

## MENSTRUAL MAN



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# MENSTRUAL MAN

Directed by Amit Virmani

2013 | Singapore, India | 63 min

In Hindi, Tamil and English, with English subtitles

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of *Menstrual Man* 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

Some folks squirm at mention of a woman's period... not Arunachalam Muruganantham. Considered a madman and pervert by his community, he ignores his detractors and makes his dream—low-cost sanitary pads made by and for rural Indian women—a reality. Using manually operated machines, Muruganantham's microbusiness model is focused on something more important than profits: providing sustainable employment, hygiene and emancipation to women who would otherwise go without. He's a man with a million-dollar idea—except money has nothing to do with it. His goal is to make a livelihood, not to accumulate wealth; to operate at a human scale, not a multinational one. *Menstrual Man* is the inspiring story of a hero who rises above poverty and a lack of education to become a superstar social entrepreneur in the business of breaking cultural taboos and re-inventing the economic pyramid. Muruganantham is leading a movement, not a company. And it's spreading. **Angie Driscoll**

Source: <http://www.hotdocs.ca>

### The Filmmaker

Amit Virmani's debut, *Cowboys in Paradise*, was one of the most talked-about Asian documentaries in recent years. The controversial film was featured on CNN, BBC and various international media, and broadcast on channels including CBC and RT. Regarded as a valuable counterpoint to *Eat, Pray, Love*, it has also been incorporated into various Women Studies curricula and screened on more than 100 campuses around the world. Amit is a graduate of Southwestern University, Texas, where he was honoured with the Feminist Voices Award. He lives in Singapore. *Menstrual Man* is his second film.

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## 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

Based on the title of the film, *Menstrual Man*, have students make three predictions about the documentary. As a class, discuss students' predictions.

Have students form small groups and, together with their group members, discuss how information about menstruation has been presented to them from their family members, teachers, friends, cultural community, etc. Ask them to reflect on the way that menstruation is represented in mainstream society and the media, and to note any existing taboos surrounding this issue.

The film features women's stories from villages in the following three states of India: Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Have students participate in a jigsaw activity to learn about these regions. Divide students into groups and assign one state to each group. Ask students to research their assigned state based on population, geography, economics, culture, education, etc. After students have become "experts" in their region, have them form groups of three to join with "experts" of the other regions and share their expertise with one another.

Have students research menstrual hygiene products (also referred to as "feminine hygiene products"). Ask them to make a chart recording the name of each product, how it is used, the pros and cons of using it, and the cost.

### Viewing Activities

Have students make notes about one or more of the individuals featured in the film. Have them record important information, observations and descriptions about each individual. What is their role in the film? How is their story represented?

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.

Ask students to record the chapter titles that introduce each segment of the film. After watching, have students think critically about why filmmaker, Amit Virmani, chose to structure the documentary in this way.

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.

Ask students to record important facts and statistics that appear throughout the film. After the film, compile a list of these facts as a class. Ask students to analyze how they are presented and how they contribute to our understanding of the film.

### Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss students' initial reactions to the film and featured individuals. Did their feelings evolve over the course of the film? What moments or scenes from the film stood out for them?

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 from the Pre-Viewing Activity and discuss whether their initial impressions were changed, altered or enhanced by the film.

Have students record the steps involved in Muruganantham's process of designing, creating and testing sanitary pads. As a class, discuss the challenges and obstacles he faced during this process. How did he resolve these issues? What motivated him to persevere?

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>

The women featured in *Menstrual Man* speak of the many taboos surrounding menstruation in India. Have students make a list of the taboos and restrictions mentioned by the women in the film. As a class, discuss the ways in which Muruganantham's sanitary pad movement is challenging these beliefs and ending the stigma around menstruation.

Muruganantham's story has been made into a feature Bollywood film called *Pad Man*. Have students watch the trailer for the movie (<http://www.youtube.com/> Type "Pad Man Official Trailer" into the search function of the website). Based on what they can infer from the trailer alone, have students complete a similarities and differences chart comparing the Bollywood version and the documentary version of Muruganantham's story. What aspects of his life are highlighted in the movie versus the documentary? How do these two methods of storytelling compare?

