



The Biggest Little Farm

VIEWING GUIDE

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teaching the film

The Biggest Little Farm chronicles the eight-year quest of John and Molly Chester as they trade city living for 200 acres of barren farmland and a dream to harvest in harmony with nature.

Through dogged perseverance and embracing the opportunity provided by nature's conflicts, the Chester's unlock and uncover a biodiverse design for living that

exists far beyond their farm, its seasons, and our wildest imagination.

Featuring breathtaking cinematography, captivating animals, and an urgent message to heed Mother Nature's call, **The Biggest Little Farm** provides us all a vital blueprint for better living and a healthier planet.

Grades 3 - 6

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All SFFILM Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFILM Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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about
the film

Directed by John Chester

(USA 2018) English, 91 min

A testament to the immense complexity of nature, **The Biggest Little Farm** follows two dreamers and a dog on an odyssey to bring harmony to both their lives and the land. When the barking of their beloved dog Todd leads to an eviction notice from their tiny LA apartment, John and Molly Chester make a choice that takes them out of the city and onto 200 acres in the foothills of Ventura County, naively endeavoring to build one of the most diverse farms of its kind in complete coexistence with nature. The land

Elementary School

Environmental Science

Journalism

Middle School

Science

Introducing ecosystems to students
plt.org/educator-tips/ecosystem-activities-elementary-students

Biggest Little Farm Film Website
biggestlittlefarmmovie.com

they've chosen, however, is utterly depleted of nutrients and suffering from a brutal drought. The film chronicles eight years of daunting work and outsize idealism as they attempt to create the utopia they seek, planting 10,000 orchard trees and over 200 different crops, and bringing in animals of every kind— including an unforgettable pig named Emma and her best friend, Greasy the rooster. When the farm's ecosystem finally begins to reawaken, so does the Chesters' hope – but as their plan to create perfect harmony takes a series of wild turns, they realize that to survive they will have to reach a far greater understanding of the intricacies and wisdom of nature, and of life itself.

Social Studies

subject
areas

connect
online

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discussion questions

pre-viewing topics and discussion

Vocabulary: Pre-teach or discuss the following vocabulary words to your class prior to viewing the film .

- Biodiversity
- Ecosystem
- Sustainable
- Regenerative
- Coexist

- What is a farm?
- What kind of work happens on a farm?
- Who or what lives on a farm?
- What is a documentary?
- How is a documentary different from other types of films?

about the farm

Apricot Lane Farms is a traditional foods farm started by John and Molly Chester, a husband and wife team, who left their jobs in Los Angeles to become farmers and pursue their dream vision of starting Apricot Lane Farms in 2011. Located 40 miles north of Los Angeles, the farm is dedicated to the mission of creating a well-balanced eco-system and rich soils that produce nutrient-dense foods while treating the environment and the animals with respect.

Apricot Lane farm residents include pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, guinea hens, horses, highland cattle, and one brown swiss dairy cow named "Maggie." Many of which, you will meet in the **Biggest Little Farm**. The land consists of

Biodynamic Certified avocado and lemon orchards, a vegetable garden, pastures, and over 75 varieties of stone fruit.

activity: fiction about Emma the Pig

Write your own fan fiction about Emma the Pig! Write a creative story about Emma --maybe she goes on an adventure with friends! Maybe she saves the farm! Maybe she travels the world!

Make sure to write a beginning, middle, and end to your fictional story. Include a problem and solution that will engage your reader. Use vivid language to bring your story events to life!

Include pictures or sketches to bring your story to life.

Have students present their stories to each other in small groups and discuss the ideas everyone came up with.

activity: write to the farmers

Have your students write letters to Chester and Molly to share what the understandings they gained from the film and to ask questions about how things are going at their farm today.

Collect the letters and mail to: Apricot Lane Farms, 10700, Broadway Road, Moorpark, CA 93021

discussion questions

context

- Summarize the beginning, middle, and end of the film. How does the farm change from the beginning to the end of the film?
- Who are Molly and John? Why did they decide to start their own farm?
- What are some of the challenges Molly and John faced as they were building their farm?
- In what ways did nature impede Molly and John's plan to build a self-sustaining farm?
- Describe some of the ways the farm's animals, plants, and insects coexisted positively.
- How did everything work together as a functioning ecosystem?
- The film documents the lives of many different animals who live or lived on the farm. Which animals did you find the most interesting? Why? What questions do you have about them?
- Apricot Lane Farm survived a very big fire, but many neighboring farms did not. What unique features of their farm made their survival possible?
- Early in the film, John has a lot of empathy for the coyotes and does not want to harm them. Later, his opinion changes. How does his opinion of the coyotes change? Why do you think it changes?
- Would you want to live or work on a farm? Why or why not?

