The Film

“A film like Hoop Dreams is what the movies are for. It takes us, shakes us and makes us think in new ways about the world around us. It gives us the impression of having touched life itself.” Roger Ebert

Originally intended as a PBS short about two kids from Chicago’s projects, Hoop Dreams became a six-year observation on race, poverty, class and the American Dream. When it failed to garner an Academy Award nomination in the documentary feature category, public outcry led to an overhaul of how films are nominated. More than two decades after its 1994 release, the film’s issues and themes are still incredibly relevant and the characters no less compelling. The stories of Arthur Agee and William Gates sadly reflect a reality many youth face today, where opportunity is obstructed and the hopes of many are a burden on a few.

Alexander Rogalski

Source: http://www.hotdocs.ca

The Filmmakers

Since the start of production of Hoop Dreams in 1987, for which he served as director, producer, and co-editor, Steve James has since then become one of the most acclaimed documentary makers of his generation, with noted works being Stevie, The New Americans, The War Tapes, At the Death House Door, The Interrupters, and most recently, Life Itself. Steve’s first film Hoop Dreams won every major critics award in 1994, as well as a Peabody and Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award in 1995. The film earned James the Directors Guild of America Award and the MTV Movie Award for Best New Filmmaker. Recently, Hoop Dreams was selected for the Library of Congress’ National Film Registry, signifying the film’s enduring importance to American film history, and hailed by critic Roger Ebert as “the great American documentary.”

Source: https://kartemquin.com

Educational package written and compiled by Dimitra Tsanos
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VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

The following three sub-sections 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 trailer for the film (https://www.kartemquin.com/films/hoop-dreams). Have students work in small groups to try to identify themes or ideas conveyed by the trailer. As a larger group, discuss with students how effective/affective the trailer is as a media piece.

After watching the trailer, have students complete a KWL chart. In the K column, have them write notes on what they already know about urban poverty in Chicago, and/or the documentary. In the W column, they should ask questions they would like answered. Students should complete the L column after they have watched the documentary.

Print several of the questions or quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide onto individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or with partners to discuss if they agree with the ideas.

Set a purpose for viewing by having a discussion about one or more of the questions or quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide. Have them share the statement and what they think or believe about it with the class.

Have students define and discuss the following terms (a) dream, (b) persistence, (c) urban poverty, (d) streetball, (e) family, (f) domestic abuse, (g) role model, (h) talent scout (i) urban blight, (j) social class and (k) racial segregation.

Have students choose one of the terms listed above. They can use a word organizer, by dividing a box in four. In each of the four boxes, have them write in one corner the following: Definition, Non-Examples, Examples and Use in a Sentence. Ask the class their opinion about the word. Take it up as a class.

Have a class discussion about the “American Dream.” Dictionary.com defines it as “the ideals of freedom, equality and opportunity traditionally held to be available to every American; a life of personal happiness and material comfort as traditionally sought by individuals in the US.” Ask students what they think the American Dream is. Ask students how the American Dream has changed over time. Also ask students how diverse cultures view the American Dream. Ask students how the American Dream can be seen similarly in Canada.

Have a class discussion about the correlation between the stability of a family and the occurrence of poverty. A Time magazine article from June 13, 2013, titled “What Part Family Plays in Poverty,” discusses the topic and can help with the discussion (http://time.com/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website).

Have students learn about the history of Chicago. Time magazine published an article from April 22, 2013, titled “City at a Crossroads: Chicago Confronts Urban Blight, 1954,” which includes a series of photos of urban slums in Chicago in 1953 (http://time.com/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website). Also show the class a photo essay depicting the history of the Cabrini Green Housing neighbourhood that William lived in, titled “The End of Cabrini-Green” (http://time.com/ Type the title of the photo essay into the search function of the website). The housing development was torn down with mixed income units in December 2010.

