

LA LAGUNA



Lead Sponsor



Exclusive Education Partner



Supported by



Additional support is provided by The Andy and Beth Burgess Family Foundation, Hal Jackman Foundation, The S. M. Blair Family Foundation and through contributions by individual donors.



LA LAGUNA

Directed by Aaron Schock

2016 | USA & Mexico | 40 min

In Mayan and Spanish, with English subtitles

TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of *La Laguna* by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussion with their class, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some weblinks that provide starting points for further research or discussion.

The Film

Deep in the rainforests of southern Mexico, a pair of Mayan boys run free among the relics of their ancient civilization. In their village school, however, 12-year-old Yu'uk and eight-year-old José find themselves lost in a world they can't fully comprehend, governed by a language they can't fully grasp. In this breathtaking coming-of-age film, Emmy-nominated director Aaron Schock crafts an immersive, visually stunning portrait of a childhood on the margins of Mexican society. As Yu'uk prepares to leave the local school, the future of his family and his Indigenous community hangs in the balance. *La Laguna* is an unforgettable story about a boy on the cusp of adulthood and a society on the cusp of change.

The Filmmaker

Emmy-nominated director Aaron Schock holds an MA in public policy from Columbia University and worked for many years in social research at Columbia and in non-profit community development in the South Bronx before making documentary films. His most recent feature is *Circo* (2011), which premiered at the Los Angeles and London Film festivals, won the grand jury prize at the Hamptons International Film Festival (among other awards), was distributed theatrically in the US, the UK and Canada and shown nationally on PBS's *Independent Lens* and internationally on HBO. His recent short film *La Laguna* received a 2017 Cinema Eye Honors Award, and won Best Documentary Short at Woodstock Film Festival and the Panavision Best North American Short at the Palm Springs Film Festival, among other awards. The film is distributed by Cinema Guild.

Educational package written and compiled by Pria Patroni
pria.patroni@gmail.com

VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

The following three subsections 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 weblinks for further investigation.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Show students the poster for the film (<http://www.lalagunafilm.com/> Click on Press Kit, then Download Film Poster). Based on the image and the title of the film, *La Laguna*, which translates as "The Lagoon" in English, have students make three predictions about the film. As a class, discuss students' predictions.

La Laguna takes place in a small village called Metzabok, located in the Lacandon jungle of Chiapas, Mexico. Have students locate Metzabok, Chiapas, Mexico, using Google Maps. Using the satellite view, ask students to note their observations about the geography of this region. What features do you notice about the natural landscape from the map? Approximately how many homes or buildings can you see from the satellite image? What does this tell you about the community?

Have students research Mayan cultures of Mexico and record their findings about Mayan civilization, both past and present. You may choose to divide students into small groups, assign each group an aspect of Mayan culture (i.e., geography, religion/spirituality, politics, food, etc.), and have each group present their research to the class.

Viewing Activities

Have students make notes on one or more of the individuals from the film. What is their role in the film? How would you describe them?

Ask students to make a list of Yu'uk's daily activities and responsibilities. After the film, ask students to make a list of their own daily activities and reflect on how Yu'uk's lifestyle compares with their own.

Have students make a T-chart comparing traditional versus modern elements in the lives of Yu'uk and his family. How has modernization affected the community of Metzabok and how has the community responded to these changes?

Have students complete the PBS viewing guide on documentaries (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/docs/Copies%20of%20Viewing%20Guide.pdf>). Students can revisit their completed documents as a Post-Viewing Activity.

As they watch, have students paraphrase one quotation from the film that they feel is especially interesting or inspiring. After the film, students can share the quotation they documented and why this quotation stood out for them.

Have students jot down three to five ideas for discussion, or questions that the film raises in their minds. As an Extension and/or Post-Viewing Activity, students can enter their questions into an online response or polling system and can vote on the questions or issues they would like to explore in further detail. Encourage students to use multiple levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss with students their initial reactions to the film and featured individuals. Did their feelings evolve over the course of the film?

