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## UNRESERVED: THE WORK OF LOUIE GONG



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# UNRESERVED: THE WORK OF LOUIE GONG

Directed by Tracy Rector

Canada | 2010 | 14 min

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of documentary film by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their classes, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some web links that provide starting points for further research or discussion. In separate packages, there will also be support materials available with information regarding general viewing and teaching principles for documentary film and the fundamental aspects of making documentary films.

### The Film

*Unreserved: The Work of Louie Gong* profiles Seattle-based artist, activist and teacher Louie Gong, who was raised in Ruskin, B.C., and the Nooksack Tribal Community in Washington state. Gong—who is Nooksack, Squamish, Chinese, Scottish and French—designs shoes, T-shirts and skateboard decks using Coast Salish artistic forms. Gong merges contemporary symbols of youth culture with traditional images from Coast Salish art, creating a unique combination of art and attitude that tests the boundary between traditional and contemporary. The film also documents Gong's dismissal of fixed concepts of identity, showing how he combines his mixed-race background to create a fluid self-concept. *Unreserved* has been screened at film festivals around the world, including the Cannes Film Festival.

### The Filmmakers

Director and cinematographer Tracy Rector is from the Seminole Nation. Rector has an M.A. in education and a particular interest in Native American approaches to learning and filmmaking. Her mission is to combine traditional and contemporary forms of education together using a foundation of environmental stewardship. She employs media and film as a storytelling tool.

Educational package written and compiled by Suzanne Methot [suzanne.methot@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:suzanne.methot@tdsb.on.ca)

## VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

There are important themes in this film that have broad implications for students and their futures.

Take time to activate your students' background understanding of these themes before viewing.

This will help them as they come to their own understanding and develop their critical abilities.

The following three subsections, on this page, 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 web links for further investigation.

### Pre-Viewing Activities

View the film trailer on YouTube ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tJEwgd5bmI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tJEwgd5bmI)). Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss the following questions: Why do you think the filmmaker chose to use no dialogue or voiceover in the trailer? How does the use of music prioritize the images in the trailer? Who is the target audience for this media text? How do you know?

Print several of the quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or in pairs to discuss the ideas in the quotations. Then ask them to share their conclusions with the large group. As they discuss the quotations, ask students to think about the following:

- Who is the target audience for this media text? How can you tell?
- How and why does this media text appeal to its target audience?
- How does this media text appeal to you?
- What are the themes of this film?

Have a large-group discussion about one of the quotations from the Extension Activities section of this guide. Ask students to structure their questions and responses around the themes of identity, relationships, sovereignty and challenges.

### Viewing Activities

Have students take notes on the connections they see between the themes in this film and the ones from the Big Questions/Ideas/Themes section of this guide.

Have students describe what they see in the film. Ask them to withhold judgment and observe carefully. They can write notes or give an oral description.

Ask students to create a mind map as they watch the film. The mind map should contain the following key words: characteristics, motivations, values and perspective. To get students started, use the following prompts:

- What characteristics does the main character possess that makes him interesting to watch?
- Are the motivations of the character clear to the viewer?
- What other options does the character have and what are the consequences of his actions?
- What values are being promoted? How do you know this?
- From whose perspective is this story told? How do you know this?

Have students jot down three questions for discussion that the film raises in their minds.

## Post-Viewing Activities

Ask students if the prediction they made after viewing the film trailer was correct. Have them give specific evidence from the film, facts revealed in images or voiceover/dialogue, that supports or disproves their prediction about the target audience.

Have a large-group discussion guided by student questions written during the last Viewing Activity.

Have students revisit the quotations they discussed during the Pre-Viewing Activities. Have a large-group discussion to see whether their opinions have changed after viewing the film.

Show students the short YouTube video about the elements of Coast Salish design ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc3K-MyH3xg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc3K-MyH3xg)). Ask students to write a short essay or stage a large-group debate comparing and contrasting the design elements described in the YouTube video with the elements Louie Gong uses in his art. What are the similarities? Are there any differences? How does Louie Gong combine traditional Salish art forms and contemporary art forms? Do you think his work is successful? If students do the debate, have them prepare questions and statements/positions ahead of time based on the themes in the movie and the above questions.