Have a class discussion on the importance of urban renewal. Use a case study of a neighbourhood called Regent Park in Toronto, a publicly funded housing project which became a poverty trap for many low income families (http://www.torontohousing.ca/ Type “Regent Park” into the search function of the website). The project underwent revitalization starting in 2005, and involving housing over 12,500 residents through a project lasting 15 to 20 years, turning what was once solely a social housing development into a self-sufficient mixed-income, multi-use community. The Metcalf Foundation has created a publication titled “Regent Park: A Story of Collective Impact” discusses the history and purpose of the project (http://metcalffoundation.com/ Type the title of the publication into the search function of the website).
Have a class discussion about racial segregation and urban poverty in Chicago. An article from the *Chicago Reader* from August 21, 2013, titled "A Dream Unrealized for African-Americans in Chicago" discusses how the issues from the 1960s are still present due to a number of factors (http://www.chicagoreader.com/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website). Another article from the *Chicago Reader* from February 10, 2011 titled "Separate, Unequal and Ignored" discusses racial segregation and provides many maps of the city, illustrating the divided communities by ethnicity since the 1970s (http://www.chicagoreader.com/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website).

**Viewing Activities**

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.

Have students jot down five ideas for discussion, or questions that the film raised in their minds.

The film was organized by the period William and Arthur were in school: pre-high school, freshman year, sophomore year, junior year and senior year. Have students make a chart organizing the events from each period that took place over a five-year time frame.

Have students use a Venn diagram to compare William and Arthur throughout the film.

The film includes a number of themes: urban poverty, persistence, people’s dreams and failures, desperation versus hope, overcoming obstacles, maternal struggle, friends and family support, lack of a strong paternal role model, domestic abuse, drugs and money. Have students take notes for each theme using a chart.

**Post-Viewing Activities**

Show the students their quotations from the Pre-Viewing Activity and see if their opinions were changed, altered or enhanced by the film.

Assign some of the questions and quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide for homework to be taken up the next day in class. Check for completion.

Have students complete an exit note (a single small sheet of paper with one phrase or idea written on it) that demonstrates one thing they have learned, felt or decided as a result of watching the film.

Discuss with students their initial reactions to the various scenes and situations addressed in the film.

Do a follow-up of the KWL chart Pre-Viewing Activity. Students will work with an elbow partner to review the questions posed in column two of the KWL chart and complete column three.

Have students choose one of the events from the film and write a diary entry as if they were part of the event.

Have a class discussion about social class and the achievement gap for students in school. *Psychology Today* has an article from January 29, 2013, titled “The Achievement Gap Between Privileged and Poor,” that discusses the reasons behind the gap (https://www.psychologytoday.com/ Type the name of the article into the search function of the website).

Have a class discussion about how athletics can help students focus in school. Ask students if they are in school clubs and on teams and if this helps them succeed at school. A *Time* magazine article from April 7, 2011, titled “Low Graduation Rates: It's Not Just Student-Athletes,” discusses how athletes can have higher achievement rates in college (http://www.time.com/ Type the name of the article into the search function of the website).

Have a class discussion about Canadian basketball players in the NBA. There are 11 active Canadian basketball players in the NBA (https://en.wikipedia.org/ Type “List of Canadians in the National Basketball Association” into the search engine of the website). Have students choose two of these players and write mini biographies on each one. Have students compare each player to Arthur and William. Have students identify any differences and/or similarities in a conclusion to the biographies.

Have students interview and write an article on an athlete in their school who pushes the limits and always strives to be the best they can be in their sport. In addition, the teacher can compile the biography of each athlete selected and create a small newspaper that can be shared at the athletic awards for the school. Each biography could be posted on a bulletin board outside the Physical Education office to
promote athletic leadership in the school.

Have students create a news report identifying a current social issue in one or more of the communities of the city the student lives in. The assignment and rubric, titled Vital Signs Community News Report can be found in the Culminating Activity section of this guide.
WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About the Film

http://www.kartemquin.com/films/hoop-dreams

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hoop-Dreams/108036805883675?ref=tts

Twitter: https://twitter.com/kartemquin?lang=en

Additional Resources

*Arthur Agee Role Model Foundation*: The organization run by Arthur aims to help underprivileged kids to understand that their role models are not professional athletes, but their parents at home.
http://www.arthuragee.org

*CBC Sports*: Canada Rising is a section of Canadian basketball history in the making. It features a series of articles on the men’s and women’s national basketball programs leading up to the 2016 Olympic Games.
http://www.cbc.ca/ Type “Canada Rising” into the search function of the website to view a series of articles on the subject.