Muruganantham calls his sanitary pad business a "de-centralized micro-model" that presents an alternative to the centralized macro-business model. Have students work in pairs to research centralized and de-centralized business models and come up with a diagram or visual representation of both models. Ask them to consider the following: Where is power concentrated? Who has ownership? Who benefits economically?

*Menstrual Man* features the stories of Guddiya and Tara, two women from different villages and regions of India who have become part of Muruganantham's sanitary pad movement. Ask students to consider the experiences of these women and have them write a journal entry from the perspective of a woman employed in a rural sanitary pad factory. Students can use the following questions as writing prompts: How have her thoughts about menstruation changed since she has become part of the sanitary pad movement? How is she helping to spread awareness among other women? How has employment impacted her life and her self-perception?

At one point in the documentary, Muruganantham emphatically states: "I say just empower women. It's nothing but empowering the country." As a class, discuss the connection between women's empowerment and the well-being of a country or society at large.

## WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

### About the Film

<http://www.menstrualman.com>

### Additional Resources

*BBC:* A 2014 article by Vibeke Venema, entitled "The Indian Sanitary Pad Revolutionary," provides a written account of Muruganantham's story, including information about how his low-cost sanitary pad movement has grown internationally. Students can read this article to reinforce their understanding from the documentary and to learn more about Muruganantham's movement.

<http://www.bbc.com/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*EcoFemme:* Students can browse this website to learn about Eco Femme, a women-led social enterprise based in Tamil Nadu, India. The organization promotes healthy and sustainable practices by producing and selling cloth pads and providing menstrual health education to adolescents. Students can read and watch featured videos to learn about their campaigns and their unique approach to menstrual hygiene and education.

<https://ecofemme.org>

*Menstrual Hygiene Day:* This website provides a wealth of information and resources about menstrual health. Students can browse the Campaign Resources tab for information and infographics about Menstrual Hygiene Day. Students can also click on Resources on MHM to access several reports, articles and factsheets.

<http://menstrualhygieneday.org>

*Menstrupedia:* This is the official website for Aditi Gupta's friendly guide to periods and educational comic book called Menstrupedia. Students can access the first chapter of the comic book on the home page of the website, as well as a variety of educational resources under the Learn tab.

<https://www.menstrupedia.com>

*period.:* This webpage features a poem and photo essay by Rupri Kaur, who aims to challenge the taboo around women's menstruation through vividly realistic images of this natural phenomenon. Students can critically reflect on Kaur's words and images, as well as analyze their initial impressions and reactions to this work.

<https://rupikaur.com/period>

*Poulomi Basu:* Artist, storyteller and activist, Poulomi Basu focuses on the physical controls imposed on women during menstruation in Nepal and India in her work, "Ritual of Exile." Students can interpret the photographs and multimedia images included on this webpage based on their understanding of menstrual taboos in this region of the world.

<http://www.poulomibasus.com/aroo>

*TED Talk:* Students can watch Aditi Gupta's talk, "A Taboo-Free Way to Talk About Periods," to hear Gupta's own journey of breaking the taboo about menstruation for herself and spreading awareness about menstruation through a culturally sensitive and informative comic book that she created.

<http://www.ted.com/> Type the name of the talk into the search function of the website.

*TED Talk:* Arunachalam Muruganantham's talk "How I Started a Sanitary Napkin Revolution" provides students with a funny and informative firsthand account of his story.

<http://www.ted.com/> Type the name of the talk into the search function of the website.

*TEDxDumas:* In a talk entitled "Men Need to Talk About Menstruation," speaker Pravin Nikam discusses his work in low-income communities in India to end the stigma around menstruation. This video encourages men and women to speak openly about menstruation and it provides students with another perspective on many of the issues raised in *Menstrual Man*.

<https://www.youtube.com/> Type of the name of the talk into the search function of the website.

