



BATKID BEGINS

GRADES 5-12 CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILM:

Batkid Begins is a documentary film about a young boy who wants to be batman for a day, and a community that comes together to make his wish come true. A class screening of the film may complement a health, social studies or media literacy curriculum. Taught in conjunction with this guide, the film will encourage students to think critically about strength, creativity, and what it means to be part of a community. Discussion questions and supplemental materials facilitate further research into related topics such as the definition of compassion, what makes a superhero, and the role that media plays in contemporary storytelling.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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SAN FRANCISCO
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USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **Batkid Begins**. Support

materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

ABOUT THE FILM

One child. One wish. Millions touched. Who would have thought a 5-year-old boy named Miles Scott, who fought leukemia, would transform a city and a nation for a day? No one. Not his family. Not his friends. Not the thousands of volunteers who came from near and far to help make his wish come true. But it did. *Batkid Begins* is a documentary that takes you back to November 15th, 2013, the day San Francisco turned into Gotham City, and the day the internet was nice. More than a billion people took to social media to cheer on BatKid, even President Obama! In all, the #SfBatKid and #BatKid hashtags reached more than 1.84 Billion people on Twitter and Instagram. This wish and this little caped crusader resonated with so many people, including the filmmakers, and they wanted to find out why.

{ Dana Nachman (USA, 2015)
87 minutes, Color, English
Grades 5-12 }

Recommended Subject Areas:

Arts/Media
Ethics/Religion
Health
Peer/Youth Issues
Social Science
Social Studies

Key concepts / buzzwords:

Batman
Cancer
Childhood
Community
Compassion
Creativity
Imagination
Kindness
Media
Performance
Service
Volunteering



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Batkid Begins tells the story of six-year-old Miles, who was diagnosed with leukemia at a very young age. With the help of the Make a Wish foundation, Miles became Batman for a day. Before watching the film, you may wish to talk with students about leukemia, the incredible challenge of being a sick kid, and the goals of the Make a Wish foundation. Students may have personal or family experience with illness, so it is important to create a safe and judgment-free space for sharing in the classroom. As a class or in small groups, discuss the following questions:

- What is leukemia?
- How does a person get leukemia and what is the treatment process?
- Have you ever been to the hospital or had a close friend or family member who was hospitalized?
- What do you think it feels like to be very sick as a young child?
- What is the Make a Wish foundation? Why do they grant wishes to children who have been sick?

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

1) Describe Miles.

- What is his personality like?
- How is he like other kids that you know and how is he different?

- How has his experience with illness shaped his personality?
- Why do you think Miles likes Batman and other superheroes?
- What does it mean to say that Miles is compassionate?
- Where did you see instances of compassion in **Batkid Begins**?

2) Describe Miles's family.

- What are his parents like?
- What are their values?
- What do you admire about Miles's family?
- What is their reaction to the worldwide phenomenon of Batkid, and how does that connect with their overall values?

WHAT DO YOU THINK IT FEELS LIKE TO BE SICK AS A YOUNG CHILD?

3) Describe EJ and Mike Juton, the guys who play Batman and The Penguin.

- What kind of people are they?
- Are they like other adults that you know?
- In what ways are EJ and Mike like children?
- What can we learn from EJ and Mike about the relationship between childhood, play and creativity?

4) What other characters did you meet in **Batkid Begins**?

- What character traits did you notice in the adults in **Batkid Begins**?
- What did Patricia, the chief of police, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee, and the many volunteers in the Batkid campaign have in common?
- What happened when these civic leaders got involved with Miles's wish?



- Do you think that their involvement benefited people beyond Miles and his family?
- What impact did Batkid have on the city of San Francisco as a whole?
- Do you think that supporting Batkid was a valuable use of city time and resources?

Context

1) What do people say that Miles is a fighter?

- What do you think it feels like to be a kid fighting cancer?
- Why does the Make a Wish foundation say that they are giving kids back a little bit of childhood?
- What does it mean to say that cancer takes away part of your childhood?
- How did you feel when you learned about the struggles that Miles has gone through?
- Were you inspired by his ability to stay strong?

