



Lesson: Taking Off

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will create short pieces of reality-based fiction. The main character will be an undocumented immigrant awaiting deportation from Switzerland, a country that prides itself on being a leader in human rights but whose deportation process has resulted directly in the deaths of several men.

Video clips provided with this lesson are from **Special Flight**.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Write reality-based fictional accounts centered around a character they see on film
- Critique one another's writing
- Research the historical, cultural and geographical background of a character so that their fictional accounts are credible

GRADE LEVELS

10-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Creative Writing

English/Language Arts

Research

MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video
- Optional: equipment to project or duplicate student writing for critique

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

Half of two class periods: 20 minutes in the first class; time to share and critique writing in the second class period (can be varied to meet your needs)

FILM CLIPS

Clip 1: "Mr. Pitchou Pleads His Case" (length 6:06)

This clip begins at 20:24 with Pitchou reading about mistreated animals getting lawyers and ends at 26:30, at the end of the interview between Pitchou and the police officer responsible for carrying out his deportation.

Clip 2: “Release” (length 2:25)

The clip begins at 27:55, during a family visit. Pitchou is holding his baby and saying, “It’s terrible.” It ends at 32:20 with Pitchou being released and saying good-bye.

ACTIVITY

1. Introduce the assignment: You’re going to meet a person featured in the documentary **Special Flight**. After viewing some clips from the film, you’re going to ponder what happens next and, without knowing the actual answer, write the next chapter in his life. Before viewing the clips, here is the context:

Special Flight is about the plight of 25 undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers at the Frambois detention center in Geneva, Switzerland. The inmates featured are among the thousands imprisoned in Switzerland without charges or trials and facing deportation to their native countries, where they fear repression or even death.

As it turns out, their countries of origin aren’t the only places where detainees may face death. Several have died as a result of the component of the deportation process known as “special flights.” The only passengers aboard special flights are the deported, police officers and Federal Office for Migration representatives. To avoid resistance, inmates are notified of these flights at the last moment. They are then taken to the airport, where they are chained up. Tied to their chairs and equipped with helmets and diapers, inmates are escorted into the aircraft. A special flight may take up to 40 hours, and during that time they remain tied to their seats.

The film exposes the contradictions between the country’s compassionate social policies and the intractability of its immigration laws. You will see clips featuring Pitchou. Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pitchou is the grandson of a traditional tribal leader. After he became a Christian, he became a target for persecution; he fled to save his life. Pitchou has worked in Switzerland for 11 years, and his only child was born in that nation. Unlike most inmates facing deportation, Pitchou is represented by a lawyer who is publicizing his case.

2. Show Clips 1 and 2.

3. Assign students to write scenes, either in prose or as plays or screenplays, depicting what happens to Pitchou after he leaves the detention center. Remind them that you expect details to be authentic, so they’ll want to do some research about life for immigrants in Switzerland and/or life in Pitchou’s country of origin, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Depending on your students’ skill level, you may need to spend a

few minutes reviewing effective online research techniques. Depending on the structure of your course, give students several days to one week or more to complete this assignment.

4. On the due date for the assignment, invite students to share and critique excerpts from their work. Wrap up with a discussion about what students learned about immigrants and immigration, as well as what they learned about writing.

EXTENSIONS

1. Compare student writing to other literature by or about immigrants and their experiences.

2. Coordinate with French language classes to explore the film's website (available in several languages, including English and French) and to watch the webdoc made by the filmmaker to explore what actually happened to the men featured in the film, including Pitchou. The webdoc is available only in French.

RESOURCES

Global Detention Project: "Immigration Detention in Switzerland"

www.globaldetentionproject.org/fileadmin/publications/GDP_Swiss_detention_report.pdf

The Geneva-based Global Detention Project provides research and policy recommendations on the role of detention of undocumented immigrants, including this 2011 report on practices in Switzerland.

Special Flight

www.volspecial.ch/en/

The official website for the film includes background about the issues and the men featured in it.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

[W.11-12.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

[W.11-12.3a](#) Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

[W.11-12.3b](#) Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events and/or characters.

[W.11-12.3c](#) Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth or resolution).

[W.11-12.3d](#) Use precise words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting and/or characters.

[W.11-12.3e](#) Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed or resolved over the course of the narrative.

[W.11-12.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

[W.11-12.7](#) Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

[W.11-12.8](#) Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and over-reliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

[RI.11-12.7](#) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

[SL.11-12.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

McREL (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>): a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Geography, Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 150 independent films.