka and Kutamba AIDS Orphans Schools, highlighting the community that inspired the project and the children whose lives were changed in the process.

Uganda: The Land and Its People (2009)

Godfrey Mwakikagile

Written by noted African Studies scholar Godfrey Mwakikagile, this book provides a broad introduction to the history, geography, and culture of Uganda and examines the challenges the country continues to face as it attempts to create a common, national identity

FILMS

Bouncing Cats (2010)

www.bouncingcats.com/

In 2006, Abraham "Abramz" Tekya, a Ugandan b-boy and AIDS orphan created Breakdance Project Uganda (B.P.U.) with the hope of empowering and healing his community by providing free workshops in break-dancing and b-boy culture. *Bouncing Cats* tells the inspiring story of Abramz and the youth of B.P.U and follows their efforts to engender positive social change through hip-hop.

Reassemblage (1982)

<http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c52.shtml>

Women are the focus but not the object of Trinh T. Minh-ha's influential first film, a complex visual study of the women of rural Senegal. Through a complicity of interaction between film and spectator, REASSEMBLAGE reflects on documentary filmmaking and the ethnographic representation of cultures.

The Last King of Scotland (2006)

The Last King of Scotland is a British drama that tells the fictional story of Dr. Nicholas Garrigan (James McAvoy), a young Scottish doctor who travels to Uganda and becomes the personal physician to the dictator Idi Amin (Forest Whitaker).

War / Dance (2007)

www.wardancethemovie.com

Nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary, *War/Dance* follows the lives of three youths in Northern Uganda who attend school in a refugee camp and find hope through the tradition of song and dance.

WEBSITES

Where Are You Taking Me?

www.whereareyoutakingme.com

The official film website for *Where Are You Taking Me?* provides information and resources on film's production, the filmmakers, and additional work by director Kimi Takesue

Hope North

www.hopenorth.org

The official website for the organization Hope North, featured in the film *Where Are You Taking Me?*. Hope North's 40-acre campus in Northern Uganda provides living accommodations, education, and vocational training for hundreds of refugees, orphans, and escaped child soldiers.

BBC News Uganda Country Profile

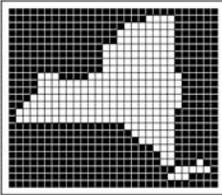
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1069166.stm

The BBC News Uganda Country Profile provides a general overview and fact sheet on the social and political history of Uganda as well as links to historical and contemporary media resources.



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State of the Arts



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WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME? ABOUT THE FILM

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Kimi Takesue is an award-winning filmmaker and the recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Filmmaking.

Her feature-length documentary *Where Are You Taking Me?* shot in Uganda, was commissioned by the International Film Festival Rotterdam where it had its world premiere. It was selected for MoMA's Documentary Fortnight (Museum of Modern Art, NYC) and the Los Angeles Film Festival



(Documentary Competition) where it was a Critics' Pick by *LA Weekly*. *Where Are You Taking Me?* was called "Extraordinary" by Nicolas Rapold (*The Village Voice*), "Stellar" by Richard Porton (*Cineaste*) and "Beautifully meditative...an enriching experience" by Jay Weissberg (*Variety*).

Takesue's films have screened at over 200 film festivals and museums, including the Sundance Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, New Directors/ New Films, Los Angeles Film Festival, Locarno International, SXSW, the Walker Art Center, and the Museum of Modern Art (NYC). Her narrative and documentary films have aired on PBS, the Independent Film Channel, and the Sundance Channel.

Among her fellowships and grants are a Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship, two artist fellowships from the New York Foundation in the Arts, an Eastman Kodak Cinematography Fellowship; grants from the Independent Television Service (ITVS), Ford Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, National Asian American Telecommunications Association, The Arts Council of England and artist residencies at Yaddo Artist Colony and the MacDowell Colony.

Narrative projects include award-winning *Summer of the Serpent* and *That Which Once Was* (winner of the *Futurestates* Audience Award) starring Natar Ungalaq (*Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*). Takesue has produced and directed television programming for A & E Network and PBS, including the documentary series *The First 48* and *After the First 48*.