*The Guardian:* In an article entitled "We're Having a Menstrual Liberation: How Periods Got Woke," journalist Abigail Radnor discusses the new period movement that is breaking the stigma around menstruation and creating a culture of "period positivity." Students can read this article to understand the current wave of period activism shaping the world as well as the taboos about menstruation that still exist.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/nov/11/periods-menstruation-liberation-women-activists-abigail-radnor>



*Women in the World:* An article entitled "Menstruation Activists Fight to End a Stigmatizing—And Sometimes Life-Threatening—Taboo," published on December 1, 2017, highlights the work of "menstrual activists" who are attempting to make menstruation visible and dispel the myths surrounding this subject. Students can read the article to learn about menstrual activism and relate it to Muruganatham's movement in India.

<https://womenintheworld.com/> Type the name of the article into the search function of the website.

*PBS NewsHour:* A PBS news segment, titled "This Innovator Is Trying to Make Sanitary Pads Affordable for Women in India," provides greater insight into Muruganatham's personal story. Students can watch this video to gain a different perspective on his story and to consolidate their knowledge from the documentary.

<https://www.youtube.com/> Type the title of the video into the search function of the website.

*SHE:* A video entitled "Production of Go! Pads in Ngoma, Rwanda" shows how the organization Sustainable Health Enterprises (SHE) is producing sanitary pads for women in Rwanda. Students can watch this video to compare the way these pads are manufactured with the process that Muruganatham uses in *Menstrual Man*.

<http://www.youtube.com/> Type the name of the video into the search function of the website.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

Describe how the young women at the beginning of the film react when their teacher attempts to speak openly about menstruation and feminine hygiene products. How does this compare with your experience of learning about these issues in school? What do you think could be changed in order to make students feel more comfortable when learning about menstruation?

The film identifies that the majority of women in India do not use sanitary pads; rather, they use cloth rags, husk, sand or even ash. What is the problem with using these other materials? What effect do they have on women's health? What barriers prevent women from using pads?

Throughout the documentary, clips from Bollywood films are included and interspersed with Muruganantham's story. Why do you think filmmaker Amit Virmani chose to include these clips? How do they contribute to the narrative or entertainment value of the film?

How was Muruganantham perceived when he began creating and testing his sanitary pads? How was he regarded by his family and community members and why did they treat him in this way? How did their attitude towards him change over the course of the film?

Muruganantham describes the sanitary pad movement as a "women-to-women" business model. Why do you think it is important for women to drive the production, distribution, branding and sales of sanitary pads in their communities?

Aditi Mittal, the stand-up comedian featured in the film, comments on the ridiculous nature of advertisements for sanitary napkins in India. She claims that it would be nice to see "something more relevant" depicted in the media. How does her description of the commercials from India compare with advertisements for feminine hygiene products in Canada? Do you think anything could be done to market these products in a more relevant or realistic way?

Muruganantham describes his sanitary pad movement as a "woman-to-woman model." What role do the women in the film play in spreading awareness? How do they go about changing the mindset of the other women in their communities?

In the film, we learn that 23 per cent of women stop attending school after the onset of menstruation. Why do so many women drop out of school at this stage in their lives?

Muruganantham states that the machine he engineered to produce his sanitary napkins is very simple and resembles a skeleton, or the bare bones of a machine. Why does he choose to maintain this simplicity instead of adding more features? How does this benefit the women's groups and non-government organizations who work with these machines in rural villages?

What kind of growth does Muruganantham envision for his low-cost sanitary pad movement? How do you see evidence of this growth in the film? Do you think his goals are realistic based on his current business model?