Have students participate in a Socratic discussion on the film. Guidelines for Socratic discussions can be found here: <http://www.authenticeducation.org/documents/WhatSeminar04.pdf>

Have students complete an exit note. The exit note should contain one idea that demonstrates what they learned from the film, as well as one question that they still have about the topic.

Ask students to re-visit their predictions about the film from the Pre-Viewing Activity and discuss whether their initial impressions were changed, altered or enhanced by the film.

La Laguna depicts Yu'uk's transition from childhood to adolescence. Ask students to write a journal entry about their own transition from childhood to adolescence. Have them reflect on what made this time in their own life challenging or exciting.

In the film, Yu'uk must make a difficult choice: To stay with his family in Metzabok and continue to learn the traditional Mayan way of life from members of his community or to move away from his home to pursue a modern, Mexican education in Tumbo de la Montaña. Have students participate in a debate line activity to present both sides of the argument. Instructions for facilitating the debate line: designate one side of the room as one side of the argument (i.e., traditional Mayan way of life) and the other side as the opposite side (i.e., modern, Mexican education). Have students position themselves on either side of the room, or towards the centre if they are unsure. Ask for volunteers from each side and from the centre to present their arguments. Students can change their position during the debate if they are swayed by the arguments of their peers.

Ask students to think critically about the title of the film, *La Laguna*, which translates as "The Lagoon." Why do you think the filmmaker chose this title? Do you think it reflects the overall tone or meaning of the documentary? Have students brainstorm an alternate title for the film and as a class, ask them to share their titles and explain the rationale behind them.

As a class, revisit students' initial research on Mayan culture in Mexico. Facilitate a class discussion based on what students learned from the documentary. Ask students to think about how their impressions of Mayan culture, history and traditions have changed since watching the film. How can a personal story help us to understand and appreciate other cultures? What role can documentary filmmaking play in disseminating cultural histories?

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About the Film

<http://www.lalagunafilm.com>

Additional Resources

Living Maya Time: This resource, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, introduces students to the Mayan cultures of Mesoamerica. Students can navigate the website to learn about Mayan civilization and the Mayan calendar.

<https://maya.nmai.si.edu>

Maya Civilization: This online exhibit from the Canadian Museum of History's website offers students a chance to learn about Mayan civilization past and present.

<http://www.historymuseum.ca/> Type "Maya" into the search function of the website.

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People:

This document establishes a universal framework for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples around the world. Students can use this document as a framework for understanding some of the issues facing the Lacandon Maya, which are presented in the film.

http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

Mundo Maya: This travel website introduces visitors to Mayan tourist destinations in Mexico. Students can use this site as a resource for learning more about Mayan culture in Chiapas, the Lacandon jungle and the community of Metzabok, which is featured in *La Laguna*.

<http://mundomaya.travel>

International Union for Conservation of Nature: The article "Kin, A Man of the Jungle, Saving the Jungle," from December 14, 2016, introduces readers to the Lacandon

Mayan communities of Nahá and Metzabok. It raises awareness about environmental threats in these areas, and highlights the community-run Nahá Ecotourism Centre

<https://www.iucn.org/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

Nahá Ecoturismo: This is the website of an ecotourism initiative in the Lacandon community of Nahá. Although the website is in Spanish, students can explore images of the region and the ecotourism initiatives on the website, as well as the Pinterest and Facebook links on the homepage.

<http://nahaecoturismo.com>

BBC Travel: The article "Mexico's 500-Year Jungle Dwellers" by Susannah Rigg presents a journalistic account of the Lacandon Maya, including insight into the local culture, as well as political and environmental threats that these communities face today.

<http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20161215-mexicos-500-year-jungle-dwellers>

National Geographic Blog: In a 2015 interview entitled "A Portrait of the Lacandon People," Mexican photographer Gema Ramon shares her experience of photographing the Lacandon people.

<https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/> Type the title of the interview into the search function of the website.

