



FilmEd Classroom
**Films to Engage Students in
Meaningful Conversation**

FILM GUIDE

WELCOME TO MY LIFE

GRADES 6-8

Elizabeth Ito | United States

ANIMATED SHORT FILM | FICTION | 8:52 MINUTES | 2015

Subtheme: Difference, Inclusion, Bullying, Bias, Self-Identity

PART IV

BEHIND THE SCENES

LEARN ABOUT THE FILMMAKER & FILMMAKING PROCESS

Remind students that everything they saw and heard in the film was the result of an intentional decision made by the filmmaker. The characters and the film itself were designed, animated, and created by the filmmaker Elizabeth Ito and her team of animators and artists.

CONSIDER THE FILMMAKER'S STYLE & TECHNIQUES

Filmmakers make lots of decisions, big and small, to ensure they tell a story clearly or in an interesting way.

Pose the questions below before showing the film once again and let students take notes while they watch. Encourage them to use adjectives or short phrases.

- How would you describe the visual style of the film? What does the film look like?
- How would you describe the design of the character in the film?
- How would you describe the music in the film?
- Did this film feel realistic or fantastical?

- Consider different endings for this question; *'How would this film be different if _____?'* (This will help students notice the different decisions the filmmaker had to make.)

CONSIDER THE FILMMAKER'S UNDERLYING MESSAGE

Films are made by filmmakers who have something they want to say, which might be inspired by their own experiences or something they've encountered in the world.

Therefore, a film often has an underlying message, or multiple messages.

Ask the questions below and explain that there are no wrong answers here. Works of art, including film, can be interpreted in many different ways.

- Why do you think Elizabeth Ito might have wanted to tell this story?
- Why do you think she might have chosen to tell this story as a **mockumentary**?
- Why do you think Elizabeth Ito might have chosen to tell this story about a monster? How might it have been different if it were about a human?
- What do you think the message or messages of the film might be? What makes you say that?
- How do you think the film communicates this message?
- Did you learn anything from this film or the actions of the characters?
- Was there anything you didn't understand about the film or the actions of the characters?
- The characters in the film are voiced by members of the filmmaker Elizabeth Ito's family. How does knowing this add to or change your ideas about the film?
- Why do you think Ito might have chosen to have her family voice the characters of the film?

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS: ELIZABETH ITO

Elizabeth Ito has worked in the animation industry on film and television projects for over 15 years. She originally created the short film **WELCOME TO MY LIFE** for Cartoon Network; the film won an audience award at NYICFF in 2017. Elizabeth's additional awards include an Emmy for her directing work on **ADVENTURE TIME**. She's currently developing an innovative new animation/live action/documentary series for Netflix.

Q&A WITH THE FILMMAKER

Let students know that while the filmmaker might have had a message or idea in mind, we are all welcome to interpret the film in our own way.

Why was it important for you to tell this story? Are there aspects to the story that are autobiographical?

I thought that my brother's point of view would be something that other people would relate to, and would help others who have experiences like him to feel less alone...My brother went to Palisades Charter High, that's the school we used for the short. He also really had everything happen to him that happens in the short, like another kid challenged him to a fight, and didn't show up. His friend Lucas intervened when he saw who my brother was going to fight, and he, in fact, knew him from church. My brother was also on the football team, and met some great friends there. All of the big decisions for storytelling were based on his real experiences.

Why did you choose to have T-Kesh represented as a monster?

I tried to think of who or what would be the ultimate representation of someone that people would react to based on physical appearance, because of fear or otherwise. Something that stood out to me about my brother was that he's funny and kind hearted, but because he's a stronger looking dude, people react a certain way to that sometimes.

What do you like most about animation?

I like that we can tell stories about some of the most imaginative things. We can bring characters to life out of nothing, and make people feel connected to them as if they are real! We can get people to understand and (sometimes) care about the feelings of others through something we've completely made up from thin air.

T-Kesh is a fictional character, but the interview style makes him feel like a real person. What are some filmmaking choices you made to achieve this effect?

The first big thing is that part of the process involved recording interviews with him and using that in the final edit. Most traditional animation is scripted, and there is very little improvised. Another thing was when storyboarding, I was constantly asking myself if what we were showing would make sense for us to have captured in T-Kesh's life if this was a real documentary, and tried to think of what is usually shown in documentaries in general. I wanted to make sure it felt as real as possible, and I had also become obsessed with making Instagram posts where I would draw characters into photos I had taken. I was ready to try something new, stylistically, and thought live action, or photo BGs [backgrounds], with CG [computer generated] animated characters would produce the most real effect.

What is something that you think people don't know about working in animation?

It's one of the most cis white male dominated industries, and most women, and especially women of color, that you see at the top, are most likely very persistent, very smart, and worked very hard to get there.

What is some advice you would give to young students interested in filmmaking?

Start making stuff and trying it out however you can. There is nothing more fun than diving straight in, wherever that is for you. Writing is something that will always be useful, so if you have stories to tell, start writing them, or filming them, or telling them in whatever way feels right for you. There is a lot of fun to be had with how accessible tools are now. People have shot award-winning films on their phones. I am always so excited to see what younger people do, because a lot of times it's so much more creative than what someone more trapped by the "rules" would make. I mean, just look at TikTok, young people dived right in and owned it, until older people started getting into it and ruined it. ■