*Elite Camps*: A GTA based Hoop Dreams Overnight Basketball Camp is designed for girls and boys ages between 10 and 13 (youth division) and between 13 and 16 (teen division) who are looking to work on their game, learn and have fun playing basketball all day in an outdoor setting.
http://elitecamps.com

*Hoop Dreams Basketball*: Based out of Portland Oregon, their goal is to help youth and competitive basketball players reach their true potential and to help them realize their goals and dreams with basketball.
http://www.hoopdreams.com

*Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity*: Formally called the Institute on Race and Poverty, the University of Minnesota Law school group investigates the ways that laws, policies and practices affect development patterns in US metropolitan regions, with a particular focus on the growing social and economic disparities within these areas.
http://www.law.umn.edu/metro/index.html

*Knowledge is Power Program*: KIPP was created to have a respected, influential and national network of public schools that are successful in helping students from educationally underserved communities develop the knowledge, skills, character and habits needed to succeed in college and the competitive world beyond.
http://www.kipp.org

*National Library of Medicine National Institute of Health*: An article titled “Youth Sport: Positive and Negative Impact on Young Athletes” discusses the pros and cons of having youth in sport.
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*Psychology Today*: A section on sport and competition includes articles about youth sports, competition, professional athletes, performance, sportsmanship, competition and visualization.
www.psychologytoday.com/ Type “sport and competition” into the search function of the website to view a series of articles on the subject.

http://www.si.com/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*The Dissolve*: Operated by Pitchfork Media and based in Chicago, Illinois, the site was focused on reviews, commentary, interviews and news about contemporary and classic films. A feature article titled “Hoop Dreams: An Oral History” provides deep insight on the making of the film.
http://thedissolve.com/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*The Guardian*: An article from February 18, 2015, titled “Hoop Dreams: Where Are the Main Figures Now?” discusses where the film’s main characters are today.
http://www.theguardian.com/ Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*Vital Signs*: After starting in Toronto in 2001, this city report became a national program in 2006 and continues to grow each year across Canada and internationally. The program uses community knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities. It gathers data and publishes reports on significant social and economic trends to illustrate how Canadian communities are faring in key quality-of-life areas.
http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca

*Wikipedia*: The page includes a list of Canadian players in the NBA today.
https://en.wikipedia.org/ Type “List of Canadians in the
National Basketball Association” into the search engine of the website.

Wikipedia: An outline of Isiah Thomas's career.
https://en.wikipedia.org/ Type “Isiah Thomas” into the search engine of the website.

Various Links for Lesson Plan Ideas, Media Awareness, Critical Literacy and Documentary Films

Center for Media Literacy: A US website which provides resources for making, understanding and criticizing media.
http://www.medialit.org

Media Awareness: A Canadian non-profit media education and Internet literacy resource library.
http://www.media-awareness.ca

NFB: Valuable education resources for the classroom.
http://www.nfb.ca

POV: Media literacy questions for analyzing films.
http://pov-tc.pbs.org/pov/docs/POV_medialiteracy.pdf
**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

What factors do you think played a positive part in William and Arthur’s lives?

How does attending a college prep Catholic school like St. Joseph’s seem more ideal than attending a public school like Marshall Metropolitan High School? How does education provide more life opportunities and choices?

What influences people to sponsor a student in financial need? What motivated Patricia Weir to help a complete stranger?

Do you think William and Arthur had control of their life? Did they make their own decisions or were they influenced by others?


How does funding support the success of an athlete? Should the government provide more funding for athletes? Should more scholarships be available to talented athletes? Does athlete financial support and scholarships equal to success? Use William and Arthur as an example.

Why didn’t Arthur receive any financial support like William did from Patricia Weir? Is the system fair? Explain.

What percentage of an athlete’s success do you think is based on skill and how much on mental strength? Explain.

Family support is important. Do you think William and Arthur would have made it without family support? Is it important to have family and friends show support and attend events? Do you prefer your family to attend your school events? Why or why not?