Film honors include the *Spirit of Slamdance Award*, Slamdance Film Festival; *Best Documentary*, Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema; *Grand Jury Prize*, Brooklyn International Film Festival; *Gold Medal & Grand Jury Prize*, Brno International Film Festival, Czech Republic; *Jurors' Choice Award* (1st place),

Black Maria Film and Video Festival; *Best Narrative Short*, San Diego Asian Film Festival; and the *Golden Reel: New Visions Award*, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival.

Raised in Hawai'i and Massachusetts, Takesue received her B.A. from Oberlin College and her M.F.A from Temple University. She is an Assistant Professor in the Film Program at Syracuse University. Her films are distributed by Women Make Movies and Icarus Films.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME is a film that speaks to the beauty and rhythms of everyday life in Uganda. The film charts my travels through Uganda, from the kinetic energy of urban life to the tranquility of rural areas. In exploring the nuances of everyday life, the film challenges the dominant and prevailing images of Africa that focus only on the horrors of war, poverty, and AIDS. Outside of East Africa, there are very few representations of Uganda that reach beyond the sensational and stereotypical. In contrast, WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME offers unexpected images of a complex country, and challenges the viewer to abandon pre-conceived notions of where we are going and what we will find.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME was commissioned by the Rotterdam International Film Festival as part of a special series on African Cinema. Twelve international filmmakers, who had never traveled to Africa before, were invited to make films on their experiences in Africa. I was particularly excited to participate in this project because my film work often deals with various kinds of cross-cultural encounters. I'm interested in the meeting point, when people from different cultures come together and search for a mode of communication. My work often explores the process of "looking" cross-culturally and the interplay between the observer and the observed.

I went to Uganda without a specific agenda or set of expectations. As a one-person crew, I had a great deal of flexibility with my time and method of working. Rather than execute a specific plan, I was interested in responding to what unfolded and emerged during the journey. Often, I would station myself in a particular place and observe with my camera. Over a period of time interesting interactions would surface as people approached me and interacted with the camera; these relationships were constantly changing and in flux. A group of children might initially clamor for attention but then become bored and move on. I was interested in this interplay between observation and engagement, voyeurism and intimacy.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME is primarily an observational film; there is no voice-over narrating the journey. No translations are provided. No attempt is made to explain or definitively inform the viewer about Uganda. Instead, the film re-constructs my sensory impressions of people and places, by concentrating on the images, details, colors and sounds that left an impact: a high society wedding, bustling city streets, a nightclub filled with music and laughter. The film captures moments of visual inter-connection and disconnection---voyeuristic fascination and fleeting intimacy. Throughout the journey my presence as a filmmaker is constantly felt through the eyes of the camera---looking and being looked back at.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME invites the viewer to come along on a journey to Uganda—to watch, to listen, to experience. As the title suggests, it is a journey into new territory that is both familiar and exotic, disorientating and eye opening.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE TITLE?

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME? is a question that applies to the viewer, the Ugandans in the film, and to myself, as the filmmaker. For the subjects represented within the documentary the question “Where are you taking me?” also moves beyond curiosity into a confrontation of the politics and ethics of the documentary contract. How are these images being appropriated and for what use? How will these images be disseminated and consumed? What right do I have to take these pictures? Sometimes the question registers in a subject’s eyes, less often it is stated—as it is several times in this film. It is an inquiry that can never be fully answered, and one that implicates both the filmmaker and audience.

PLACES VISITED

My filming began, the day after I arrived, with an invitation to a Ugandan wedding. I was expecting a small, modest affair but it turned out to be the most lavish, extravagant wedding I’ve ever attended. The day included a visit to the beauty salon for elaborate hair styling, a traditional church wedding, and an enormous reception with guest appearances by local pop stars.

On another day, I noticed signs in the lobby advertising an African Women’s weightlifting competition. The following day I wandered over to the hotel and discovered an amazing group of young women lifting weights in the middle of an ornate hotel banquet hall. Again, it was a surprising and wonderful image.

Other highlights of my trip, included a visit to a video hall in Kampala, where a resident “VJ” did a live translation of a Bruce Lee film from English to the local Lugandan language. I also traveled to the Entebbe Zoo where hundreds of energetic school children swarmed the grounds in packs, wearing brightly colored uniforms. Other wonderful discoveries included: a kickboxing school, a group of Ugandan independent filmmakers at work on set, and street kids learning break dancing at a local youth center.

