

AT&T PROUDLY SUPPORTS

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES®

DO THE RIGHT THING

A FILM BY
SPIKE LEE

EDUCATOR GUIDE



TRIBECA
FILM INSTITUTE

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Whether you're an educator, administrator, parent, student, or just someone who wants to learn more about media literacy, you can use this guide as a way to discuss the themes in the film. Lessons are aligned with time-coded video modules, and 'Resources for Students and Teachers' offers further reading, further watching, and a list of local and national arts organizations. Above all, we understand that educators are multifaceted artists in their own right, so we encourage you to utilize your own artistic experiences to spark dialogue.

A PDF of this and other creative, incisive Tribeca Film Institute® Educator Guides can be found at **TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG**

ABOUT THE FILM

Set during the hottest day of the year in New York City, *Do The Right Thing* depicts the tensions intensifying around a pizza joint in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy) neighborhood. Inspired by racially charged incidents such as the 1983 police beating and subsequent death of graffiti artist Michael Stewart and the 1986 assault of three black men in Howard Beach, Queens, the film takes place over a 24-hour period of sweltering heat, following the protagonist Mookie (Lee), a black pizza delivery man, as he navigates through the neighborhood's racial, generational, and class conflicts. Moving between the private sphere of apartments and bedrooms to the public sphere of street corners and crowded public sidewalks, the film offers a nuanced portrayal of the different attitudes, personalities, and desires that can clash within the urban space.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER



SPIKE LEE

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

Spike Lee is an award winning writer, director, producer, actor, and author who revolutionized both the landscape of independent cinema and the role of black talent in film. Widely regarded as a premiere African-American filmmaker, Lee is a forerunner in the 'do it yourself' school of filmmaking with a body of work that spans feature film, documentary, commercials and music videos. His most notable works include *She's Gotta Have It*, *Malcolm X*, *Crooklyn*, *25th Hour*, *Inside Man* and *When The Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*.

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM WRITER

Tracee Worley is an educator and curriculum developer who loves to design media-based learning experiences. She has developed and implemented K-12 curricula, professional development workshops, and technology-based educational materials through her work with organizations such as Staff Development Workshops, ITVS, Tribeca Film Institute, Urban Arts Partnership, and the Brooklyn Historical Society. She holds a B. A. in African-American Studies from UC Berkeley, an M. A. in Education from Brooklyn College, and is currently pursuing an advanced certificate in Digital Media Design for Learning from New York University.

FILM IN CONTEXT

In a published journal and script of *Do The Right Thing*, Spike Lee notes that the film was inspired, in part, by violent racial clashes that occurred in 1980s New York City. He writes, “While I was in the grocery today I heard a radio newscast that two Black youths had been beaten up by a gang of white youths in Bensonhurst. The two Black kids were hospitalized. They were collecting bottles and cans when they got jumped. This happened on Christmas night. Just the other day some Black kids fired up a white cab driver in Harlem. New York City is tense with racial hatred. Can you imagine if these incidents had taken place in the summer, on the hottest day of the year? I’d be a fool not to work the subject of racism into *Do The Right Thing*.”

Taking notes from real-life incidents of racially motivated violence, Lee imaginatively portrays the racial animosities that often erupt within the urban sphere. He dedicates the film to the families of victims of police brutality in New York City: Eleanor Bumpurs, an elderly black woman who was gunned to death by the police as they were attempting to evict her from her apartment in the Bronx; Michael Griffith, who was killed after he was hit by a car while trying to flee a pizzeria where he and his companions were assaulted by white teenagers armed with baseball bats; Arthur Miller, a businessman who was beaten to death by 16 policemen; Edmund Perry, a 17-year-old graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy, who was shot and killed by a plain-clothes police officer in the Morningside Park neighborhood of Manhattan; Yvonne Smallwood, a 28-year-old Bronx woman who died after what her friends said was a severe beating by the police; and Michael Stewart, who was killed while in the custody of the New York City Transit Police.

