



# Nothing Fancy: Diana Kennedy

## VIEWING GUIDE

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## teaching the film

**Nothing Fancy: Diana Kennedy** is a feature documentary that introduces audiences to the esteemed chef who is an expert in Mexican cuisine. Kennedy's charm and no-frills attitude reveals how passion and appetite can build a lifelong career.

A class screening of this film may compliment a curriculum in history, world cultures, Latin American studies, and food studies. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will encourage students to think about other cultures and their own lives and career paths. Students will also be prepared to learn more about activism.

**Grades 7 - 12**

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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 Elizabeth Carol**

**(USA/Mexico 2019) In English and Spanish with  
English subtitles, 85 min**

Reflecting on her life's work as one of the globe's authorities on Mexican cuisine, 95-year-old Diana Kennedy says, "Always get a recipe." Whether hosting cooking classes in her Michoacan home ("If anyone says they don't like cilantro, please don't invite them"), driving back roads in her weathered Nissan, or providing a noteworthy example of sustainable living, Kennedy and her

reminiscences and irascible persona show how passion and appetite made a career. Though the film remains focused indelibly on Kennedy, Bay Area food luminaries Alice Waters and Gabriela Cámara offer penetrating insights of their own.

# subject areas

**English Language Arts**

**History**

**Spanish**

**Food and cuisine**

**Latinx Studies**

**World Cultures**

**Women and Gender Studies**

# connect online

Diana Kennedy Center in Mexico  
**[dianakennedycenter.org](http://dianakennedycenter.org)**

NPR article, 'At 93 Diana Kennedy Still Reigns as Mexico's Fiestiest Food Expert'  
**[n.pr/20J2D8s](http://n.pr/20J2D8s)**

NPR article, 'When Chefs Become Famous Cooking Other Cultures' Food'  
**[n.pr/2KdWT7Q](http://n.pr/2KdWT7Q)**

Saveur interview with Diana Kennedy  
**[bit.ly/2uGruR2](http://bit.ly/2uGruR2)**

LA Times profile of Diana Kennedy  
**[lat.ms/2OHTDR3](http://lat.ms/2OHTDR3)**

What is sustainable food?  
**[sustainweb.org/sustainablefood](http://sustainweb.org/sustainablefood)**

Sustainable food is better for the environment  
**[bit.ly/2WMQzpB](http://bit.ly/2WMQzpB)**

The Locavore movement  
**[localfoodswheel.com/locavores](http://localfoodswheel.com/locavores)**

More info at [sffilm.org/education](http://sffilm.org/education)



# discussion questions

## pre-viewing topics and discussion

To prepare a class for a screening of **Nothing Fancy: Diana Kennedy**, discuss what role cooking and eating plays in the lives of your students.

- What are their favorite meals?
- Who prepares them typically?
- Have they learnt to prepare any dish or done any cooking at home or in a class?
- Do you like burritos, tacos, enchiladas, or other dishes originating from Mexico?
- How about guacamole?
- What flavors and styles do you associate with food from Mexico? Why?



What flavors and styles do you associate with food from Mexico?

You may want to have students brainstorm any words related to Mexico and Mexican food.

- What comes to mind when you say “Mexico” and when you think about “Mexican food”?

Once you have some words brainstormed, you could all discuss the role of cooking and food in a country’s culture.

- What food do you associate with the United States and why?

- Beyond just eating, does food have anything to do with history, culture, and tradition? What role does it play?

## characters and story

1. Talk about the central character, Diana Kennedy, in this documentary:

- Where is she from? Where does she live? What does she do?
- Does she have family?
- How would you describe her personality?
- What motivates her in her work and life?
- Is she the sort of person you expected to be talking about Mexican culture and Mexican food? Why or why not?
- How did she learn about her area of expertise?
- What is she like as a teacher? What is her approach? Would you like her to teach you how to cook?

2. How is Diana Kennedy portrayed in the documentary?

- Why is she well known in her field?
- Is she a typical figure in the culinary community?
- Why are her cooking books important?
- Why do you think the film is called “Nothing Fancy”?

3. Thinking about some of the specific aspects of the film,

- What role do food markets play in the film?
- What is her house like and why is it remarkable?
- What things are most important to her?
- What does it mean to be a “repository of knowledge” about Mexican cooking



Why do you think the film is called ‘Nothing Fancy: Diana Kennedy?’

and why is that important?

- How was her time in New York? How did she first get recognition as a chef and teacher?



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# discussion questions

## context and themes

1. Talk about how she thinks about food.

- What is her philosophy regarding food? Does it have to be perfect?
- Are good quality ingredients important to her and why?
- Why does she travel throughout Mexico?
- What features does her house have that relate to her personality?
- Discuss how her approach to food and the environment compares to that of many other people.

2. The film discusses an English woman in her 90s who lives in Mexico and writes about its food and culture.

- What are some of the main elements you notice about her way of talking about Mexico and its culture?
- Why might some Mexicans view her with skepticism?
- Is there an issue of cultural appropriation here, or is it possible to learn enough about a culture to be an expert on it without issue? Has Kennedy overcome this barrier with her knowledge? How?
- See the last article in the **web connections** section, and discuss the question: "Is it OK when a chef cooks other people's food?"



Is there an issue of cultural appropriation here, or is it possible to learn enough about a culture to be an expert on it without issue? Has Kennedy overcome this barrier with her knowledge? How?

3. The film uses a number of clips from old TV cooking shows.

- What do you notice about the TV shows?
  - Does it look like the TV shows available these days? How has TV changed in terms of quality and style?
  - What are the advantages of learning about food culture from another country?
4. What is your impression of Mexican culture after watching this film?
- What are the people like?
  - What do the places look like? Is there a variety of landscapes in the film?
  - What can we learn about Mexico from its food and why is it important?
  - Is it enough to call it "Mexican food," or are there many regional varieties and influences in Mexican cuisine? Explain.

