

# School Guide: **AGAINST THE CURRENT**



## **ABOUT THIS GUIDE**

This BYkids School Guide is designed to help teachers expand students' use of this film from passive watching to active, deeply personalized learning. Included are three sample Pathways, each driven by an essential question to challenge students. Use the Pathway questions to start discussions in small groups or with the whole class. We've also added Discussion Starters and Suggested Projects, but we encourage you and your students to follow your own pathways and create your own projects. BYkids wants our films to be part of compelling, project-based, collaborative learning experiences that are cross-curricular, link cultures and countries by themes we all share, and spur students to develop the personal, social and emotional competencies they need to become global citizens while mastering necessary college and career readiness skills. Most of all, we want students to value their own stories while learning from the stories of others around the world. We encourage you to share the creativity and knowledge that flourish in your classroom as you and your students expand on these BYkids suggestions and create your own learning units. We'd love it if you would share your discoveries and ideas with us at [BYkids.org](https://www.bykids.org)!

**BYkids**  
THEIR WORLD THEIR FILMS

Funding provided by



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## ABOUT THE FILM

AGAINST THE CURRENT was filmed, directed, and narrated by Daunnette Moniz-Reyome (age 17), who is an enrolled member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska (also UmonHon) and lives on the UmonHon Native American reservation in Nebraska.

Daunnette illustrates her tribe's cultural identity, historical trauma, and the inspiration she finds in learning about and keeping alive the strong cultural traditions and support of her friends and family on the reservation. Daunnette tells her story as she comes of age with a sacred ceremony that highlights her strong values of cultural pride, the self-awareness within the close relationships in her particular world, and the healing power of activism, focusing on honest acceptance of others and oneself and showing how to live in two cultures without losing her sense of self.

At her tribe's powwow, Daunnette has her feather ceremony. Many Native American ceremonies are considered too sacred to film or for nontribal members to attend, but Daunnette describes her feelings on being honored with her feather ceremony and shares her family, friends, and special mentors from the reservation in the film. She hopes to inspire her Native American peers to celebrate their culture, and to show how Native American youth can use their own culture and traditions to heal from historical trauma. Daunnette sees the elders in her tribe who have kept traditional ways alive as a gift to her understanding how to become the whole person she is learning to be.

Daunnette is a fashion model, basketball player, track and field runner, and activist. She has appeared in *Teen Vogue* and spoken at the UN "Day of the Girl" Summit. A successful young woman with a bright future, Daunnette has thrived, despite growing up surrounded by drug and alcohol abuse, depression, mental illness, and suicide.

Native American people are gaining a stronger voice in United States politics and greater influence on correcting erroneous characterizations of them, for example, in the myth of the Pilgrims and the "first Thanksgiving." But enormous challenges remain—there are over 2.9 million Native Americans in the United States, and they have collectively faced years of oppression, injustice, and institutional racism. This persistent historical trauma greatly impacts the younger generations; more than one-third of the Native American population are under the age of 18. These kids face issues that range from low self-esteem, sexual violence, and mental illness to conflicting messages about cultural and environmental preservation. Native American youth have the highest rate of suicide of any ethnic group in the country. Additionally, four in five Native American women have experienced violence and one in two experience sexual violence.

One of the most important issues for young Native Americans is cultural preservation. Native American cultural practices, including religious rituals and language, were once outlawed. As a result, older generations had been prohibited from passing down their cultural traditions and forbidden to teach their language to the next generation. It took an act of Congress, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, before Native Americans could freely practice their cultural and traditional ceremonies. In 1990, Congress passed the Native

American Languages Act (NALA), recognizing that “the status of the cultures and languages of Native Americans is unique and the United States has the responsibility to act together with Native Americans to ensure [their] survival.” This legislation promised a lot to Native American communities, stating that it was now the policy of the United States to “preserve, protect and promote” Native Americans’ rights to use their Indigenous languages anywhere, including “as a medium of instruction” in schools. But such promises have often been broken, and much remains to be done to sustain and preserve Native American communities' cultural traditions.