Do the Right Thing’s allusion to then-recent race-related violence served to keep the real-life racial tensions of New York City in the consciousness of movie-goers, causing some scholars to suggest that the film was largely responsible for Mayor Ed Koch’s loss in his November 1989 reelection campaign to David Dinkins, who would become New York City’s first—and so far only—black mayor.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

CULTURAL CLASHES

Near the film’s climax, members of each ethnic community featured in film hurl vicious racial slurs at each other. Looking directly into the camera, the African-American Mookie taunts Italians, the Italian-American Pino tells Blacks to “go back to Africa,” The Puerto-Rican Stevie mocks Koreans, the white policeman ridicules Puerto Ricans, and the Korean grocer scorns Jews. New York City has always been a gateway to opportunity for people from around the world. Between 1970 and 2008, the foreign-born population in New York City more than doubled to 3 million, while the native-born population declined by more than 1 million. How has the influx of immigrants led racial tension throughout the city? Is it possible for people from different backgrounds to live together peacefully in the same neighborhood? What kinds of cultural clashes occur in your neighborhood?

ECONOMIC DISPARITY

Although the Bed-Stuy community featured in the film is largely populated by African-American and Puerto Rican residents, Korean-Americans and Italian-Americans own the local businesses. Clifton, the white homeowner, draws attention to the issue of gentrification, after he accidentally bumps into Buggin’ Out and steps on his Air Jordans. According to the New York Times, from 2000 to 2010, the white population in Bed-Stuy grew 633 percent — the biggest percentage increase of any major racial or ethnic group in any New York City neighborhood. How do the economic and racial disparities between property/business owners fuel hostility between the long-term residents? How do these groups differ? What do the groups have in common? How do these tensions affect family life? Life among neighbors?

NEIGHBORHOOD ARCHETYPES

The characters in the Bed-Stuy neighborhood where the film is set represent inner-city archetypes of the 1980s: Mookie is a streetwise, underemployed youth who neglects his young family; Da Mayor is the neighborhood wino; Mother Sister, the domineering matriarch, sits in her window most of the day, watching and listening to everything and everyone; Tina is the tough, foul-mouthed girl from around-the-way; Radio Raheem is the feared and respected youth who wanders around the neighborhood playing Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” on his enormous boom box. What kinds of archetypes are commonly found in films? How do the archetypes in *Do The Right Things* differ? How are they the same? Do these archetypes still persist today? What do you think each character archetype symbolizes in the film maker’s mind? Spike Lee has been sharply criticized for what has been regarded as stereotypical and one-dimensional

DISCUSSION PROMPTS CONT.

representation of women in his films. How are women portrayed in *Do The Right Thing*? How does the portrayal of the female characters differ from the portrayal of male characters?

DOING THE RIGHT THING

The results of the riot at Sal's pizzeria are unclear. Was the boycott a trivial matter that ended tragically or a worthwhile fight in the name of equality and cultural identity? Can people get along in a diverse neighborhood, or is the separatism favored by some of the characters a better solution? Did Mookie do the right thing? What were his motives? Did he throw the trash can through the window because he was racist? Or was he a revolutionary, protesting inequalities in race and class? What is the "right thing" in your opinion?

NONVIOLENCE VS. VIOLENCE

The film ends with two quotations: one from Martin Luther King Jr. denouncing violence as self-defeating and another from Malcolm X equating violence with self-defence and intelligence. Is violence immoral, or is it intelligent action? Which approach do you think constitutes "the right thing?" Twenty years later, what does it mean to "do the right thing" when it comes to addressing racial injustice?

VIDEO MODULES

1



THE BLOCK

(00:10:40 - 00:18:30)

2



WALL OF FAME

(00:18:35 - 00:21:53)

3



CAN'T STAND THE HEAT

(00:25:00 - 00:30:20)

4



DUMP KOCH

(01:26:41 - 01:28:15)

5



THE RIOT

(01:28:10 - 01:45:01)

6



MARTIN VS. MALCOLM

(01:52:00 - 01:53:45)

KEY WORDS

Archetype a very typical example of a certain person or thing.

Gentrification a shift in an urban community toward wealthier residents and/or businesses and increasing property values, often at the expense of the poorer residents of the community.

Racial Inequality imbalances in the distribution of power, economic resources, and opportunities along racial lines.

Class a group of people having the same social, economic, or educational status in a society.

Police Brutality a type of police misconduct in which officers use excessive force.

Street Art an umbrella term defining forms of visual art created in public locations, usually unsanctioned artwork executed outside of the context of traditional art venues.

CLASSROOM GUIDE

LESSON 1

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

Time: 45 minutes

Tools: *Do The Right Thing* Set Map, pens, blank paper, video module one: “The Block,” video module three: “Can’t Stand the Heat”

As Mookie roams through the neighborhood on his pizza delivery runs, we witness the constant activity swirling around the Bed-Stuy universe and its cast of neighborhood old-timers, corner men, troublemaking teenagers, and patrolling police. In this lesson, students will visually represent the life of their neighborhood block with its layers of neighborly exchange.

PART A As a warm-up, ask students to respond for a few minutes in writing to the question “What makes up a neighborhood?” Ask volunteers to share their responses. Ask students:

- What is the importance of a neighborhood? Who or what determines its unique identity?
- Describe your neighborhood. Where is it exactly? Who lives there? Are there people of different ages and ethnicities? Are there people who have lived there for a long time? Are there any newcomers?
- What do you like best about your neighborhood? What do you dislike?
- What changes have you seen or do you see going on now in your neighborhood? Are there new groups of people moving in? Are long-time residents moving out? If so, what are the reasons for these changes?
- If there are changes going on in your neighborhood, such as gentrification, are your neighbors fighting for or against change? Are there clear “good guys” and “bad guys” or are the issues more complex? What do you think of their struggle? Why?
- What kinds of businesses exist in your neighborhood, if any? Who owns the businesses? Are there banks, liquor stores, bodegas, etc? How do these businesses impact the neighborhood?

PART B Examine the *Do The Right Thing* Map, which outlines the spatial arrangement of the movie set, shot on Stuyvesant Avenue between Quincy Street and Lexington Avenue. View the video modules.

Discuss

- What is the neighborhood portrayed in *Do The Right Thing* like? What is its unique identity?
- Who are the neighborhood characters? How do they relate to one another?
- Compare and contrast the film’s block to your block.

PART C Have students draw out a map of the block around their home or school. Ask them to label their house, local businesses, and any other familiar sights and happenings. Students can compare and contrast their maps with those completed by their fellow students.

LESSON 2

STREETS IS TALKING

Time: 2 class sessions

Tools: digital/mobile phone cameras, video module four: “Dump Koch,” computers or laptops

Street art looms large in *Do The Right Thing*. A huge mural of Mike Tyson hangs over Sal’s Pizzeria, children’s chalk drawings ornament the sidewalks and graffiti shouts subversive messages such as “Tawana Told the Truth,” “Dump Koch,” and “Jesse.” In this lesson students will contemplate the political meaning of street art and document the street art in their communities.

PART A Before viewing the module, brainstorm word associations for the term street art. Ask students:

- What is street art?
- Where do you see street art?
- Why is street art controversial?
- How can street art express something about a city or society?

PART B Watch the “Dump Koch” video module and discuss the political context surrounding the street art featured in the scene.

Discuss

- What message do you think the artist behind the “Dump Koch” graffiti is trying to convey?
- What do the Jesse Jackson posters say?
- Why do you think a Mike Tyson poster was placed on the wall?
- What do these images reveal about Spike Lee’s politics?