Would you want to live or work on a farm? Why or why not?

style and message

- Who created this film? What was the purpose of creating it?
 - Review the 6 types of documentary films. bit.ly/2z9byaT
- What type of documentary is Biggest Little Farm? Provide details to explain your response.
- How does the film score contribute to your viewing experience? How would the film be different if it didn't have any music?

activity: design a farm

Project or print this photo for your class, and have them make observations about the design and layout of the farm: bit.ly/2GmKCcj

Then, have them draw a design for their own farm, and write a paragraph describing the layout. Encourage them to use the vocabulary words when writing about their design.

Then have students present their farm designs to the class. After the presentations, have a discussion about the similar designs and ideas students generated for their own farms.

Take it one step further and have the class vote on the best farm!



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california media literacy standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.2: Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.3: Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6: Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

common core standards

CA Media Arts Anchor Standard
6: Convey meaning through the
presentation of artistic work

CA Media Arts Anchor Standard
7: Perceive and analyze artistic work

media literacy resources: screening with meaning

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive. Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best

be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) Medium: the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) Author: the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) Content: the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) Audience: the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) Purpose: the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

common core standards

MEDIUM

All Media Is Constructed.

- What is the message, how is it delivered and in what format?
- What technologies are used to present the message?
- What visual and auditory elements comprise the media content?
- What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?

CONTENT

Media Is A Language For Information.

- What is the subject of the media message?
- What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content?
- What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response?
- To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?

PURPOSE

All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.

- Why was the message constructed?
- Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How?
- To what extent does the message achieve its purpose?
- What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?

AUTHOR

All Media Is Constructed by Someone.

- Who is delivering the message?
- Who originally constructed the message?
- What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?

AUDIENCE

All Media Messages Reach an Audience.

- Who receives the message?
- For whom is the message intended?
- What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message?
- What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message?
- How might others perceive this message differently? Why?

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what is a documentary?

A documentary is a film whose goal is to capture truth, fact or reality as seen through the lens of the camera. But there are many kinds of documentaries, and not everyone's idea of truth is the same. The Scottish filmmaker John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in 1926 to describe American filmmaker Robert Flaherty's romanticized culture studies, but nonfiction filmmaking dates back to the earliest motion picture reels.

The definition of documentary expanded as filmmakers experimented with technology and the goals of nonfiction. Avant-garde documentarians, like Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, believed that the mechanical eye of the camera gave a truer image of reality than the human eye and pointed his lens at newly industrialized cities. Leni Reifenstahl's propaganda films from Nazi Germany used the nonfiction form to convey a political message, a slanted truth.

The international cinema vérité or observational movements of the 1960s attempted to remove authorship from the documentary. The observational filmmaker hovered like a "fly on the wall" watching the world without commentary. Modern documentaries often seek to raise awareness about a social, environmental or political issue, guiding their audiences toward civic participation and activism.

While watching a documentary, it is important to remember the core concepts of media analysis: who made the film, for what audience and why? The nonfiction format can be deceptively subjective, as all filmmaking involves an inherent selection process: in the images that are shot, the music and narration that accompanies them and, most significantly, the way in which they are all edited together. Media literacy means always analyzing a documentary for its message and authorial intent.

Even though they are nonfiction films, most modern documentaries structure their content around a traditional story arc, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters, and a conclusion, theme or thesis to impart to the audience. Documentary filmmakers begin their projects with an idea or an issue that they wish to explore more deeply. Through research and planning, they develop a comprehensive plan before they begin shooting.

a brief timeline of the documentary

1895 The Lumiere brothers develop the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief unedited clips of life around them called 'actualities.'

1900-1920 Travelogue or 'scenic' films become popular showcasing exoticized images from around the globe.

1926 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With A Movie Camera*.

1939 John Grierson collaborated with the Canadian government to form the National Film Board of Canada, with the initial goal of creating Allied propaganda in the support of war.

1960s The 'cinema vérité' movement began in Europe, followed by the 'direct cinema' in the US. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos*, opened the door to activist cinema of the 1970s, using film as a tool to counter capitalist politics in Latin America.

1988 Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium more affordable to independent filmmakers. The term 'documentary' comes to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema.