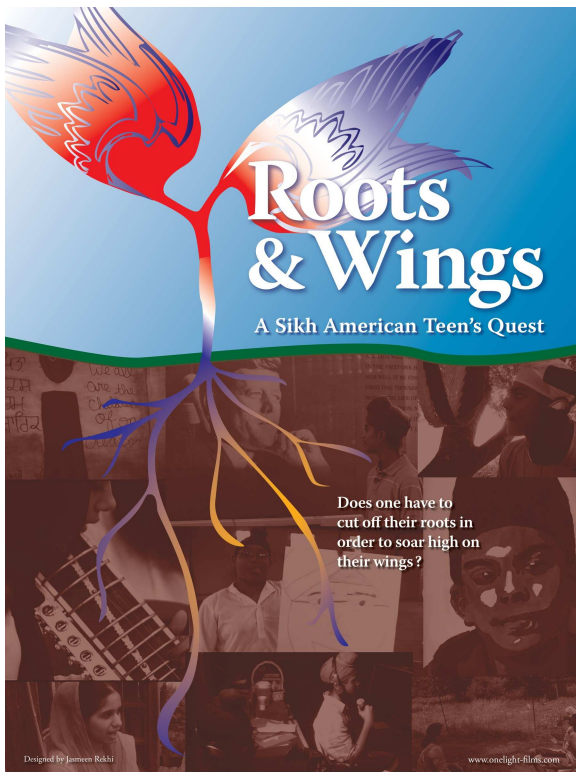


Roots & Wings

A Lesson Plan for Educators Committed to Diversity



About the movie:

Roots & Wings is an award winning short documentary on the struggles and spirit of Young Sikhs in America. The film questions the notion of forced assimilation into the American “melting pot,” and explores the idea of whether one has to cut off one’s roots in order to soar high on one’s wings. In this documentary, the teenage director reveals how the Sikh youth face challenges on account of their unique identity that is widely misunderstood in the U.S.A.

The film speaks to anybody who faces challenges on account of being “different,” whether visibly or ideologically. The film persuades students to expand their horizons and think beyond stereotypes.

Introduction to the Lesson Plan:

Ms. Shelby Steinhauer, A French teacher in Atlanta, GA built a 3-hour curriculum around the documentary. Spread over 3 days—she achieved tremendous success in engaging her students in a constructive dialogue around “*What does being an American mean in today’s multicultural society?*”

Feedback from the students revealed that 99% of them felt that their present school system does not do enough to promote multicultural diversity. In this global environment the need for students to understand and appreciate diversity is a new challenge that educators face. Letters from the students following the curriculum revealed tremendous shift in their thinking towards being open and compassionate to fellow human beings of different cultures and mindsets.

Educators are welcome to customize this lesson plan in the context of bullying, cultural exchange, foreign language study, world history, social sciences, world religions or other areas of relevance.

A request to the Educators:

We request for the Educators to share their experience with the world community. Share pictures of the screening, letters to the filmmaker, individual and collective responses. Your feedback will be helpful in inspiring other schools to take a step in this direction.

Please share your experience and feedback by writing to: rootsandwingsthemovie@gmail.com

Lesson Plan for Roots & Wings, French Class

The lesson is ideally presented right before, during or right after our two-week exchange with our sister school, *La Perverie*, in Nantes. The lesson takes two periods, although it could be expanded to three to allow for more discussion.

Goals:

- Students will reflect on what it means to be an American.
- Students will reflect on how French students from our sister school in Nantes may view us as Americans.
- Students will reflect on the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of America and how this may affect/benefit our exchange program.
- Students will reflect on their own comfort level with American diversity.
- Students will learn about restrictions on religious freedom in French schools imposed in the name of secularism and how this differs from the American response to the separation of church and state.
- Students will be given the opportunity to write letters in reaction to the ideas presented in the lesson
- Students will be given the opportunity to present “My America” to our sister school in Nantes.

Day One: Introduction: 5-10 minutes

- Discussion questions for the class:

Why do we study languages? Why do we study languages such as French that others may not deem useful? Why do we have our exchange program (approximately 30 students and two teachers come here every year to live with students and learn about America)?

- Students present a variety of responses. If not already mentioned, I present the following: *My favorite part of the exchange is that the French can come here and see the true diversity of America. They can see that we have many types of families and students of all backgrounds. In spite of these differences, we are all Americans or residents of America.*

Introductory Explanation to students:

I tell students that in light of our yearly exchange, we are going to talk about what it means to be an American and whether others views all the diverse elements of our society as truly

American. I explain that when we host our exchange students, we would ideally have many different kinds of American families hosting. I ask students to think about how they would react to being hosted by a French family (in a reverse exchange) that did not fit their idea of “typical,” for example, a French family of Arab or Indian descent with whom they may or may not learn about “typical” French traditions and eat “typical” French foods.

I tell the students that Milton student, Angad Singh, has made a documentary highlighting what it means to be born in America but not to always be seen as American by others. I also mention that he hosted a French student this year.

Reflection: I tell the students that they are going to answer some questions on paper, and then at the end, they will have the chance to discuss the questions they feel comfortable talking about with small groups.

