

When Kids Get Life Teacher's Guide

About the Film:

When Kids Get Life profiles the cases of five juveniles sentenced in Colorado to life in prison without the possibility of parole. The film explores whether juveniles should receive sentences that, in effect, end any possibility of life outside of prison.

The film makes the point that the United States is one of the only countries in the world that allows persons under 18 to be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. According to Human Rights Watch, over 2,200 of the inmates in the United States who are serving life sentences without the possibility of parole received those sentences for crimes they committed when they were under 18 years old. By contrast, according to self-reporting numbers from the rest of the world, only 12 people serving the same sentence were sentenced as juveniles.

Watching the Film:

Teachers can either assign the film for viewing as homework or show the film in class, but teachers should be aware that scenes in the film might be disturbing to students. Suggested discussion questions are provided. The lessons and activities in this guide can be used in the classroom without having viewed the film.

Grade levels 9-12. For classes in social studies, civics and government, language arts, media studies, video production, current events, and history.

A Note to Teachers: The lesson itself is, potentially, emotionally charged since the film on which it is based presents students with disturbing events and photographs and with dilemmas that will undoubtedly evoke disagreement and discussion, even heated debate.

Discussion Questions:

This guide includes a list of questions for students to discuss after viewing *When Kids Get Life*.

Featured Lesson Plan:

"Understanding the Power of Media: Planning a Documentary Segment About Peter: A Juvenile Sentenced to Life Without Parole "

Students will:

- Understand the Felony Murder Doctrine
- Examine the nature of documentary film
- Develop visuals for a documentary about the justice or injustice of the doctrine as it applies to juveniles in a particular case
- Understand the power of film to shape opinion

Additional Lesson Idea:

Exploring The Adolescent Brain

Students will

- Conduct a survey of classmates about their attitudes towards the difference between adult and adolescent decision-making.

- Read several articles about brain development and create a chart depicting differences between adult and adolescent brains.

Additional Lesson Idea:

How Does YOUR State Treat Adolescent Offenders?

Students will research and report on how their states treat juveniles who commit or are accessories to crimes.

Additional Resources:

An annotated list of relevant Web sites.

Purchasing the Film:

When Kids Get Life can be purchased from [Shop PBS for Teachers [LINK <http://teacher.shop.pbs.org/home/index.jsp>]. Also, teachers and students can watch the film streamed in its entirety on FRONTLINE's Web site. [LINK <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/whenkidsgetlife/>]

Credits:

This teacher's guide was developed by Simone Bloom Nathan of Media Education Consultants. It was written by Ellen Greenblatt of The Bay School, San Francisco. Advisors were Debra Plafker Gutt of Stuyvesant High School, New York, and Greg Timmons, curriculum writer and educational consultant.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Note: Understanding the definitions of "**Felony Murder Doctrine**" [LINK] and "**felony**" [LINK] is an essential prerequisite to a discussion of the film and the issues it raises. Review the descriptions and briefly discuss the differences.

- **Felony Murder Doctrine:** "A rule of criminal statutes that any death which occurs during the commission of a felony is first degree murder, and all participants in that felony or attempted felony can be charged with and found guilty of murder. A typical example is a robbery involving more than one criminal, in which one of them shoots, beats to death or runs over a store clerk, killing the clerk. Even if the death were accidental, all of the participants can be found guilty of felony murder, including those who did no harm, had no gun, and/or did not intend to hurt anyone." Source: **Dictionary.com** [LINK <http://dictionary.law.com/default2.Asp?selected=741&bold>]
- **Felony:** "1) a crime sufficiently serious to be punishable by death or a term in state or federal prison, as distinguished from a misdemeanor which is only punishable by confinement to county or local jail and/or a fine. 2) a crime carrying a minimum term of one year or more in state prison, since a year or less can be served in county jail. However, a sentence upon conviction for a felony may sometimes be less than one year at the discretion of the judge and within limits set by statute. Felonies are sometimes referred to as "high crimes" as described in the U.S. Constitution." Source: **Dictionary.com** [LINK <http://dictionary.law.com/default2.asp?selected=740&bold=||||>]

Questions for discussion:

1. Under what conditions do you think someone should be sentenced to life without parole?
2. Should these conditions apply equally to juveniles as to adults? Why or why not?
3. What factors prompted the change in Colorado from an earlier focus on rehabilitation of juvenile offenders to the present focus on punishment?
4. Jacob Ind murdered his mother and stepfather. Should the circumstances of his home life described by defense attorneys and Jacob's brother mitigate the severity of his punishment? (To "mitigate" is to "lessen in force, intensity or severity.") Do you think the circumstances they described were "mitigating"?
5. An attorney in the film says that the law treats most harshly children who kill their parents and most leniently parents who kill their children. Why do you think the attorney thinks children are treated more harshly?
6. Shawna Geiger, a defense attorney in Colorado, notes that the Colorado Legislature, when it prohibits adolescents from driving with other adolescents, recognizes that the adolescent brain is not yet fully developed. Yet the same

Legislature allows adolescents to be tried as adults for felony murder. How would you explain what Ms. Geiger sees as a contradiction?

7. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights urges rehabilitation for juvenile (under age 18) offenders and prohibits juveniles from receiving life sentences without the possibility of parole. But when the United States ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1992, it articulated one exception to the prohibition against juveniles receiving life sentences without the possibility of parole: The most "hardened of criminals" would be treated as adults; juveniles receiving such a sentence would have to be "the worst of the worst."
 - How would you define the most "hardened of criminals" or the "worst of the worst"?
 - Do the juveniles profiled in the documentary fit your definition?
 - Do you consider Colorado law as the documentary describes it as consistent with the International Covenant? Explain.

8. In 2006, the Colorado Legislature passed a reform bill changing juvenile life without parole to 40 years before parole eligibility, but the bill did *not* make the reform retroactive, so the reform does *not* apply to any juveniles sentenced before 2006.
 - Why do you think the Legislature did not make the reform retroactive?
 - Do you believe the reform should be retroactive? Why or why not?

Featured Lesson Plan:

"Understanding the Power of Media: Planning a Documentary Segment About Peter, a Juvenile Sentenced to Life Without Parole "

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Understand the Felony Murder Doctrine
- Examine the nature of documentary film.
- Examine the case study of Peter A., who is serving a life sentence for a crime he committed when he was a juvenile
- Develop a storyboard for a documentary sympathetic or unsympathetic to Peter A.'s case.
- Understand the power of film to shape opinion

Materials Needed:

Internet access

"**The Language of Film and Video**" [LINK] Student Handout

"**Storyboard Organizer**" [LINK] Student Handout

Downloaded copies of **Peter A case study** [LINK

http://hrw.org/reports/2005/us1005/3.htm#_Toc114638392]

Time Needed:

10 minutes for brainstorming session: "What should a documentary be?"

20 minutes to discuss how documentaries can "construct" reality and to read "The Language of Film and Video" handout.

15 minutes to review the Felony Murder Doctrine and read the Case Study of Peter A.

30-45 minutes to work in groups on the storyboard.

15-30 minutes to discuss:

- how *telling* or *representing* a story influences understanding and opinions;
- whether Peter A. received appropriate punishment.

Procedure:**Step One:**

- Review the Felony Murder Doctrine to ensure all students understand its provisions and ramifications.
- Ask the whole class to write for two to three minutes on the following questions:
 - Why do people make documentaries?
 - What are the characteristics of a documentary film?
- Discuss together students' ideas about what a documentary should be or contain. Write students' ideas on the board. There may well be contradictions, but words like "informative," "real," "factual," "true," "nonfiction," and "educational" may well appear.
- Write on the board: "Documentary filmmakers could make our school look positive or negative simply through the choice of information they present."

- Create two columns on the board, one for positive images/information, the other for negative images/information. Ask students to come up and write details under the appropriate column.

An example:

- under "positive," you might include the new basketball courts filmed so you can't see the graffiti on the gym wall;
- under "negative" would be shots of the gym with graffiti in the forefront.¹
- After students write details in the "positive" and "negative" columns on the board, ask them which details provide the "truest" image of the school. They will, undoubtedly, disagree.
- Ask students to distinguish between "propaganda" and "documentary."
- Distribute "The Language of Film and Video" handout and review selected terms with students.

Note: The goal of this particular part of the lesson is to make students aware of the power of the filmmaker to influence the viewer and convey a particular point of view.