Schools for Chiapas: This website features lesson plans related to Mayan culture and the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. Students can learn about the history of this political movement in Mexico, as well as the Zapatista model of education.

<http://www.schoolsforchiapas.org>

Sesenta y Ocho Voces: This Vimeo channel, called Sesenta y Ocho Voces (which translates as "Sixty-Eight Voices" in English) is an ongoing initiative from Mexico's government Fund for The Culture and Arts (FONCA) that promotes pride and respect for Mexico's 68 Indigenous languages. The channel features myths, legends, poems and stories told through animated short films. A few of the films have English subtitles, included two from Chiapas: *Tojolabal* (The Tiger and the Grasshopper) and *Tsotsil* (The Meeting of the Scare-People).

<https://vimeo.com/channels/68voces/>

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

Describe how Yu'uk and his family live off the land. How do they sustain themselves using the natural resources available to them in the Lacandon jungle? What environmental challenges do they face?

Much of the film centres around Yu'uk's relationship with his younger brother, José. Why do you think the director, Aaron Schock, chose to focus on this aspect of Yu'uk's life? How is Yu'uk and José's relationship depicted in the film? How do you think their relationship will change after Yu'uk leaves home to pursue further studies?

Compare and contrast the formal education that Yu'uk and José receive in school with the informal education they acquire from living off the land. What skills do they learn in school? What skills do they learn from their interactions with their natural environment?

Yu'uk describes his teacher in the following quote: "He comes from far away and doesn't speak Maya. When you don't know how to do your homework, he hits you." What are your impressions of Yu'uk and José's teacher? Do you think his teaching methods are effective? Why or why not?

Throughout the film, stories, prayers and rituals give viewers a glimpse into the religious life of the Lacandon Mayans. In one scene, Yu'uk's father shares the following spiritual worldview with his sons: "When the moon turns black, the people will rise from the *laguna*. When the last world ended, there was a lot of rain, and a huge flood. All the people died. There was only water. Then god made the world again. A new one. And he made us, the people. And when the hour comes, when this world ends, the earth will burn and he will make another world." What does this tell you about Mayan spiritual beliefs? How does this understanding of the world compare with other religious and/or scientific worldviews?

At a poignant moment in the film, Yu'uk proudly states: "I am not Mexican. I am Mayan." What do you think he is trying to say about his identity and his culture? In what way is his statement political? In what way is it personal?

In the following passage from the press release for *La Laguna*, director Aaron Schock provides viewers with a cultural context for his film: "Yu'uk and his family are Lacandon Maya, believed to be the only Indigenous group in Mexico to have never been conquered by the Spanish. They maintained their autonomy by retreating further and further into the forest, and only began to make sustained contact with outsiders in the middle of the 20th century—nearly 450 years after the conquest" (<http://lalagunafilm.com>). Why do you think the Lacandon Maya avoided contact for so long? How might it be possible for the Maya to sustain their culture and traditional way of life in the future?

Chiapas is one of the poorest states in Mexico, with one of the largest Indigenous populations. What does that tell you about the treatment of Indigenous people in Mexico? How does it compare with Canada's treatment of Indigenous people, both past and present?

How would you describe Aaron Schock's style of documentary filmmaking in *La Laguna*? Consider the subject matter, main themes, subjective or objective perspectives, and the presence or absence of the filmmaker in the film. Why do you think Schock chose to make this film in this way?

The final scene of the film shows Yu'uk in an urban setting, presumably making his way to his new school in Tumbo. How does this environment compare with that of his home? What challenges do you think he will face in this new setting?