PART C Have students go out into their school or home communities and take a photo of a piece of street art (e.g. graffiti, mural, wheat pasting, stenciling, sticker, poster.) Students should write a short caption describing the piece of art, where it is, and what they think it means. Create a blog to upload these images and words. Students can publish their blogs online using blogging platforms, such as:

Edublogs www.edublogs.org

Weebly www.education.weebly.com

Tumblr www.tumblr.com

Discuss

- How does street art compare to art in museums, galleries, offices, and other non-public places?
- How can street art give a voice to minority groups in the community?
- Can street art be an effective form of protest and a means for bringing about political and social changes?
- How can history and time be immortalized in street art?
- What are some of the social issues that are addressed in prominent street art in your city/neighborhood?

LESSON 3

WALL OF FAME

Time: 60 minutes

Tools: Wall of Fame Worksheet, colored pencils and/or markers, video module two: “Wall of Fame,” videomodule four: “Dump Koch (01:26:41 - 01:28:15),” video module five: “The Riot (01:28:10 - 01:45:01)”

At the center of the infamous riot scene in the film is the controversy over a collection of photographs, an array of signed publicity photos of Italian-American stars in sports, movies, and popular music framed and hung on the “Wall of Fame” in Sal’s Famous Pizzeria. In this lesson students will collectively contribute to their own Wall of Fame that represents the diversity of their neighborhoods.

PART A Watch the video modules. Ask students:

- Why is the wall of fame important to Sal?
- Why is the wall important to Buggin’ Out?
- Do you think integrating the wall would ease racial tensions in the neighborhood?
- How might African-American representation on the wall influence how Buggin’ Out views himself and his place in American society?
- Each group in the film seems to take pride in occupying their own turf: the Italians have the pizza shop, the Black and Puerto Rican residents have the block and the stoops, and the Koreans have the grocery. Why do people segregate themselves? What benefits and drawbacks exist in segregation? Can segregation and racial understanding exist simultaneously or does it contribute to misperceptions, stereotypes and unfounded fears?

PART B Ask students to name a public figure that they draw inspiration from. Brainstorm a list and write on the board. Include all names provided. Have students examine the complete list, then together try to identify characteristics of a role model.

Distribute the Wall of Fame Worksheet. Have students create a drawing of a public figure they draw inspiration from. Hang all of the drawing up on a bulletin board to create a class Wall of Fame.

Discuss

- What is a role model?
- What characteristics are important for your personal role models to possess, and why?
- Was race or ethnicity an important characteristic of your role model? Why or why not?
- What do the individuals on our list have in common?
- How are they different?
- Is important it for young people to see images of themselves in public figures?

LESSON 4

MARTIN VS. MALCOLM

Time: 30 minutes

Tools: Video module 6: Martin vs. Malcolm (00:09:35 - 00:11:59), Quotation Worksheet

A photograph of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X smiling and shaking hands reappears throughout the film and the film closes with opposing quotes from both leaders that express different views about power and violence. In this lesson, student will evaluate differing assumptions held by people across time regarding power and violence and analyze the two quotes to determine which they believe are most true about power, politics, and their own lives...

PART A Create two columns on the board with “Martin Luther King, Jr.” at the top of one and “Malcolm X” at the top of the other. Have students brainstorm words or phrases that come to mind when they think of each leader. Ask:

- How did these two Civil Rights leaders differ in their approach to achieving racial equality?

Explain to students that Spike Lee concluded *Do The Right Thing* with quotations from Martin Luther King and Malcolm X that gave the viewer the choice between opposing views toward racial violence.

PART B Watch video module six “Malcolm vs. Martin.” Distribute the Quotation Worksheet. Have the students read the quotations and assign each quotation a “truth ranking” from 1 to 5 (1 = never true, 5 = always true). Poll the class and have them share their truth rankings. Ask them to support their ranking with evidence from their own experiences and knowledge of historic and current events.

Discuss

- How does the film explore the opposing themes expressed by Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X?
- How are the ideological perspectives expressed by the characters in the film aligned with those of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X?
- Which perspective do you think Spike Lee is more aligned with?

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS

FURTHER READING

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint by Spike Lee & Lisa Jones

This “making of the movie” book includes Spike Lee’s production journal, as well as notes, the script, credits, and storyboards for *Do The Right Thing*. Photos taken on the set during production are included.