You might want to highlight a few terms after they have read through the handout.

- For example, #5 notes: "A character filmed from a low angle will seem strong, powerful, tall, proud, etc... whereas if a high angle is used the subject will appear weak, insignificant, vulnerable, small etc... Our impression of a structure or object can be manipulated in a similar way. A distorted angle may be used to make a scene more frightening, or to make the viewer feel anxious, or queasy (especially if fast or jerky camera movement is also used)."
- Another example is in #7: "Soft Focus: A slightly blurred shot to make the subject seem more attractive, romantic, nostalgic or dreamlike."

Step Two:

Students will now apply what they are learning about film documentaries to create a storyboard for their own documentaries. To proceed:

- Review the **Felony Murder Doctrine** [LINK <http://dictionary.law.com/default2.Aspx?selected=741&bold>]
- Read the **Case Study of Peter A.** [LINK http://hrw.org/reports/2005/us1005/3.htm#_Toc114638392]
- Break the class into two groups; then, depending on the size of your class, break each of the two groups into several smaller groups of four to five students each.
- Assign half the groups to create a documentary sympathetic to Peter A., while the other half plans a documentary unsympathetic to him.
- Distribute the "Storyboard Organizer" handout, and explain to students that the assignment asks them to create a plan of *how to tell their story from their point of view*.
 - What kinds of things should they include or not include?
 - Who should be interviewed?
 - Who should *not* be interviewed?
 - What is the "plot" or narrative of their story?

¹ This activity is adapted from http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/units/documentary/constructed_reality.html

- After they have this discussion, each group should describe four specific camera shots for a documentary about Peter A.
 - One shot should be at the beginning of the film;
 - Two shots should come from the middle of the film;
 - The last shot should come from the end of the film.

Step Three:

- After they have finished the four panels of their storyboards, ask all students in the "sympathetic" groups to come together to share what they have created. They should be prepared to present the most visually powerful, compelling and/or persuasive storyboard shots to the rest of the class. (They may choose shots from different groups to create the "best of the best.")
- At the same time, ask all students in the "unsympathetic" groups to come together to share what they have created in their storyboards. They should be prepared to present the most successful storyboard shots to the rest of the class. (They may choose shots from different groups to create the "best of the best.")
- Students should discuss as a whole class what techniques were most and least successful in conveying their points.
- To culminate the discussion, ask students the following question:
If you were told to make an "objective" documentary, what would you need to do?
- Students may write responses or respond in discussion.

Method of Assessment:

- Participation in discussion.
- Participation in creation and presentation of the storyboard.
- Written assignment: Write a two or three paragraph letter to a state legislator or a juvenile judge arguing for or against the continued imprisonment of Peter A. and/or for or against reform of juveniles sentenced as adults. You may use information from either of the storyboards in your letter.

Additional Lesson Ideas:**Exploring the Adolescent Brain**

Students will

- Read several articles about brain development and create a chart depicting differences between adult and adolescent brains. Suggested articles, in the "Additional Resources" section of this guide, are listed here for your convenience:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/work/adolescent.html>
[LINK]
<http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/may02factsheetadolbraindev.pdf> [LINK]
(PDF file)
- Develop questions and conduct a survey of classmates about their attitudes towards the difference between adult and adolescent decision-making.
- Make a chart of the differences.

Additional Lesson Idea:**How does YOUR state treat adolescent offenders?**

Students will explore youth sentencing laws in their states. Students will research and report on how their states treat juveniles who commit or are accessories to crimes.

Go to:

- FRONTLINE's interactive map; and [LINK
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/whenkidsgetlife/etc/map.html>]
- The National Center for Juvenile Justice Web site [LINK
<http://www.ncjj.org/stateprofiles/>]. Scroll down at the top to find statistics about your state.

STUDENT HANDOUT

The Language of Film and Video

Some explanations and definitions for film students.

This handout is from: <http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/resources/film.html>
It is reproduced here for teachers' convenience.

1. STRUCTURE OF A FILM

Shot

A single 'run' of the camera. This is the basic unit from which a film is constructed. The length (or duration) of a shot depends upon:

- its purpose i.e. establishing a place; to show action; to show reaction
- the pace (or tempo) of the sequence in which it occurs.