## activity: origins of your lunch

Take a moment to think about what you will have/had for lunch today and consider where the food came from. Is there a way you can find out?

Take some time to keep a journal of the different foods in your lunch from one day, a couple of days, or even a whole week, and think about the origin of the food.

- Did most of it come from California?
- Were things imported?
- If so, where did they come from and when might it have been prepared?

Create a map of where the food in your lunch has come from to present to your classmates.

Imagine a lunch menu that only uses food from the local area at this time of year. California has an abundance of produce and farms, but not everything grows here and not all the time. What could you have for lunch if you tried to source everything from within 100 miles?

# discussion questions

## style and message

1. What did you think of this film?

- What topics did this film address?
- Which parts of the film were most interesting to you?
- Did learn anything from watching this film?
- Does this film have a message?

2. What sort of film is it?

- What approach did the filmmakers use?
- Was it effective in conveying the main idea?
- What are other ways these ideas could be communicated?
- Have you seen any other films like this?
- Talk about the stylistic elements of the film: does it use archival footage? What is the soundtrack/music like and what influence does it have? Do they interview many people?

3. One person interviewed says that “Diana came in a very British way ... showing Mexico to Mexicans, with her British stamp, but she became a Mexican.”

- How did she “become a Mexican”?
- Are there ways that this idea can be problematic?
- Do you need to be from a place to be able to tell the story and the history of a place?



What power does the possession and expression of such a deep passion have? Is there someone you can think of who inspires you through their passion?

- How can one be accepted by and become part of a different culture? What aspects are most important? Education? Research? Passion? Intrigue? What is most important to Kennedy?

4. “I live sustainably,” she says at an awards ceremony, and she has a strong passion for sustainability and preserving the environment for future generations.

- What does she do to be sustainable?
- Why does she consider this important in the contemporary world?
- She says that “the more we are connected electronically, the less we are unified.” What does she mean by this statement and how does her life’s work attest to this?
- Do you think this film effectively tells the story of Diana Kennedy?
- “The future is not ours to destroy,” she says, even though she doesn’t have children. Why does she say that and why is it important today?

5. The film is about having a passion and engaging with it over the course of a life.

- What power does the possession and expression of such a deep passion have?
- Is there someone you can think of who inspires you through their passion?
- Kennedy likes to speak clearly and frankly about her perspectives. When is it important to speak out about something?
- Is it rare to hear the story of a person in their 90s? Why do the filmmakers choose her as their subject? What is the value of hearing from somebody of Kennedy’s age?

## activity: your favorite meal

Students could prepare a poster about their favorite food or a meal and its ingredients. Research its history and importance to the broader culture. For example, did you know the guacamole has hundreds of years of history: it was known as “ahuaca-mulli” (meaning: avocado sauce) by the Aztecs in the 1500s, and was very similar to how it is today.



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# activities

## when i'm 90...

### what does it take to develop a passion?

One person interviewed at the end says that she is like “an Indiana Jones of food, trying to search for that special gem, that diamond, that is somewhere in the forests of the mountains of Mexico, and she will not stop until she finds it. She is in the blood of what Mexico is all about. She’s already part of the strength of Mexico for generations to come ... This should serve as an amazing powerful message for any young person out there.” She loves what she does and she has dedicated more than fifty years immersing herself in it, learning about it and teaching about it.

Take some time to journal about yourself and imagine yourself as someone of Kennedy's age. What would you like to be so deeply knowledgeable about? Where would you live? What would be important to you and why?

Then, take your writing and create “a day in the life” of your future self, based on elements of the story and the points made in the documentary.

## community garden

### design your own garden

Have you ever been to a community garden? Find out where the nearest one is to your school or home and do some research about it. You could even go and visit one! What grows there?

Imagine your own plot and design it: what would you grow there and why? What times of year could you grow certain things? Would you only grow vegetables and herbs, or would you be interested in other plants and flowers, too?

What foods and meals would you create from your garden? Who would you invite to help you cook those meals? Who would you invite to dinner?

## food map of mexico

### invite Diana Kennedy over to dinner

Work in small groups to do some research about regional variations in Mexican cuisine.

Then, design a 1-page menu for your class that has an appetizer, main course, dessert, and drinks that are typical to that region and that Diana Kennedy might like.

Provide some history and information about each element of your menu and give a name to your restaurant.

Perhaps you could try emailing her your menu and tell her you saw her film? Present your menus to the class and build up a “map” of Mexican cuisines and plan an imaginary trip there to experience Mexican culture through food.

# california media literacy standards

## Analysis and Evaluation of Oral and Media Communications

Grade 7: Standard 1.8 Analyze the effect on the viewer of images, text, and sound in electronic journalism; identify the techniques used to achieve the effects in each instance studied.

Grade 8: Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.

Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare's Henry V with Kenneth Branagh's 1990 film version).

Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.14 Analyze the techniques used in media messages for a particular audience and evaluate their effectiveness (e.g., Orson Welles' radio broadcast "War of the Worlds").

## Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication

Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.7 Use props, visual aids, graphs, and electronic media to enhance the appeal and accuracy of presentations.

Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.10 Evaluate when to use different kinds of effects (e.g., visual, music, sound, graphics) to create effective productions.

## Comprehension

Grades 9 & 10: Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.

Grades 11 & 12: Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.2 Analyze the impact of the media on the democratic process (e.g., exerting influence on elections, creating images of leaders, shaping attitudes) at the local, state, and national levels; Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

# common core standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2 Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3 Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.7 Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

# 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.