## QUOTATIONS FROM THE FILM TO EXPLORE

1. *"What I'm following is the Butterfly Model of Business. It will suck honey from the flower but cause no harm to the flower."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
2. *"Whatever your business, address a problem faced by the common public."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
3. *"There is that constant taboo effect on everything that happens inside a woman's pants. Her family honour rests there."* Aditi Mittal, stand-up comedian
4. *"Finally, India needed a school dropout to make sanitary pads for Indian women."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
5. *"I'd see some friends walking towards me. They'd change their route! Meanwhile, my wife thought I was using this sanitary pad research as a trump card to speak secretly with women and to roam with the girls. I had become a pervert."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
6. *"Because I'm uneducated, I kept going. If you're educated, what would happen? You'd stop. Why? People are only using education as a tool to survive, not to achieve something."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
7. *"Now because of my research and the machines that resulted from it, I was capable of creating sustainable rural employment for women like my mother."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
8. *"My mindset has changed. I've built a new life for myself. I used to be afraid to speak. I'd barely say anything. I'd speak when spoken to but otherwise I'd stay silent. It was as if I didn't exist. But now? If others don't start the conversation, I will."* Guddiya
9. *"Any rural woman can learn this process in a single day. In this way we are creating rural employment as well as improving hygiene among rural women. That is called rural marketing. That is called empowering a country. That is called empowering a woman."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
10. *"I don't want to scale up. I want to scale deep. Or branch out everywhere like a movement."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
11. *"There are some taboos which can never be wiped out from India.... Seclusion for five days is a norm for the menstruating kids. She's not allowed to visit any public places.... It accounts to untouchability."* Dr. S. Uman Shankari
12. *"Women must advance themselves. They fall behind because they're afraid of men.... They should insist on standing shoulder-to-shoulder with any man. Nowadays, women are advancing further and further. And they can do anything men can."* Tara
13. *"Women don't have the proper materials, so they feel insecure about their periods."* Sister Teresa, MPVEDS Village Development Society
14. *"To do social entrepreneurship, we need people. Not money."* Arunachalam Muruganantham
15. *"Yes, you must be crazy to dream something big. To achieve something big. That's all."* Arunachalam Muruganantham



## **CULMINATING ACTIVITY: RESPONDING TO THE ISSUE**

Imagine that you are working with a team that is leading a public awareness campaign about the importance of menstrual hygiene in India. Your goal is to raise awareness about this issue using a combination of factual information, engaging visuals and creative presentation skills.

For this activity, you will work in small groups (no more than six students per group) to research, create and present your menstrual hygiene campaign. You may choose to present information for your campaign in the form of a video, poster, PowerPoint presentation, puppet show, community theatre piece, etc. Choose your medium with your target audience in mind (e.g., girls, young women, young men, older women, older men, etc.). Keep in mind that this subject is still considered taboo in Indian society, so you should present information in an inoffensive and easily digestible way for your audience.

Your presentation must include:

- At least three facts related to menstruation and/or menstrual hygiene
- A solution to address these issues in an affordable and accessible way
- Evidence of teamwork (make sure everyone is involved)
- Creativity!

# ACTIVITY RUBRIC: RESPONDING TO THE ISSUE

## Knowledge and Understanding

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Understanding of the issue and inclusion of at least three relevant facts	Student demonstrates a limited understanding of the issue and has included fewer than two relevant facts	Student demonstrates a moderate understanding of the issue and has included fewer than three relevant facts	Student demonstrates a considerable understanding of the issue and has included three relevant facts	Student demonstrates a high level of understanding of the textual form and has included more than three relevant facts	/5

## Thinking and Inquiry

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Use of creative thinking to present a solution to the issue	Student demonstrates a limited ability to think creatively and generate a solution	Student demonstrates a moderate ability to think creatively and present a solution	Student demonstrates a considerable ability to think creatively and present a solution	Student demonstrates an excellent ability to think creatively and present an innovative and creative solution	/5

## Application

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
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	
Delivery and audience engagement (clear presentation skills, creativity)	Delivery was unclear and the student did not attempt to engage the audience	Delivery was somewhat clear and the student engaged the audience in parts of the presentation	Delivery was clear and the student engaged the audience for the majority of the presentation	Delivery of the was very clear and the student engaged the audience throughout the presentation	/5
Collaboration and effective communication with group members	Student demonstrated a limited attempt to collaborate and communicate with group members	Student demonstrated a moderate attempt to collaborate and communicate with group members	Student demonstrated effective collaboration and communication with group members	Student demonstrated excellent collaboration and communication skills with group members	/5