2) Where did you see evidence of community in **Batkid Begins**?

- What different communities stepped forward to support Miles and his wish?
- How did the community in Miles's hometown help his family when they needed support?
- How did the community in San Francisco support Miles and the Make a Wish foundation?
- How did the community online come forward to support Miles?
- What do these communities have in common and how are they different from one another?
- Can you come up with a definition of community that includes all of the supportive actions that you saw in

Batkid Begins?

3) What does it mean to volunteer?

- What instances of volunteer work did you see in the film?
- Why do you think people wanted to volunteer their time and resources to support Miles?
- Do volunteers benefit from donating their service? How did the volunteers benefit from helping Miles?

DO YOU THINK
 THAT BATKID
 SAVED THE
 CITY?

4) Do you think that Batkid did a good deed for the city of San Francisco even though the story was staged and imaginary?

- Do you think that Batkid saved the city?
- What does it mean to say that Batkid saved the grownups?
- Why do you think kids and grownups both enjoy superhero stories? Is there anything true about superheroes?
- Why do you think people were so happy when Batkid saved San Francisco? Do you think that Batkid became a superhero in any way?

5) What role did the media play in the story of Batkid?

- Do you think that the media was a positive force in this story?
- In what ways did the media help Patricia and the Make a Wish foundation and Miles and his family?
- What dangers did the media pose to Miles and his family?
- What do you think motivated the media interest in Miles and Batkid?
- Were the motivations of the reporters, bloggers and social media professionals generous or selfish or both?
- Why do you think the story of Batkid captured



public attention in such a profound way? What about this story made it so appealing to people around the world?

Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

1) What did you think about the comics in the beginning of the film? Did you like the way the pictures looked?

- How did the graphic illustrations help the audience connect with the story of **Batkid Begins**?
- What did the drawings tell us about Miles, his family and their story?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to use graphics instead of live footage to tell the backstory about Miles and his cancer treatment?
- Do you think this technique was effective for telling the story?

2) EJ and Mike are creative collaborators with true passion for their work. As the film says, “they have the enthusiasm that it takes to do something amazing.”

- How did EJ and Mike transform Batkid from an idea to a reality?
- What specific qualities did you notice about their creative process that led to the success of the Batkid production?
- What did you notice about the way that EJ and Mike worked together? Do you think they are good collaborators? What does it mean to be a good collaborator?

3) Do you think there is a message or a lesson to be learned from **Batkid Begins**?

- What do you think is the central theme or meaning of the film?
- Did **Batkid Begins** inspire you?
- How might you use your inspiration and your creativity to help other people?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

Journaling Activity

Write your own superhero scenario.

Imagine that you are creating a superhero adventure in your own city for a friend, a sibling or another kid who needs some cheering up.

Choose a superhero for your friend to become, and create a series of tasks and challenges for him or her to accomplish. Who will your superhero save? What crimes will he or she prevent? How will he or she be rewarded for all the hard work?

Become Your Own Superhero

Make a superhero costume and do something heroic. Using supplies in the classroom or at home, create a costume for your own personal superhero. Your superhero might be based on an already existing superhero or maybe you will come up with an entirely new superhero. You may want to make a mask, gloves, a cape, special shoes and socks, wings, or anything else to distinguish your superhero from a regular person.

Then, put on your superhero costume and do something nice for somebody else. It might be as simple as saying something nice to a friend or a classmate, helping a younger sibling with homework, or clearing away all of the dishes after dinner. Be creative and think a small way that you can make the world a better place.

Once you have completed your superhero duties, write a short reflective essay about how it feels to be a superhero.



California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- **Grade 5:** Standard 1.8 Analyze media as sources for information, entertainment, persuasion, interpretation of events, and transmission of culture.
- **Grade 6:** Standard 1.9 Identify persuasive and propaganda techniques used in television and identify false and misleading information.
- **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 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 1.3 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).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Common Core Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts standards for Reading Informational Texts grades 5-12. Additional specific standard applications are listed below:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.



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.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed.</p> <p>How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone.</p> <p>Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>All Media Is A Language.</p> <p>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?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience.</p> <p>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?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.</p> <p>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?</p>



THE NON-FICTION FILM 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.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

1895 The Lumiere brothers developed the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called "actualities" (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)

1900-1920 Travelogue or "Scenic" films became popular, showcasing exoticised images from around the globe.

1926 John Grierson coined the term "documentary" to describe Robert Flaherty's romantic nonfiction film, *Moana*.

1929 Dziga Vertov, with the Soviet Kino-Pravda movement, released the experimental nonfiction film, *Man With a Movie Camera*.

1935 Leni Reifenstahl released *Triumph of the Will*, the infamous propaganda film that chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress.

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 support of the war.

1960s The cinema vérité movement began in Europe, shortly followed by "direct cinema" in the U.S. Portable cameras and sync sound allowed filmmakers to capture intimate footage with minimal intervention.

1968 The Argentine film, *La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces)* opened the door to the activist cinema of the 1970s, which used film as a tool to counter capitalist and neo-colonial politics in Latin America.

1988 The US Congress mandated that the US government support the creation of independent non-commercial media, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was founded.

2000s The widespread use of digital cameras and editing software made the documentary medium vastly more affordable to independent and amateur filmmakers. Video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo allowed amateur filmmakers to broadcast their work.

PRESENT DAY The term "documentary" has come to encompass a wide range of nonfiction cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of truth in film and to explore new avenues and applications for the medium.



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THE MAKING OF A DOCUMENTARY

Idea, Issue, Story.

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.

The Production Process.

To capture candid moments on film, modern documentary makers often leave the camera running, collecting far more footage than the final film requires. They may do this during interviews or in observational-style encounters with their subjects. To get increased access and an observational aesthetic, documentary makers often use handheld cameras and natural light, rather than staging a more formal filming environment.

Post-Production and the Documentary.

Because a documentary film relies upon candid footage, a large part of the film's construction occurs in the editing room, where you work with what you've captured. A documentary editor will sift through long interviews just to find a few phrases that will summarize the film's message. To emphasize important points and build the story, some documentaries use a voiceover,

an interview or a scripted narrative that brings candid footage together into a coherent statement. An original score can work alongside the voiceover to unify the footage and shape the mood of the film. Audiences often underestimate the power of sound to generate an emotional response. Many documentaries also use charts, graphs and historical footage to add context and emphasize key points.

Distribution.

Once a film is completed, the filmmaker needs to help it find its audience. Many documentaries are made independently on small budgets, but what's the point of all your work if no one hears your message? Some documentaries will be released in theaters around the country or get programmed on public or cable TV channels, but most documentary filmmakers will start by submitting their work to film festivals, in hopes of attracting distributors for the theater and television markets. Filmmakers may also make their films available online and use social media to reach their target audience.



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The film's official website: <http://www.batkidbegins.com/>

Batkid at the Make-A-Wish Foundation: <http://sf.wish.org/wishes/wish-stories/i-wish-to-be/wish-to-be-batkid>

Batkid in the news:

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/batkids-make-transformed-san-francisco-gotham/story?id=20899254>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/15/batkid-san-francisco-charity-make-wish>

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/11/15/batkid-san-francisco/3588173/>

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/batkid/>

<http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2014/11/14/batkid-make-a-wish-report-good-health-a-year-after-sf-heroics/>





REVIEWS

The Hollywood Reporter

'Batkid Begins: The Wish Heard Around the World': Slamdance Review

1/30/2015 by Justin Lowe

The road The city of San Francisco is transformed into “Gotham City, SF” to fulfill a boy’s heartfelt wish in Dana Nachman’s humorous and touching new documentary.

In 2013, the parents of a 5-year-old recovering from leukemia asked the Greater Bay Area Make-A-Wish Foundation to help him become a superhero for a day. The event’s announcement went viral, thousands of volunteers and well-wishers flooded the streets of San Francisco, and millions more tuned in online — all recounted in Dana Nachman’s documentary *Batkid Begins: The Wish Heard Around the World*. Prior to the film’s Slamdance world premiere, Julia Roberts’ representatives announced that she’s attached to produce and star as one of the event’s key organizers in a feature film version of *Batkid*’s story. Whether that development will drive theatrical response for this documentary or simply seal the deal for small-screen opportunities, this project might not be the last we’ll hear of the young boy’s heroic exploits.