Questions for written reflection: 20-30 minutes

1a. Have you ever been judged based on your looks, your background, or based on what someone thought they knew or heard about you? Explain.

1b. Is there anything about you/your background that others may or may not know that affects your interactions with people on a daily basis? Ex: religious restrictions on food / having lost a parent, etc...

(students may choose to answer “Yes, but it’s personal,” or “Yes...” or “No...”)

2. What does it mean to be an American – short answer – what’s the first thing you think about when you think of America?

3. How do you think others see us as Americans? The answer can be positive, negative, and even contradictory.

4. How comfortable do you feel talking about race and religion? Very comfortable, slightly uncomfortable, rather not say....

- For this question, I explain that when I was in college 20 years ago, I had to take part in a workshop on race. We were separated by race and asked to discuss racial stereotypes and how they made us feel. Then we came back together and shared our thoughts. Many students, especially the Caucasians, became uncomfortable and left. I ask them to think about how they would feel about this kind of workshop today, in 2009. Would they be comfortable discussing race/religion with out exchange students?

5. Students may choose to answer this question on paper or just reflect on it:

- I start by talking about Angad Singh and explain that his faith requires him to wear a turban. I explain that since most kids here have seen him, they view him as a typical kid... but what about outside the school community? I ask students to reflect on what he will look like when he gets older... a very tall, turbaned, bearded, dark-skinned man. The question is:

If you saw this man walking down the street in your neighborhood or somewhere “unexpected,” what would be your first thought? What if you saw him going through airport security and getting on your plane?

- I follow up with my own thoughts that education is the key to letting go of fear – that now that I know Angad, whenever I see a man with a turban and a beard, my first thought is “Cool, I wonder if he’s a Sikh...”

6. Can you be American and hold onto your roots? Or would it just make it easier if people blended in? Do you think it’s possible for people to hold onto their cultural traditions over several generations?

7. What everyday freedoms do we take for granted in the United States?

Discussion: 10 minutes

- Students break up into small groups and discuss the questions that most interest them.

Conclusion: 10 minutes

I write on the board: “In this country, there is a separation of church and state. Schools should not advocate one religion or another.”

I ask the students if they agree that this statement reflects the current situation in public schools in America.

- During discussion, students may bring up that American schools tend to favor Christian holidays because of the calendar/vacations. If so, we discuss whether this practice advocates a particular religion or is merely a matter of convenience.

I explain that the statement on the board is true in French schools as well, but that in France, the government interprets it to mean that there should be no religious expression in school.

- **I add the statement:**

“Therefore no student or teacher shall wear any outward sign of his or her religion.”

- **I ask students to:**

1. React to the statement
2. Write what they would do / how they would react if this became the law here in the USA.

- Before class ends, I remind the students that the filmmaker is a Sikh and that under the French law, he would not be permitted to wear his turban to class. I also point out that Sikhs fought for France in both world wars, and yet they are denied an education based on religious expression.

- I collect all written reflections at the end of the class

Day 2 Introduction: I ask student to remind me what we discussed yesterday. I tell them that we are going to watch excerpts from Roots and Wings. I explain that certain parts of the film are about Sikhism, and while they are interesting, they do not fall into the scope of the lesson. I explain that they may request a copy of the DVD if they wish to view the documentary in its entirety. **5 minutes**

Content: 20 minutes

We watch excerpts from the film (about 18 minutes of it, total). During all points when I fast forward, I explain the content in case they may want to see it later. I also summarize the section on Sikhism so they will know a little bit about the religion of the filmmaker.

Questions after the film for discussion: 10 minutes

- What are your thoughts after seeing this movie?
- Are we a melting pot or a salad bowl/ mosaic – what do you think?

- Were you aware of the extent of “profiling” that takes place when people see someone different? Were you aware that there is often very insignificant punishment for bullying against minority groups?
- We have a history of discrimination in our country – but with every new generation, things seem to improve. How far have we come? What still needs to be improved? How should we go about doing that? What actions should we take? What will YOU do?
- What can we do to make others (specifically our exchange students) aware of / appreciate the true diversity of America?
- Are there any parts of the documentary that you want to discuss further?

Conclusion: Students will write letters in reaction to the lesson: 25 minutes

- **Letter # 1:**

Letter to a “French friend” from our sister school in Nantes

“I hope you had fun in the USA.... This is what I want you to know about “my” America...”

After reflecting on our lesson, each student will talk about an aspect of American life that may be unique to his/her family. The focus could be religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, or even a lifestyle choice, such as vegetarianism. The idea is for our sister school to receive letters that show a cross-section of the diversity of America and what it means to our students.

- **Letter # 2 – Letter to the filmmaker**

Students should write a letter to filmmaker, Angad Singh, reacting to his work. They should indicate what they learned in the documentary and how it affected them. They should tell him whether or not they would like to see more diversity education in the USA. They may also add any additional comments or reflections, and they may tell him how / if they plan to use what they have learned from him in the future. The filmmaker can be reached at rootsandwingsthemovie@gmail.com