Winter’s Edge by Valerie Milner

One of the few novels to center on the lives of older, working-class women, *Winter’s Edge* depicts the vibrant community that centers around one block in San Francisco’s downtown Tenderloin district in the late 1970s, home to people from all walks of life. Here, prostitutes, tourists, immigrants, senior citizens, shop owners, and the homeless coexist, living among the modest shops, cafes, and inexpensive, run-down apartment building’s near the city’s heart.

Hunting in Harlem by Mat Johnson

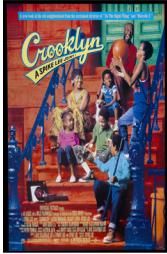
A compelling story about three ex-cons working for a seemingly visionary Harlem real estate agency, Johnson, explores what happens when gentrification becomes an obsession.

Bedford-Stuyvesant ***(Images of America: New York)*** by Wilhelmena Rhodes Kelly

Bedford-Stuyvesant details the evolution of this neighborhood, home to the nation’s second largest African-American community, and it documents how this urban center is now finally enjoying new regard for its wealth of architecture and its notable place in American history.

FURTHER WATCHING

IF YOU LIKED THIS FILM, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE SOME OF THESE OTHER FILMS.



Crooklyn (1994)

From Spike Lee comes this vibrant semi-autobiographical portrait of a school-teacher, her stubborn jazz-musician husband and their five kids living in '70s Brooklyn. The story focuses on Troy, whose musician father and schoolteacher mother work hard to provide for her and her four unruly brothers.



Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbers: We Cut Heads (1983)

Written and directed by Spike Lee as his New York University thesis film, *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop* is set in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, depicting a man torn by the realities of his life- a flagging barbershop business; the lure of the numbers game; and the dreams of his wife, a social worker tired of the poverty and crime around her. The film illustrates the often impossible attempts of urban inner-city dwellers to break from a cycle of poverty.



Brooklyn Boheme (2011)

Writer, historian, and Brooklyn resident Nelson George partners with filmmaker Diane Paragas to paint a vibrant portrait of the black arts movement that exploded in Fort Greene from the mid-1980s through the 1990s including Spike Lee, Chris Rock, Branford Marsalis, Rosie Perez, Saul Williams, Lorna Simpson, Talib Kweli just to name a few. Narrated and written by Fort Greene resident Nelson George, this feature length documentary celebrates “Brooklyn’s equivalent of the Harlem Renaissance” and follows the rise of a new kind of African American artist, the Brooklyn Boheme.



Flag Wars (2011)

Shot over a four-year period, Linda Goode Bryant and Laura Poitras’ *Flag Wars* is a poignant and very personal look at a community in Columbus, Ohio, undergoing gentrification. The film sheds light on race and class tensions that result when middle to upper-class people move into a working-class neighborhood and those who are local to the neighborhood try to sustain their community heritage.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS CONT.

GET INVOLVED

CRAVING MORE HANDS ON EXPERIENCE? CHECK OUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS.

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation restorationplaza.org

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, the nation's first community development corporation, partners with residents and business to improve the quality of life of Central Brooklyn by fostering economic self sufficiency, enhancing family stability and growth, promoting the arts and culture and transforming the neighborhood into a safe, vibrant place to live, work and visit.

The Laundromat Project www.laundromatproject.org

The Laundromat Project (LP) is a non-profit organization committed to the wellbeing of communities of color living on low incomes. Understanding that creativity is a key component of healthy human beings, vibrant neighborhoods, and thriving economies- The LP organizes art programs in laundromats throughout New York City.

STooPs unitedwedream.org

STooPS is a community-building event that will use the arts to bring people outside and promote social interaction among artists, homeowners, residents, and businesses of Bed-Stuy.

Weeksville Heritage Center weeksvillesociety.org

Weeksville Heritage Center is a multi-dimensional museum that celebrates the history of Weeksville, an African American community established in 1838. Located in Brooklyn, the mission of Weeksville Heritage Center is to document, preserve and interpret the history of free African, Caribbean, and African American communities in Weeksville, Brooklyn, and beyond to create and inspire innovative, contemporary uses of history through research, education, the arts, and civic engagement.