The national Make-A-Wish Foundation, established to provide terminally ill children with unique experiences, has granted thousands of “wishes” over the past 35 years. When the parents of Miles Scott, a young boy from rural Tule Lake, Calif., who is suffering from leukemia, contact the organization’s regional office to help him become Batman, the chapter begins planning an event that will make him “Batkid” for a day. A shy, imaginative

boy with superhero aspirations, Miles endured months of hospital and follow-up treatment and medication for his condition.

Make-A-Wish Greater Bay Area executive director Patricia Wilson set the date for Nov. 15, 2013, and began pulling together Miles’ request by calling on former stunt double, acrobat and inventor EJ Johnston and his wife, Sue, an amateur trapeze artist, to help conceive and execute the plan. At first the pair envisioned a modest event in a public park that could involve a few dozen volunteers and friends of the family. But when Wilson put out a call for volunteers on her organization’s Facebook page, thousands of people responded, her first clue that this would be no ordinary wish-fulfillment. Eventually the scope grows to include Johnston as Batman and Sue as a “damsel in distress” to be rescued by Miles, as well as amateur performers playing familiar villains The Riddler and The Penguin. San Francisco Chief of Police Greg Suhr and Mayor Ed Lee take small roles as well, and Lamborghini owners volunteer their cars as Batmobile stand-ins. Dozens of other volunteers assist with logistics, costuming, stunt training and social media outreach.

Miles’ parents, Nick and Natalie, were responsible for keeping their son in the dark until the day of the event, then supporting the little guy as he saved the city from impending evil. “Everyone said yes on this project,” Wilson recalls at one point in the doc, far exceeding even her expectations as the event goes viral and an estimated 25,000 people turn out to cheer Miles on. Even Hans Zimmer gets involved, composing a custom score for the *Batkid*, while President Obama checks in with a supportive video message for Miles.

Nachman, director of several previous Emmy-winning

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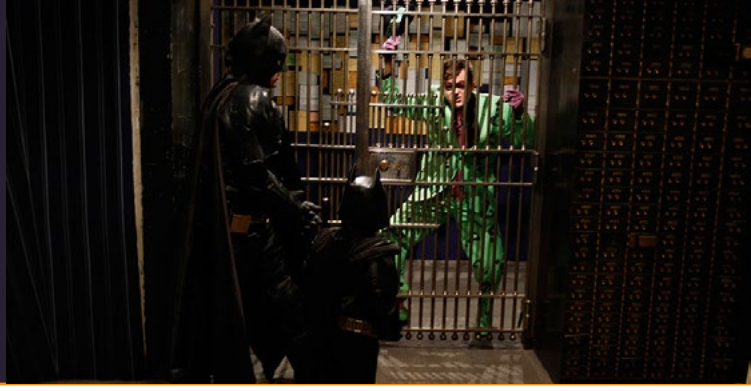
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documentaries, initially missed the entire Batkid phenomenon, coming aboard the project well after the fact. Fortunately, the Make-A-Wish Foundation had hired production company John Crane Films to shoot the spectacle, so Nachman was left to create the setup and the framing material around the event itself. Interviews with Miles and his family, foundation staff and key participants fill in the narrative, along with fairly cogent graphic novel-style animation to bridge substantial gaps in footage, all attractively packaged by editor and co-writer Kurt Kuenne.

As the star of the show, young Miles comes into his own surprisingly fast, adopting his Batkid persona and playing right along with the Batman and supervillain enactors in a highly entertaining, semi-scripted scenario that goes off mostly according to plan. In addition to throngs of well-wishers, social media platforms attracted an unheard-of 2 billion people posting and tweeting Batkid-related messages, tags and photos.

Certainly there's never been anything like it in the Make-A-Wish Foundation's or San Francisco's civic history, and as a viral, live-interaction Internet event it set a new standard. Whether Miles will remember the day exactly in the manner it's portrayed in the film has yet to be determined, but for millions of people worldwide, it's likely to remain one of the more notable experiences in recent collective memory.