Sequence

A group of shots depicting one action, or, which seems to belong with or depend upon each other. (Say 3 to 18 shots).

Scene

A group of sequences, or, (for short scenes) a group of shots, which:

- depict an event in the story. and
- occur in one place.

A scene is generally a larger unit than a sequence (though) sometimes a group of shots can be classified as either).

2. TYPES OF SHOT

Long Shot [L.S.]

A distance shot in which a setting, and not a character, is the emphasis. This is generally used to establish the place in which action will occur, hence the term establishing shot. Given its function, a long shot is often used at the beginning of a scene or sequence, and may be combined with a panning movement of the camera to show us a wider area.

Mid Shot [M.S.]

A middle distance shot which focuses our attention on a particular subject. With a mid shot the camera is close enough to pick up detail, though still far enough away to be able to follow the subject as he/she/it moves. The mid shot, therefore, is commonly used to show action e.g. as in a fight scene.

Close-up [C.U.]

A close shot of an object or person, the aim being to focus our attention on a particular detail. Close-ups of objects may serve as the inpoint to a new scene, depicting a new fact or location in the story. Close ups of a person have a number of different functions:

- in an establishing sequence a close up of someone suggests that he/she is a main character
- the first close up of a character (in a sequence of shots), establishes point of view e.g. who is watching an event
- a close up is most commonly used to show the reaction of a character, i.e. a reaction shot.

3. CAMERA MOVEMENTS

Pan: Movement from side to side from a stationary position.

Tilt: Movement up or down from a stationary position.

Tracking: The camera is not stationary but moves to follow a moving object or person. The camera is mounted on a moving device such as a rail platform, a dolly or a vehicle.

Zoom Out: Movement outwards away from a subject.

Note: The speed of a camera movement (from very fast to very slow) can dramatically alter its effect.

4. MOVING FROM ONE SHOT TO ANOTHER

Cut

The ending of a shot. If the cut is a jerky movement, which seems a little inconsistent with the next shot it is called a jump cut.

Fade In or Out

The image appears or disappears gradually. It brightens to full strength over a full second, or darkens to fade out. The fade is often used as a division between scenes.

Dissolve

One image fades in while another fades out so that for a few seconds the two are superimposed.

Inpoint

An image which starts the scene. Sometimes this inpoint is used to smooth the transition between scenes. As the word suggests the inpoint takes us in to the next shot or scene by making a visual link (a related object or shape) with the outpoint of the previous shot.

5. CAMERA ANGLES

In filming a shot a decision is made about the angle at which the camera is to be directed at a subject. High and Low angles may be used to influence our impression of a particular character.

A character filmed from a **low angle** will seem strong, powerful, tall, proud, etc... whereas if a **high angle** is used the subject will appear weak, insignificant, vulnerable, small etc... Our impression of a structure or object can be manipulated in a similar way.

A **distorted angle** may be used to make a scene more frightening, or to make the viewer feel anxious, or queasy (especially if fast or jerky camera movement is also used).

6. EDITING

This is the process of assembling and splicing together the various shots which comprise a film. Underlying the process is a technique which can be called pairing, i.e. a story is built up by alternating one set of shots with another.

There are common instances of pairing:

- **A conversation or confrontation between two characters.** The shots alternate from one to the other, angles may be used to suggest inferiority or superiority.
- **Shots of a character are alternated with shots of what he/she sees.** The first shot of the character is the P.O.V. (It establishes point of view i.e. who is looking).
- **Cross-cutting.** A sequence of shots in which the alternation is between two different locations (e.g. A burglar creeping into a house in which an unsuspecting victim lies sleeping). The sequence builds to a climax and ends with the two things coming together.

The Editing Speed (or tempo) of a particular sequence is also an important consideration. Fast editing involves fast cutting, i.e. The shots are 1 to 2 seconds long. Fast editing generates excitement and anticipation as for example in a chase sequence. Slow editing (i.e. Shots are 3 to 10 seconds long), has the opposite effect, calming and relaxing the viewer. Accordingly slow editing is a characteristic of love scenes.

7. OTHER TERMS

Soft Focus: A slightly blurred shot to make the subject seem more attractive, romantic, nostalgic or dreamlike.