How have William and Arthur earned their achievements? What helped each of them achieve their dreams? Do you think either of the boys reached their goals and dreams? What does success look like for each of the boys?

St. Joseph recruits athletically talented youth from low-income areas. When the school didn’t get the player it expected from Arthur, should they have forgiven him his debts? Why or why not?

Have you ever felt like you were pulled in too many directions with people telling you how you should live your life? Who was telling you what to do? Did you listen to them? Why or why not?

How did you feel about each character as you watched the film? Did it change as you were watching the film? Why or why not?

Will this film bring greater visibility to urban poverty and racial segregation and low-income youth? Explain.

Do you think William or Arthur made it to the NBA? What will their future hold?
1. “I’m trying to let him know right now. You gonna get hurt, you gonna get knocked down, you gonna get banged around, so you better get used to it now.” Curtis Gates, William’s brother

2. “The kids that are willing to do it are going to take away something that will help them for the rest of their life. The kids that are not willing to do it, for whatever reason, are not going to be very successful as far as here.” Coach Gene Pingatore

3. “If I had known all of this was gonna lead to this, Arthur would have never gone to St. Joseph. I mean, if I had known that he was going to go through this type of pain, myself, the anguish of it, and then to put him out in the middle of the school year.” Sheila Agee, Arthur’s mother

4. “It’s just a real hard area to live in period. And for raising kids... kids don’t even have a playground or play area or anything constructive to do in the neighbourhood. But you see why half of them become gang bangers because there’s nothing constructive in the neighbourhood for them. So now, you more or less have to keep your kids close to you and watch them at all times.” Sheila Agee

5. “You know, I say you may not make it to the NBA. He said, ‘Don’t keep on telling me things like that, that’s just like showing me you don’t have any trust in what I do.’ And I say ‘I do, but don’t keep putting everything into this.’ So nobody’s going to take my dream away from me. That’s what I’m going to do.” Sheila Agee

6. “The whole school sees me as being an Isiah Thomas. I’m trying to build my own identity. When I leave, they’re going to be like, ‘He’s going to be the next William Gates!’” William Gates

7. “It hurt everybody, it changed everybody’s attitude. That you can have something today and it’s gone tomorrow.” Sheila Agee

8. “So you know what the system is saying to a lot of women in my predicament? They don’t care.” Sheila Agee

9. “I really thought Curtis was going to make it, but he didn’t make it, so I just wanted this one to make it.” Emma Gates

10. “If he had gone out there [to St. Joseph’s] and played like they had predicted him to play, he wouldn’t be at Marshall, and it don’t take no brilliant person to figure that out.” Luther Bedford, Agee’s new coach at Marshall

11. “You have to realize... that nobody cares about you. You’re black. You’re a young male. All you’re supposed to do is deal drugs and mug women. The only reason why you’re here... you can make their team win. If their team wins, these schools get a lot of money. This whole thing is revolving around money.” Spike Lee, film director

12. “I didn’t think I could do it. And people told me I wasn’t gonna be anything.” Sheila Agee

13. “Do you all wonder sometime how I am living? How my children survive, and how they’re living? It’s enough to really make people want to go out there and just lash out and hurt somebody.” Sheila Agee

14. “One goes out the door, and another one comes in the door. That’s what it’s all about.” Coach Pingatore

15. “It became more of a job than a sport to play.” William Gates

16. “When I had some real problems, I couldn’t go to none of them about it. Y’know, I was having some problems with Catherine’s family and my family, and I said, ‘Coach Pingatore, their family been getting on me about I’m not doing this, and I’m not doing that.’ And the only thing Coach Pingatore could say is, ‘Write them off.’ That was all he told me. I was like, what kind of advice is that?” William Gates

17. “‘I’m going into communications,’ he says, ‘so when you come asking for donations, I’ll know the right way to turn you down.’” William to Coach Pingatore

18. “Y’know, four years ago, that’s all I used to dream about was playing in the NBA. I don’t really dream about it like that anymore. Y’know, even though I love playing basketball, but I want to do other things with my life, too. If I had to stop playing basketball right now, I think I’d still be happy.” William Gates

19. “That’s why when somebody says, ‘When you get to the NBA, don’t forget about me,’ and that stuff. Well, I should’ve said to them, ‘If I don’t make it, don’t you forget about me.’” William Gates
CULMINATING ACTIVITY: VITAL SIGNS COMMUNITY REPORT

Learning Goals:

• Students will identify an urban social issue and explain its significance to effected communities.
• Students will generate an innovative five- to eight-minute video with their recommendations.