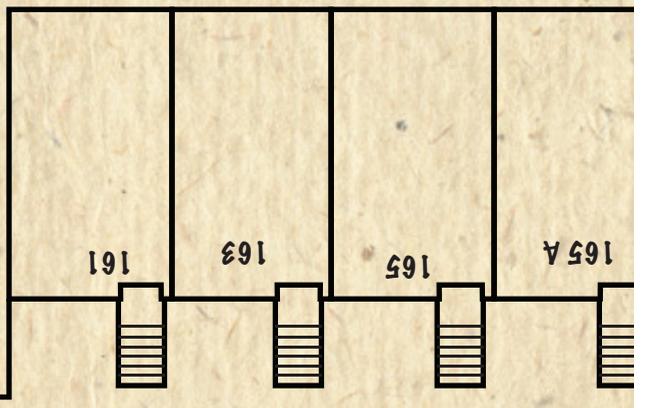
DO THE
RIGHT THING
SET MAP

LEXINGTON AVE.

STUYVESANT

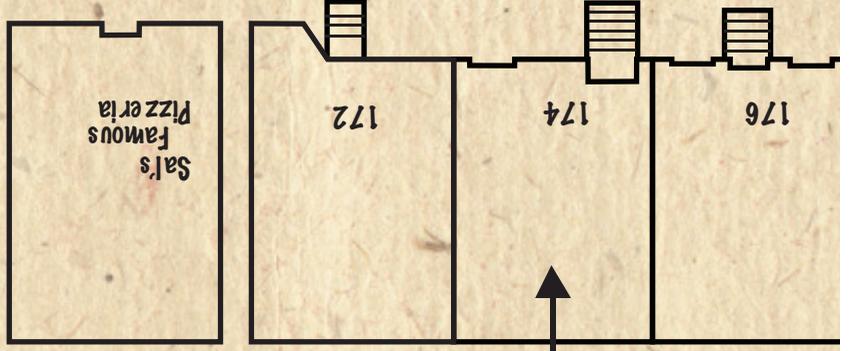
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Korean Market

