

EXPLORING OUR WORLD

Documentaries about scientific discoveries, the environment, human behavior or nature help viewers understand the world they live in.

Science and technology can be difficult for a general audience



Filmed in the large screen IMAX format, *EVEREST* (1998) followed a group of mountain climbers who ended up trapped in a deadly blizzard, creating an unexpected plot twist for the filmmakers whose lives were also endangered. Courtesy of MacGillivray Freeman Films.

to understand, so filmmakers often concentrate on the people who made discoveries or who are working toward advances in the field. Humor is another tool that helps make a complicated subject more interesting.

Documentarians use sophisticated technology such as IMAX or tiny cameras to show viewers things that they might not be able to see in

real life. Sometimes filmmakers must develop new technology in order to make the film, such as the special aircraft that was

designed to allow the makers of *Winged Migration* to film birds up close.

Human behavior provides another compelling topic for filmmakers. Some documentaries explore the lives of people from

different societies around the world. Others, like *Spellbound* by Jeffrey Blitz and Sean Welch, or Les Blank's 1990 film, *Yum, Yum, Yum*, look at people closer to home. Filmmakers may unobtrusively observe their subjects, or they may give them video or still cameras or tape recorders to record their own impressions of their lives, which are then incorporated into the documentary.

After watching the documentary your teacher has chosen, identify the techniques the filmmaker has used to make the subject interesting to viewers.



The controversy and confusion surrounding artist and sculptor Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, is profiled in *MAYA LIN: A STRONG CLEAR VISION* (1994). Photo courtesy of American Film Foundation.

Title of film:

What is the topic of the film?

Who do you think is the target audience for the film? How do you know that?

What techniques such as humor, innovative photography or new technology has the filmmaker used?

What kinds of images does the film use?

Does the film have narration?

Is the narration necessary to explain the topic?

Why or why not?

How do the narration and the visuals work together?