Your task in this assignment is to identify and explain the spatial significance of a current social issue in one or more of the communities of the city you live in. You will be using statistics found on the Vital Signs Canada website (http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/ Look under Local Reports) to identify these social issues. Make sure to pick a topic that isn't too big but still has enough information to create a report with.

Topics include:

• Housing issues
• Environment and green space
• Transit
• Employment
• Arts and culture
• Learning
• Gap between rich and poor

Your second task will be to use a geographic perspective to identify non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental organizations and charities that are presently trying to assist with these social concerns. You are to highlight their efforts and report on how successful they have been in alleviating some of these pressing social issues.

Finally you must make recommendations, as the youth of Toronto, as to what programs, charities and modifications might also be needed in your community. You are to finish up with these recommendations in your video.

Product:

The product of this assignment will be a five- to eight-minute-long video in the form of a news broadcast.
## ACTIVITY RUBRIC: VITAL SIGNS COMMUNITY REPORT

### Knowledge/Understanding

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### Thinking/Inquiry

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<td>Information indicates moderately effective research skills with some connections to social issues and the NGOs, governmental organizations and/or charities involved</td>
<td>Information indicates effective research skills with most connections made to social issues and the NGOs, governmental organizations and/or charities involved</td>
<td>Information indicates excellent research skills with all social issues and the NGOs, governmental organizations and/or charities involved are thoroughly examined and considered</td>
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### Communication/Application

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**Descriptive Feedback:**

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<th>COURSE</th>
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| Grade 7 & 8 Languages                        | • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.  
• identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.  
• create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions and techniques.                                                                                           |
| Grade 9-12 English                          | • generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience.  
• identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.  
• demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.                                                                                                                                                   |
| Grade 9 & 10 Physical Education             | • demonstrate an understanding of the importance of being physically active, and apply physical fitness concepts and practices that contribute to healthy, active living.                                                                                           |
| Grade 11 Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology | • use a sociological perspective to explain how diverse factors influence and shape individual and group social behaviour.                                                                                                                                                        |
| Grade 11 Family Studies                     | • demonstrate an understanding of the components of personal well-being, how to achieve and maintain it and its importance throughout the life course.  
• explain how self-concept and self-esteem influence personal well-being.  
• demonstrate an understanding of how self-concept influences an individual’s interactions with others.  
• demonstrate an understanding of effective decision-making processes in a variety of social contexts.                                                                                                         |
| Grade 11 Media Studies                      | • demonstrate understanding of a variety of media texts.  
• deconstruct a variety of types of media texts, identifying the codes, conventions and techniques used and explaining how they create meaning.                                                                                                      |
| Grade 11 Communications Technologies        | • apply project management techniques to the planning and development of audio, video, broadcast journalism, graphic arts and printing products.  
• create products or productions that demonstrate competence in the application of creative and technical skills.                                                                                                      |
| Grade 12 Family Studies                     | • demonstrate an understanding of factors that can affect decisions about whether to have and how to care for children, and of the impact of norms, roles and social institutions on family and parent-child relationships.                                                    |
| Grade 12 Geography                          | • analyze interrelationships between urban environments and quality of life.  
• assess from a geographic perspective the effectiveness of solutions to issues affecting the built environment.                                                                                                           |
| Grade 12 Physical Education                 | • demonstrate an understanding of how the social and cultural significance of physical activity and sport has evolved historically, and analyze current social issues relating to physical activity and sport.  
• demonstrate an understanding of the concept of leadership and of the attributes, skills, and styles needed to be an effective leader.                                                                                      |

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](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html)