Have students build a conceptual map showing the web of ideas, topics and associated sub-topics in the film. Using the conceptual map as a guide, ask students to create questions they think will represent the important issues. Then, using the questions and the conceptual map, ask students to make interconnections among elements of the film. This should take the form of an argument, including a thesis statement and evidence from the text. Have students make a final judgment about the text based on the argument they created above. Students will learn that their evaluations and feelings are informed by description, analysis and interpretation. Finally, ask students to reflect on the processes of description, interpretation and evaluation they completed during the Pre-Viewing, Viewing, and Post-Viewing activities. Did these steps help inform their ideas? Ask students to write a personal reflection to summarize what they have learned.

Many Aboriginal cultures have a belief that the people will emerge from a time of darkness (i.e., colonialism and loss of identity) after seven generations. That time is now. First, have a large-group discussion on the concept of the seventh generation and possible meanings for Gong's company name (Eighth Generation). Then ask students to create either an oral presentation or a three-minute video using whatever equipment is available to them (e.g., cellphone or digital camera video) detailing what they think their responsibilities are as members of the eighth generation. To get them started, use the following prompts: How might youth play a role in Aboriginal cultural resurgence in Canada and the U.S.? Across the globe? What examples did we see in the Arab world in 2011 that merged contemporary youth culture and traditional culture to create change? Are there any examples from your own ethno-cultural and/or geographic communities in which change was created by a younger generation at any time in history?

## THE BIG QUESTIONS/IDEAS/THEMES

### Multiple Perspectives

What is the subject of this film? Can you determine the filmmakers' perspective on this subject? What evidence can you find in the film to support your view?

How does this film help you analyze and interpret points of view about issues that concern people?

Does the filmmakers' perspective foster respect for diversity and an inclusive society? If so, how?

### Identity

Whose story is told in this documentary? Whose story is not told? How does this story, and the way it is told, help you understand your own community/life?

How do the people in this film identify with their community? What are the common bonds among the people in this film? What challenges do they face in expressing their identity?

What film techniques do the filmmakers use to convey the identity of the people in this film?

### Citizenship

What insights does this documentary offer about the ideals of good citizenship in the community depicted in this film?

How does the film deal with issues of freedom, equality, human dignity, and individual and collective rights and responsibilities?

### Change and Continuity

How does this film help you understand a community's values and its attitudes towards an issue at a particular time?

What changes do the people in the film experience? What causes those changes? What are the consequences of those changes for the people in the documentary?

### Culture and Community

Which aspects of a people's culture does this film focus on? Why do you think the filmmakers focused on those aspects?

How do the images, themes and message of this film help you understand the filmmakers' attitude towards the subject? What do you think might have been the intended audience's attitude towards the documentary subject?

### Individuals, Societies and Economic Decisions

What economic systems are at work in this film? What are some of the causes and effects of the economic decisions made by the people in the film's community?

Does money play a part in the decisions being made in the film and what does it tell you about their local culture?

### Power and Governance

What system of government control do we see in this documentary? How is power distributed within this society? What are the implications of that distribution on issues affecting the people's well-being and freedom?

### Global Connections

What global issues are addressed in this film? What is the filmmakers' point of view on the opportunities and challenges of those issues?

Adapted from NFB Documentary Lens: <http://www.nfb.ca>

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Have students watch the short YouTube video on Louie Gong's work with youth, originally broadcast on a CTV station in B.C. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wmHTYiZz\\_w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wmHTYiZz_w)). Ask students to create a piece of original art combining something from pop culture and something from their particular traditional culture (ethno-cultural and/or geographic). Then have them write a short statement detailing their thoughts on one or more of the following questions: How might the merger of pop culture and traditional art forms teach people about the relevance of traditional culture to contemporary life? How might "reversing the script"—taking art forms, such as Salish art, that have been appropriated or commercialized and using them on items from pop culture that have been appropriated for this use—teach people about identity, history and the future?

If students complete the Take a Walk In These Shoes Post-Viewing Activity, have them evaluate their classmates' artworks by completing a checklist based on the principles in the rubric. Rather than assign a mark, however, ask students to complete the checklist by writing a comment for each classmate: Do the elements and principles of design used in the artwork communicate meaning successfully?

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

How does the film reflect the relationship between traditional and contemporary influences in Aboriginal cultures?

How does the concept of authenticity relate to the concept of identity? How might someone's personal journey toward self-actualization be affected by notions of "authenticity" in the world around them?

How might the challenges Louie Gong faced as a person of mixed race have led to his current work with youth? How might Gong's mixed background have given him strength and resources to deal with the challenges he has faced in his life?

How might Louie Gong's work with his uncle, John Miranda, and use of yellow and red cedar reflect the ongoing relationship Aboriginal peoples have with the land? How does it reflect a changing relationship with the land?