QUOTATIONS FROM THE FILM TO EXPLORE

1. *"My dad says that Hachakyum, he made it all. He made the sky, the water, the earth. When we die, we will go back to the water. We will return to the lagoon."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
2. *"I don't know what Mexico is. Is it a city? I am not too sure."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
3. *"When the moon turns black, the people will rise from the laguna. When the last world ended, there was a lot of rain, and a huge flood. All the people died. There was only water. Then god made the world again. A new one. And he made us, the people. And when the hour comes, when this world ends, the earth will burn and he will make another world."* José Valenzuela Chan K'in, Yu'uk's father
4. *"We are from the earth and we will end up like the earth. Only bones will be left."* José Valenzuela Chan K'in, Yu'uk's father
5. *"What are we going to do about Yu'uk? Is he going to school or to the fields?"* Luisa Solorzano Lopez, Yu'uk's mother
6. *"Before the foreigners came, I didn't know any Spanish. Neither did my dad. We used to run from the people we saw. But now I don't run. Now I speak a little Spanish."* José Valenzuela Chan K'in, Yu'uk's father
7. *"This year, there's nothing in the field. The rain came, the beans got wet, they rotted. Now, there's nothing to eat, only tortillas."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
8. *"My mom wants me to go away to school in Tumbo in another town, far away. So I can get a job."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
9. *"If you planted corn, or if you made tortilla or atole, you left an offering here. If you talked to them, they answered. They could do things for you, if you believed in the gods.... They're here, you just can't see them. No one talks to the gods anymore."* Geraldo Lopez Martin, Yu'uk's uncle
10. *"I am not Mexican. I'm Mayan."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
11. *"Before, the Maya were the ones giving the orders. And everything that there is, it all belonged to the Maya."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
12. *"I think there are people in the ruins, but you can't see them."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
13. *"I will go to Tumbo. I'll help my mom with what she has to do."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
14. *"That there is no sickness in our family, that we are all healthy when the crops arrive, that we don't find any snakes in our path. Hachakyum, Hachakyum."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano
15. *"He [José] knows how to fish and he knows how to swim. He'll learn more as he grows older. I love him a lot."* Yu'uk Felix Valenzuela Solorzano

CULMINATING ACTIVITY: AN EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOR METZABOK

La Laguna highlights the divide between the Mexican education system and the traditional knowledge of the Lacandon Mayans. The education that Yu'uk and his brother, José, receive at their local school fails to acknowledge their cultural background; furthermore, at the end of the film, Yu'uk must leave his family and traditional land behind in order to continue learning in the Mexican school system.

Imagine that you have been chosen to create a new school in Metzabok that bridges the gap between traditional Mayan ways of life and modern Mexican culture. You must design an educational model that teaches foundational skills such as reading and writing, but also addresses students' cultural background and prepares them to become leaders in their community.

Use examples of Mayan culture and traditional knowledge from the film as a starting point for your project.

For further context, read Article 14 of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which relates to education (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf). You can also check out Schools for Chiapas to learn about their alternative, Indigenous-centred education model (<http://www.schoolsforchiapas.org>).

You may present the plan for your school in the form of a written report, PowerPoint presentation, video, visual board or other presentation mode of your choice. Be sure to include the following information about your school:

- Name and motto
- Vision and overall objectives
- Design of the physical space (i.e., a floorplan, images of the classroom spaces or a detailed description)
- Outline of the curriculum (i.e., subjects taught, language(s) of instruction, etc.)
- How the school will benefit the students and the community of Metzabok (i.e., sustain traditional knowledge, provide opportunities for employment, etc.)

ACTIVITY RUBRIC: AN EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOR METZABOK

Knowledge/Understanding

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5.0	
Understanding of Mayan cultural context, as presented in the film	Student demonstrates a limited understanding of the cultural context	Student demonstrates a moderate understanding of the cultural context; few examples of cultural practices are provided	Student demonstrates a considerable understanding of the cultural context; several examples of cultural values and traditions are provided	Student demonstrates a high level of understanding of the cultural context; many detailed examples of cultural values and traditions are provided	/5

Thinking and Inquiry

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5.0	
Ability to research, synthesize and organize information	Student demonstrates a limited ability to research, synthesize and organize information	Student demonstrates a moderate ability to research, synthesize and organize information	Student demonstrates a considerable ability to research, synthesize and organize information	Student demonstrates an excellent ability to research, synthesize and organize information	/5