The most meaningful personal experience I had involved my visit to Hope North, a school located in Northern Uganda in the Masindi region. Founded by the Ugandan artist, Sam Okello, Hope North is a school that provides an education and home for children displaced by the civil war that has ravaged Northern Uganda for the last 20 years. Many of the kids at Hope North have suffered tremendous loss, displacement, and personal trauma—a number of them were abducted and forced to serve as soldiers in a brutal war. To help with the emotional healing process, the school integrates art, music and dance into its curriculum. Hope North is an inspirational place that helps to empower and prepare kids for a better and more hopeful future.

At Hope North, I was able to speak to several kids who were forced to serve as child soldiers; they shared very intimate, personal stories with me. I was inspired by their resiliency and determination to rebuild their lives. However, within the film I only refer to their pasts very briefly, in order to provide context. I didn’t want to define these kids by the horrors of their pasts. Instead, I wanted to present their daily rhythms as students and playful teenagers immersed in life at school. <http://www.hopenorth.org/>

CHALLENGES WHILE FILMING IN AFRICA

As an Asian-American woman wandering through the streets of Kampala with a camera there were legitimate suspicions about who I was and what my intentions were in filming. Most people assumed that I

was a journalist with a specific agenda; there was a lot of fear that I would likely misrepresent a situation. These concerns were justifiable--so often, in the context of Africa, people's images are appropriated and misused. People also assumed that I was directly profiting from "stealing" their image and therefore expected to be paid, if filmed.

I spoke with one young Ugandan man about this issue at length. I asked to film him and he initially refused. He was concerned that his image might be used out of context--for example, to inaccurately illustrate a news story on poverty or AIDS in Africa. I then explained the Rotterdam project to him—that I was an artist, and my intention was to show everyday aspects of Ugandan life, filtered through a very personal lens. Once he understood that I was an artist, rather than a journalist he was willing to be filmed. It was rewarding to have this personal dialogue but it wasn't always possible. At times, it was frustrating to be denied access, but I understood and respected people's concerns about filming.

STYLISTIC APPROACH:

Stylistically, I was interested in creating a visually driven hybrid film form that combines characteristics of documentary and experimental film. Within this piece I was interested in the interplay between naturalism and stylization. On the one hand, the film is anchored in a very naturalistic world but it also has elements of abstraction and stylization. I wanted to create a distinct sensory world with its own geography, textures, colors, and sounds. Much of the piece is structured in a series of long observation tableaux where action unfolds within a static frame. This formal strategy encourages a viewer not only to look, but to continue to look, hopefully more deeply, and, thus, to become aware of the complicated, and often changing, spatial and personal relationships revealed by the camera.

WHAT IS THE FINAL MESSAGE OF THE FILM?

I don't intend for the film to have a specific message. Within the media, I feel we are inundated with images of Africa and Uganda that relate to war, poverty, hunger and disease. As outsiders, we get a very distorted view of a particular place and people. *WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?* is filtered through a very personal lens, but I hope it offers images that speak to the beauty, vitality and specificity of everyday life in Uganda.

ABOUT THE EDUCATOR GUIDE

This Educator Guide was developed and written by Allison Milewski in collaboration with Kimi Takesue. Allison is a curriculum specialist and educator with over ten years' experience in arts and media education. She has developed and implemented primary and secondary school arts-integration programs, professional development workshops, and arts and media curricula for over 30 schools and youth development organizations in New York City, Cambodia, and Laos. She has also managed a broad range of arts outreach programs through her work with organizations such as Tribeca Film Institute and Urban Arts Partnership. In 2004, Allison launched *PhotoForward*, a program that provides photography and digital media instruction to under-served youth with the goal of encouraging self-exploration and active community engagement as citizen artists. Allison attended the Literacy Through Photography Institute at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies and received a BA in Liberal Arts from the New School for Social Research with concentrations in Women's Studies and Media Studies. She is currently pursuing a certificate in Creative Art Therapy at The New School.