Hand Held Camera: The tripod and dolly are deliberately abandoned in favor of this method when a director wants to create a sense of anxiety or confusion, exploiting the unsteady movement of the camera. A hand held shot in which a character is approached from behind usually suggests that someone is being followed and is about to be 'pounced upon'...

Montage: The editing together of a large number of shots with no intention to create a continuous reality. A montage is often used to compress time (a number of facts are established in one sequence). Films may begin with a montage which establishes a particular time and place. With the absence of a visual relationship between them, the montage shots are linked through a unified sound - either a voiceover or a piece of music.

STUDENT HANDOUT
Storyboard Organizer

Adapted from: <http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/storyboarding/orga.html>

Your name _____ Sympathetic to Peter? Unsympathetic to Peter?
(circle one)

Use the following to help you plan and create your storyboard:

- A. Working with your group, briefly describe the parts of Peter's story you are going to film.
- Write your description out in **six** numbered steps.
 - Without *telling* your point of view directly, you will *show* your point of view through film techniques. For example, if you want Peter to look powerless, you will probably film him from above. If you want him to look powerful, you will film him from below. (See the handout: "The Language of Film and Video.")
 - One shot should be at the beginning of the film, two should come from the middle, and one should come from the end.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

- B. With your group, look at your numbered steps and take any out that don't seem as if they help you tell the story. Add any that you feel are missing. You must end up with **four** numbered steps for your four shots.

C. Fill in the chart below. For each numbered step of your story, fill in a new shot.

Shot #1 Beginning

Description: What's going on?	Shot type—for example, close-up or wide?	Visual clues to help communicate your idea and point of view	Additional elements (music?)

Shot #2 Middle

Description: What's going on?	Shot type—close-up or wide?	Visual clues to help communicate your idea and point of view	Additional elements (music?)

Shot #3 Middle

Description: What's going on?	Shot type—close-up or wide?	Visual clues to help communicate your idea and point of view	Additional elements (music?)

Shot #4 End

Description: What's going on?	Shot type—close-up or wide?	Visual clues to help communicate your idea and point of view	Additional elements (music?)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A Note about Internet Resources

Students need to be aware that Web sites sometimes only present one view of an issue. Encourage them to think about and question Web sites even as they are reading. Guiding questions as they review Web sites are: What did you learn from this site? What didn't you learn from this site? Who sponsors this site? What bias might the sponsor have? How current is the site?

FRONTLINE

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/whenkidsgetlife/>

The companion Web site to the documentary features a state-by-state map showing statistics on juveniles sentenced to life without parole, profiles of the inmates featured in the report, extended interviews with legal experts, a conversation with the filmmaker and the opportunity to view the full program at any time in streaming video.

Articles About Juveniles Sentenced to Life Without Parole in Colorado

http://hrw.org/reports/2005/us1005/9.htm#_Toc114638432

This Web site is a case study of Kevin C., a juvenile in Colorado sentenced to life without parole

http://www.denverpost.com/teencrime/ci_3636564

This article is headlined "Teen Crime, Adult Time," with a subtitle: "Laws converge to put teens away forever."

http://www.denverpost.com/teencrime/ci_3527304

This article asks whether Felony murder is a "legal fiction."

http://www.denverpost.com/teencrime/ci_3530251

This article points out that the "scars of abuse [were] concealed" until a teen killed his stepfather.

http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/reform/ch3_b.html

This article tracks changes in Colorado's juvenile justice system after violence in the 1980s and '90s.

The Teen Brain:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/>

A FRONTLINE Web site examining the adolescent brain.

<http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/may02factsheetadolbraindev.pdf>

This PDF file discusses how adolescent brains are different than adult brains.

<http://nextdayfoundation.org/RESOURCES.html>

The Next Day Foundation was started by Erik Jensen, one of the inmates featured in *When Kids Get Life*. This page on the foundation's Web site offers a state-by-state listing of resources for teens who need help.

Information About Documentary Films

http://english.unitec.ac.nz/resources/resources/exp_lang/grammar_film_tv.html

This Web site compares the grammar of written language to the "grammar" of film.

<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~ebayer/introtodoc.html>

This Purdue University course handout lists and discusses how documentaries convey meaning.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0602/p01s02-ussc.html>

This article, from the Christian Science *Monitor* argues that "in 'docu-ganda' films, balance is not the objective."