### Quotations From the Film to Explore

*"For the first part of my life, I lived with my grandma and grandpa... in the same house that my dad and his nine brothers and sisters were raised in... My cousins... also grew up in the same house."* What benefits does the relationship among extended family offer to Aboriginal families? What challenges?

*"My time here in Nooksack really established the foundation for who I am right now, moving in and around different spaces in Seattle. So everything I do is always determined by my experiences growing up in my tribal community and my desire to do things that are relevant to the people who are growing up the same way I did... Something that's meaningful to them."* How does this statement reveal Louie Gong's understanding of how traditional and contemporary beliefs and values influence present-day activities and behaviours? What does it reveal about the relationship between on-reserve and urban communities?

*"I always had a dad who had identified what was important to him and pursued his goals with a lot of passion."* How might the choices of the older generation affect the choices of the younger generation?

*"It's been very difficult for me to find spaces where I felt comfortable being my complete self. There are always these expectations about what it means to be an 'authentic' Native person or to be an 'authentic' Asian person."* Can authenticity ever be fully defined? Can it ever be achieved? Is achieving "authenticity" more difficult for a person of mixed race?

*"[It] really reflects who I am, as a contemporary Native person, who is, on a daily basis, moving back and forth between multiple worlds."* How does Louie Gong's life and art reflect the effort of Aboriginal people to attain autonomy in their lives?

*"I see the shoes as an extension of my activism."* Why might the combination of traditional art forms and an item from pop culture be considered "activism"? What is it about the combination of youth culture and traditional culture that might teach, support, or encourage others?

*"Nobody ever once questioned the fact that I was putting a traditional piece of art on something that is a pop culture icon."* How might Louie Gong's approach to his art minimize negative reactions to the combination of traditional art forms and contemporary objects? How might his choice of object minimize negative reactions?

## POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY: TAKE A WALK IN THESE SHOES

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Mark: \_\_\_\_ /40 (See rubric)

In the film *Unreserved: The Work of Louie Gong*, artist and activist Louie Gong describes how at age 35 he finally went to buy a pair of Vans shoes, something he'd wanted to do since he was a child. But when he got to the store, he didn't see anything that reflected his personal or cultural identity. So he bought a plain pair, and then, using a Sharpie marker, customized them with Coast Salish art forms.

You will be responsible for producing your own pair of customized shoes. You can use an old pair that you or someone in your family no longer wears, or visit a used clothing store to purchase an inexpensive pair. You can use any art media you wish: acrylic paint, permanent marker, fabric marker, fabric, paper or anything else you think will work. You may choose representational or abstract images. You can draw or paint on the shoes or decorate them with collage or decoupage. Do not copy Coast Salish artistic forms; the shoe design must be of your own creation.

Your project should include a summary of the "Basic Tips for Vans and Chucks By Louie Gong" video available on YouTube

at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bo4aRL-wpHo&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bo4aRL-wpHo&NR=1).

Your summary must include Louie Gong's tips as well as answer the five Ws (who, what, when, where and why). You may complete your summary using written or poster format. Your project should also include a one-page artist's statement that lists the project name, your name, the art media used and the context and meaning of the colour and images you chose for your shoe.

Your shoe must reflect images of importance to you, your family or your ethno-cultural/geographic community, as well as the steps you have taken in your life to get where you are today. This can be the story of your life, a challenge you have overcome, a story from your parents or other relatives or the story of your community.

You may also use ideas from the Pre-Viewing, Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities, information from the film, the questions from the Big Ideas section and the rubric categories to help guide your project and your one-page artist's statement.

# TAKE A WALK IN THESE SHOES RUBRIC

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Categories	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
Knowledge and Understanding	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Understands the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates limited knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates some knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates considerable knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity	Demonstrates thorough knowledge of the relationship between artistic creation and identity
Explains the effects that challenges and peoples' response to challenges have on personal and cultural identity	Explains the effects that challenges and peoples' response to challenges have on personal and cultural identity with a limited degree of understanding	Explains the effects that challenges and peoples' response to challenges have on personal and cultural identity with some degree of understanding	Explains the effects that challenges and peoples' response to challenges have on personal and cultural identity with a considerable degree of understanding	Explains the effects that challenges and peoples' response to challenges have on personal and cultural identity with a thorough degree of understanding
Thinking and Inquiry	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Uses critical and creative thinking to create meaningful artistic images that invite viewers to get to know someone by "walking in their shoes"	Applies few of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies some of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies most of the skills involved in an inquiry process	Applies all or almost all of the skills involved in an inquiry process
Communication	5.0 5.2 5.4 5.6 5.8	6.0 6.2 6.4 6.6 6.8	7.0 7.2 7.4 7.6 7.8	8.0 8.2 8.5 9.0 10
Communicates information and ideas through the use of appropriate colour, line and/or imagery	Communicates information and ideas with limited clarity	Communicates information and ideas with some clarity	Communicates information and ideas with clarity	Communicates information and ideas with clarity and insight

## EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 7 The Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create artworks that express feelings, ideas and issues.</li> <li>• explain how the elements and principles of design are used in their own and others' art work to communicate meaning or understanding.</li> <li>• identify and describe some of the ways in which visual art forms and styles reflect the beliefs and traditions of a variety of cultures.</li> </ul>
Grade 8 The Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create artworks that express feelings, ideas and issues.</li> <li>• use elements of design in art works to communicate ideas, messages and understandings for a specific audience and purpose.</li> <li>• analyze ways in which elements and principles of design are used in a variety of art works to communicate a theme or message.</li> </ul>
Grade 9 The Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use materials and processes to create art objects that express their intent.</li> <li>• apply the elements and principles of design.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of connections between art and cultural identity or context.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Native Studies: Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, University/ College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the influences on Aboriginal societies that have an impact on their sense of identity.</li> <li>• describe Aboriginal perspectives related to issues of identity.</li> <li>• describe how Aboriginal peoples adapt to external forces.</li> <li>• identify social, political, and economic issues currently being addressed by Aboriginal individuals and communities in Canada.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, College Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe traditional and contemporary beliefs and values of Aboriginal cultures that influence present-day activities and behaviours.</li> <li>• describe the efforts and actions of Aboriginal communities and individuals to maintain their traditional cultures and languages within traditional land bases, on reserves and in urban settings.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the cultural practices of Aboriginal peoples.</li> <li>• describe how contemporary Aboriginal communities assert their autonomy through a blend of traditional and modern practices.</li> </ul>
Grade 11 Native Studies: Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe how traditional and contemporary beliefs and values of Aboriginal cultures influence present-day activities and behaviours.</li> <li>• identify aspects of cultural identity related to specific Aboriginal peoples.</li> <li>• describe contributions made by Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society.</li> <li>• identify traditional teachings and contemporary beliefs that promote Aboriginal self-determination.</li> <li>• describe the efforts of Aboriginal peoples to attain autonomy in their lives.</li> </ul>

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 11 Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe images in media works related to Aboriginal identity.</li> </ul>
Grade 11/12 English, University/College/ Workplace Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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>• reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding media texts.</li> </ul>

## WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

### About the Film and the Filmmakers

The website for Longhouse Media contains information on the film, the filmmakers' bios and a director's statement, as well as a downloadable press kit.

<http://dnvjostudio.com/client/LHM/test/about.html>

### About the Artist and the Themes in his Artwork

The official website for artist and activist Louie Gong.

<http://www.eighthgeneration.com>

The Wikipedia entry on Coast Salish art is well researched and contains links to several contemporary Salish artists.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coast\\_Salish\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coast_Salish_art)

The website for the MAVIN Foundation contains information on current projects and the mission and history of the organization, which raises awareness about the experiences of mixed-race people and their families.

<http://www.mavinfoundation.org>

The CBC website has an archived article based on a series that aired on CBC Radio One's *The Current*, analyzing the history of mixed-race people and their lived experiences.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/mixedblessings>

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

Using Documentaries in the Classroom: This teacher librarian's personal website contains excellent resources for teaching with documentary films.

[http://www.frankwbaker.com/using\\_docs\\_in\\_the\\_classroom.htm](http://www.frankwbaker.com/using_docs_in_the_classroom.htm)

Media Awareness: A Canadian non-profit media education and Internet-literacy resource library.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

Center for Media Literacy: A U.S. website which provides several resources for making, understanding and criticizing media.

<http://www.medialit.org>

The National Film Board of Canada website: On this site is an area with teaching resources and short documentary films that can be used as teaching aides.

<http://www.nfb.ca>

The Association for Media Literacy: This Canadian website examines how media impacts and influences culture.

<http://www.aml.ca/home>

Hot Docs Looking at Documentaries: A teaching guide that sets out questions designed to help teacher include the study of documentary film in their curriculum.

[http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs\\_for\\_schools/](http://www.hotdocs.ca/youth/docs_for_schools/)