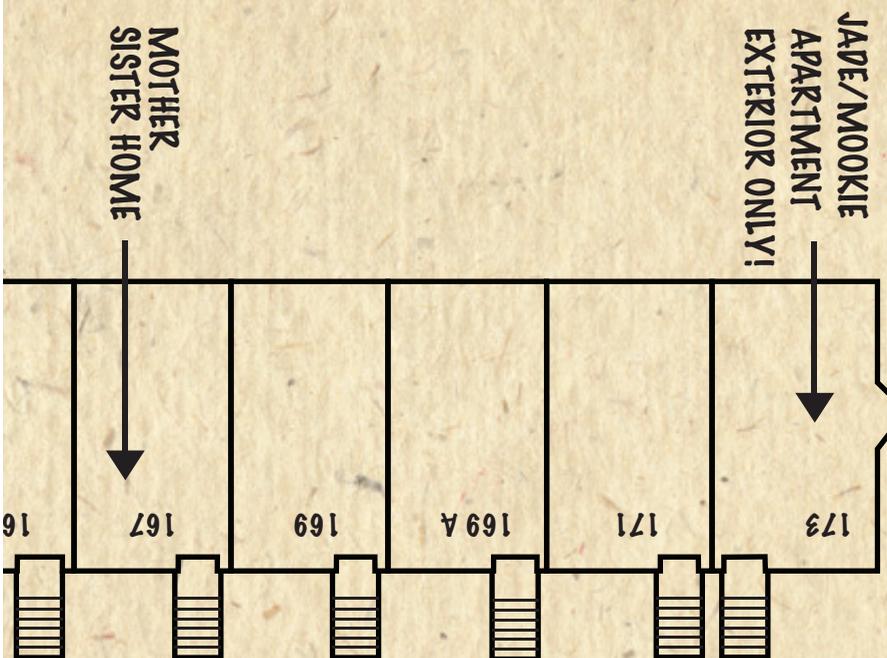


**SAT'S FAMOUS
PIZZERIA**
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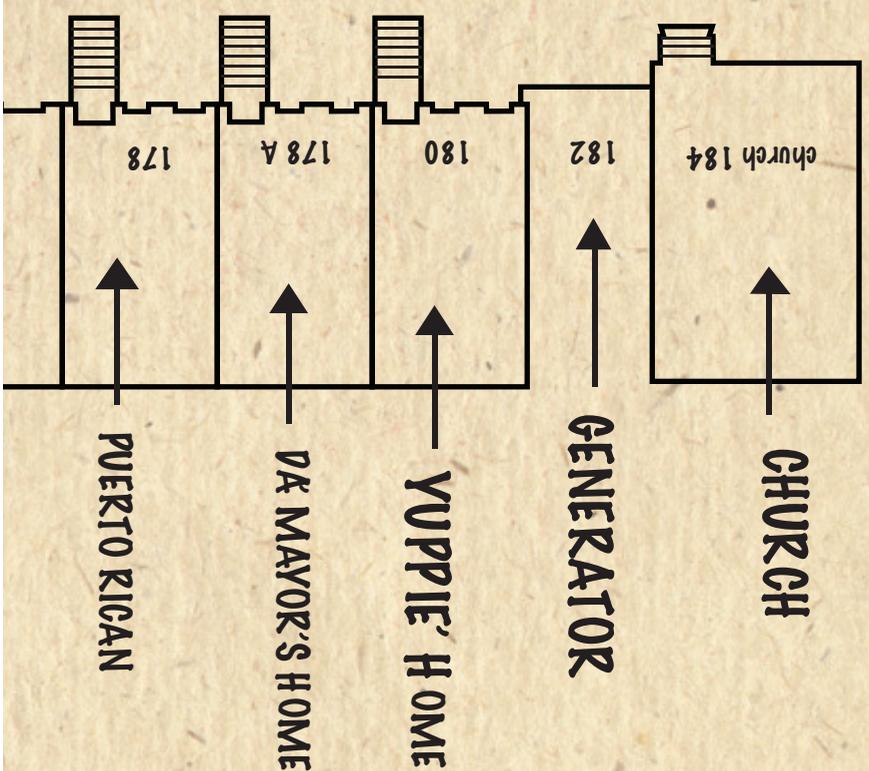
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STATION**
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QUINCY AVE.



ESANT AVE.



QUOTATIONS WORKSHEET

“Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction of all. The law of an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind. It is immoral because it seeks to annihilate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

THE QUOTE ABOVE IS ...

1

Never True

2

Seldom True

3

Sometimes True

4

Often True

5

Always True

“I think there are plenty of good people in America, but there are also plenty of bad people in America and the bad ones are the ones who seem to have all the power and be in these positions to block things that you and I need. Because this is the situation, you and I have to preserve the right to do what is necessary to bring an end to that situation, and it doesn't mean that I advocate violence, but at the same time I am not against using violence in self-defense. I don't even call it violence when it's self-defense. I call it intelligence.”

- Malcolm X

THE QUOTE ABOVE IS ...

1

Never True

2

Seldom True

3

Sometimes True

4

Often True

5

Always True

WALL OF FAME



Name:

Biographical Details:

Why I chose this person:

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES® STAFF

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ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES®

Tribeca Youth Screening Series® is a media literacy program begun in 2006 by the Tribeca Film Institute®. The academic year is divided into two series, screened from September through June in partnership with national and neighborhood partners. These screenings are augmented by in-class sessions led by a Tribeca Teaching Artist, who works with a film-specific curriculum written and edited by a team formed through Tribeca Film Institute®. Schools are selected based on relationship, location, and need; in 2012 we will be working in eight schools in New York and New Jersey. Connect and download free curricula at TRIBECAPILMINSTITUTE.ORG

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