Application

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5.0	
Ability to make connections within and between various contexts	Student makes connections within and between various contexts with limited effectiveness	Student makes connections within and between various contexts with some effectiveness	Student makes connections within and between various contexts with considerable effectiveness	Student makes connections within and between various contexts with a high degree of effectiveness	/5

Communication

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5.0	
Overall structure and clarity of language	The plan is poorly structured and contains numerous grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	The plan is loosely structured and contains some grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	The plan has a coherent structure and is largely free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	The plan is well-structured and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors	/5
Presentation (originality of ideas, audience engagement)	Student's work lacks original ideas and does little to engage audience	The student presents few original ideas and engages audience with limited effectiveness	Student presents some original ideas and effectively engages audience	Student presents innovative ideas in a highly engaging and creative way	/5

Comments:

Total: _____/25

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 7 & 8 Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience. • draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience. • use editing, proofreading and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression and present their work effectively. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.
Grade 7 & 8 Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze some challenges and opportunities presented by the physical environment and ways in which people have responded to them. • investigate issues related to the interrelationship between human settlement and sustainability from a geographic perspective. • analyze some interrelationships among factors that contribute to global inequalities, with a focus on inequalities in quality of life, and assess various responses to these inequalities.
Grade 9–12 English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience. • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.
Grade 10–12 Media Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of how media art works reflect personal and cultural identity, and affect personal, cultural and community values and their awareness of those values. • demonstrate an understanding of the sociocultural and historical contexts of media arts. • demonstrate an understanding of responsible practices associated with producing, presenting and experiencing media art works.
Grade 11 Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore topics related to anthropology, psychology and sociology, and formulate questions appropriate to each discipline to guide their research. • use a sociological perspective to explain how diverse factors influence and shape individual and group social behaviour. • use an anthropological perspective to explain how diverse factors influence and shape human behaviour and culture.
Grade 12 Challenge and Change in Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the causes and effects of social change. • demonstrate an understanding of how forces influence and shape social patterns and trends. • demonstrate an understanding of how various social structures and conditions support or limit global inequalities. • assess the impact of globalization on individuals and groups.
Grade 11 & 12 Equity Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore topics related to equity and social justice, and formulate questions to guide their research. • demonstrate an understanding of a range of perspectives on and approaches to equity and social justice issues, and of factors that affect inequity and social injustice. • analyze, in historical and contemporary contexts, the dynamics of power relations and privilege as well as various factors that contribute to power or marginalization.
Grade 12 World Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the elements and functions of culture and of the nature of cultural influence. • analyze how cultural identities are socially constructed, preserved, transmitted and transformed. • analyze specific cultural expressions and a range of factors that can affect them. • demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of power relations within specific cultural groups and between minority and majority cultures.

Grade 12 Issues of Indigenous People in a Global Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify some of the challenges to maintaining their identities that Indigenous communities throughout the world encounter in a highly industrialized world. • demonstrate an understanding of the commonality of world views of Indigenous peoples around the world. • describe a variety of approaches that Indigenous peoples are taking to preserve and maintain indigenous knowledge as it relates to such things as culture, language and the environment.
Grade 11 World Religions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain some of the ways people use religions and belief traditions to meet human needs. • analyze ways in which various religions and belief traditions conceptualize the journey of life as a spiritual journey and quest for meaning. • identify and analyze ways in which various religions and belief traditions are embodied in cultural forms. • demonstrate an understanding of how concepts of place influence the teachings and practices of various world religions and belief traditions.
Grade 12 Working with School-Age Children and Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of how developmentally appropriate environments and experiences promote healthy development. • demonstrate the ability to plan developmentally appropriate programs for school-age children and adolescents. • demonstrate an understanding of how a variety of social and cultural factors affect school-age children and adolescents.

The Overall Expectations listed above are from the *Ontario Curriculum*. Complete course descriptions, including all Overall and Specific Expectations, can be found at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html>