Comments:

Total \_\_\_\_ /25 = \_\_\_\_ /100

## EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 9-12 English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.</li> <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>• create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques.</li> </ul>
Grade 10–12 Media Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the sociocultural and historical contexts of media arts.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of responsible practices associated with producing, presenting and experiencing media art works.</li> </ul>
Grade 9 & 10 Introduction to Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe characteristics and skills associated with successful entrepreneurs and demonstrate an understanding of the contributions to Canadian business of selected entrepreneurs.</li> <li>• analyze the importance of invention and innovation in entrepreneurship.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how businesses respond to needs, wants, supply and demand.</li> <li>• compare types of businesses.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of ethics and social responsibility in business.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and describe the characteristics and contributions of an entrepreneur and the factors affecting successful entrepreneurship.</li> <li>• assess the attitudes and attributes possessed by an enterprising employee.</li> <li>• analyze activities and experiences to identify those that develop enterprising skills in managing risks, using creative-thinking and problem-solving techniques and sharing ideas.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe the process by which goods and services are exchanged.</li> <li>• explain how marketing influences consumers and competition.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the importance of marketing research to a business.</li> <li>• analyze marketing strategies used by organizations in the not-for-profit sector.</li> <li>• explain the stages of product development.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the strategies involved in the promotion of goods, services and events.</li> </ul>
Grade 12 Business Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess the role of management within an organization.</li> <li>• evaluate the impact of issues related to ethics and social responsibility on the management of organizations.</li> <li>• evaluate the strategies used by individuals and organizations to manage stress and conflict.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the various organizational structures used to manage the workforce effectively.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Regional Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess quality of life in the selected region, including factors that contribute to quality of life and policies/ programs that aim to improve it.</li> <li>• analyze aspects of inequality and economic sustainability in the selected region, including programs intended to promote equality and sustainability.</li> <li>• analyze economic activity in the selected region as well as factors that contribute to the region's economic development.</li> </ul>

Grade 12 World Issues: A Geographic Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>analyze relationships between quality of life and access to natural resources for various countries and regions.</li> <li>analyze the influence of governments, groups and individuals on the promotion and management of social change.</li> <li>analyze impacts of selected agents of change on society and quality of life.</li> <li>analyze issues relating to human rights, food security, healthcare and other challenges to the quality of life of the world's population.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 & 12 Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>analyze aspects of economic growth/development, including its costs, benefits and sustainability.</li> <li>analyze the relationship between scarcity and choice and how these considerations affect economic decision making.</li> <li>demonstrate an understanding of various macroeconomic models and measures, including indicators used to measure economic inequalities, and assess their usefulness.</li> <li>explain the main causes and effects of global economic disparities and assess the effectiveness of responses to these disparities.</li> </ul>
Grade 12 World Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explore topics related to world cultures and/or cultural groups, and formulate questions to guide their research.</li> <li>analyze specific cultural expressions and a range of factors that can affect them.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 & 12 Equity Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explore topics related to equity and social justice and formulate questions to guide their research.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>analyze, in historical and contemporary contexts, the dynamics of power relations and privilege as well as various factors that contribute to power or marginalization.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Dynamics of Human Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate an understanding of the components of personal well-being, how to achieve and maintain it and its importance throughout the life course.</li> <li>demonstrate an understanding of how self-concept influences an individual's interactions with others.</li> <li>identify the roles people have in various relationships.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Health for Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain how personal factors and individual health practices or behaviours influence personal health.</li> <li>identify the key social determinants of health and the factors that shape them, and explain how they influence personal health.</li> <li>demonstrate the ability to assess the quality of health information and use credible health information to make informed decisions and take appropriate action about matters affecting their health.</li> <li>demonstrate the ability to influence and support others in making positive health choices.</li> </ul>
Grade 9–12 Healthy Active Living Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate an understanding of factors that contribute to healthy development.</li> <li>demonstrate the ability to apply health knowledge and living skills to make reasoned decisions and take appropriate actions relating to their personal health and well-being.</li> </ul>

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>