



Yale-New Haven  
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2014 Volume II: Exploring Community through Ethnographic Nonfiction, Fiction, and Film

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## Using Film as a Gateway to Action Research

Guide for Curriculum Unit 14.02.09  
by Matthew S. Monahan

Students completing this unit will be required to keep running logs and field journals, conduct interviews, and collect documents. Ethnography requires students to become more active, especially in terms of speaking, listening, and writing.

This unit runs for approximately six weeks. In years past, students in Introduction to Film at Metropolitan Business Academy critically view one film per week; this unit decreases the pace of content covered while increasing the amount of time for and responsibility of students to engage with one another. The culminating activity of this unit requires students to conduct ethnographic studies of their own. Rather than simply record and analyze their findings, the goal is action research. After intense study of the "lines of division and solidarity," student-generated ethnographies will create positive social change.

At the unit's center are three films that explore community from the perspective of strong female protagonists: *Crooklyn*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, and *Winter's Bone*. Although all three films deal with communities that are based largely on geography and proximity, socioeconomic pressures reinforce norms and shared values. Students will analyze themes across these texts, noting similarities and differences in the cultures depicted. Students will have a greater understanding of shared political-economic conditions that transcend simple geographic proximity.

(Recommended for Film Studies and English, grades 11 and 12)

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