

Guide to CineFiles Resources on **Bowling for Columbine/Elephant**



CineFiles Educator Guide

Films: *Bowling for Columbine*, *Elephant*

This lesson uses the film *Bowling for Columbine* and clips from *Elephant* to stimulate discussion and activities around the issues raised in the films (violence in the media, youth and violence, etc) and to explore ideas about 'genre', and 'objectivity' in the media.

BAM/PFA

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Bowling for Columbine

Background Information:

Have students read the following documents before viewing the film. The program note has a short synopsis that lays out the basic premise of the film:

[Program Note, Vancouver International Film Festival \(2002\)](#)

The following excerpt from a press kit for the film has biographical information on the filmmaker, Michael Moore:

[About the Filmmaker from Press Kit, Alliance Atlantis Communications \(2002\)](#)

Previewing Questions

- What is a documentary? List some defining characteristics of a documentary.
- What is 'genre'? How strict are the boundaries of genre?

Viewing

- *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore
- *Excerpts:*
 1. *Interview with Charleton Heston*: Chapters 11, 31
 2. *Surveillance footage*: Chapter 10

Discussion Questions and Activities

- Read the following reviews that came out at the release of the film:

[Moore captures U.S. zeitgeist](#), by Jonathan Curiel, from the *San Francisco Chronicle* (2002)

[They aim to please](#), by J. Hoberman, from the *Village Voice* (2002)

[Unmoored from reality](#), by John Fund, from *The Wall Street Journal* (2003)

(Alternative Assignment: Instructors could also have their students look up reviews on CineFiles instead of handing them out, to get students familiar with the protocols of online research.)

Discussion Questions:

- What was the reception to the film when it first came out? Which review do you agree with and why?
- One of the biggest criticisms of the film was Michael Moore's portrayal of Charleton Heston. According to the following interviews, what does Michael Moore have to say about the confrontational tactics he uses in his films?

[Bigger picture](#), interview with Robert Avila, in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* (2002)

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[**Still shooting his mouth off**, interview with Bob Strauss, in the Los Angeles Daily News \(2002\)](#)

Possible activities:

- Form two teams to debate the following question: Are the tactics that Michael Moore uses in his documentary ethical?

Use arguments from the reviews and the interviews to support your position.

- Read the following article:

[**Victims' parents give 'Bowling' mixed reviews**, from the San Francisco Chronicle \(2002\)](#)

Possible activities:

- Pick a position on this issue and draft a letter to the editor in response to the article.

Elephant

Background information:

Have students read the following documents before viewing the clip. The following program note lays out the basic premise of the film:

[Program Note, Telluride International Film Festival \(2003\)](#)

The following excerpt from a press kit for the film has biographical information on the filmmaker, Gus Van Sant:

[About the Filmmaker, excerpted from Press Kit, HBO Films \(2003\)](#)

Previewing Questions:

- Based on the article below, what genres is the film 'Elephant' drawing from?

[What lies beneath, by Jessica Winter, from the Village Voice \(2003\)](#)

- Which is more truthful: a documentary, or a narrative feature?

Viewing

- *Elephant, Gus Van Sant*
Viewing Excerpts:
1. School shootout: Chapters 11-13

Discussion Questions and Activities

- Read the following article about the production included in the film's press kit:

[About the Production, excerpted from Press Kit, HBO Films \(2003\)](#)

Discussion Questions:

- What was Gus Van Sant's reason for making this film? What is his approach to the subject matter and how he presents the issue of gun violence?
- The following is a similar article about *Bowling for Columbine*, included in the film's press kit:

[About the Production/Genesis from Press Kit, Alliance Atlantis Communications \(2002\)](#)

Discussion Questions:

- Based on your viewings and readings, how is Michael Moore's approach to the issue of gun violence different from that of Gus Van Sant? Which do you think is more effective?
- Repeat Previewing Questions at the end, to see if and how opinions have changed after the lesson.