## **ABOUT DAUNETTE’S MENTOR**

For *AGAINST THE CURRENT*, Daunnette was mentored by Evan Mascagni, a former attorney turned filmmaker from Louisville, Kentucky. He recently directed and produced *Circle of Poison*, which premiered at the DOC NYC film festival and aired on Al Jazeera. The Hollywood Reporter has called his work “eye-opening and ire-raising,” and his film has been the recipient of multiple awards and shown at film festivals around the world. Evan is the co-founder of Player Piano Productions, a documentary film production company based in New York City.

*“The power of [Daunnette’s] words will inspire other youth across the globe, and her message about the importance of understanding the past will help guide us all to a more equitable future.”*

**Evan Mascagni**

## **ABOUT BYkids**

**We create understanding through storytelling.**

BYkids produces documentary films by kids and partners with public television, educators and online innovators to inspire conversations around global issues of human dignity and social justice. Films BYkids share the stories of kids who confront issues such as immigration, bullying, juvenile justice, climate change and child marriage. We reach kids – in schools and home-learning – with films and teaching materials that promote empathy and understanding to make global issues feel personal, relevant and actionable. Join us at [BYkids.org](http://BYkids.org) to see and support stories that build global citizenry.

# THE GUIDE

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## PATHWAY 1

### WHAT VALUES AND ACTIONS DO YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT FOR A WORTHY ADULT TO HAVE?

Daunnette talks about becoming worthy of her feather, of earning it as a symbol of becoming not just an adult, but responsible for meeting her own expectations, plus her family's and tribe's expectations of her. Her values are partly her own, partly based in her history and culture. Her values will show in her actions.

#### From the Film

*"[. . . you] gotta earn the right [to wear an eagle feather]. To a veteran, eagle feathers represent fallen soldiers.*

~ Alton Porter

#### Discussion Starters

- What are your cultural values and beliefs? How do they help you be a better person?
- History is often an interpretation of facts based on the historian's perspectives or beliefs. How can you read history from different perspectives and learn from differing viewpoints? Why is it important to get different historical information and perspectives to help inform your own interpretation and values? How do facts get interpreted?
- What are some facts and beliefs that you learned from the film? What was new or different to you? What facts and beliefs did you share in common?

#### Suggested Projects

- What part does culture play in the values you see your school, town, state, or nation hold as positive and as expected behavior from your peers? Which are positive, and which would you like to make better or change?

In small groups, make lists of the positive values and those needing improvement. Then make a poster, mural, or performance to illustrate both kinds.

- How can you encourage others to learn about and value the positive aspects of their history? Choose a culture—Native American or another one—and research some customs, traditions and actions, events, or laws. Make an organizing chart of your research, and list the positive and negative aspects of each. Then prepare a skit, performance, or presentation to show how any culture can learn a positive value from another. You may use music, dance, or any other medium.
- Was there something new you learned about Native American history from the film? Something that left you with questions about Native American history? Research that history—from any Native American nation or tribe. Create a visual timeline with illustrations or a film/video or essay to show that history and tell it from the viewpoint of a Native American person.

Some possibilities are the various acts and treaties passed by the U.S. Congress regulating what Natives Americans are allowed to do, such as the act that mandated that

their children be placed in boarding schools off the reservation away from their families in order to “acculturate” them; the Treaty of New Echota and its current status in Congress; and recent conflicts over natural resources such as water and the environment. What can you learn from trying to see the perspective of history from different points of view?

- Research current statistics on illness, both physical and mental, on Native American reservations, and in your town or state. Compare the statistics in a diagram or graph. Then discuss how you think physical illness such as coronavirus, and mental illness such as depression might influence a person’s actions and feelings. Report your hypotheses to your class based on your interpretation of the statistics, using mathematical thinking and reasoning.

## THE GUIDE (continued)

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### PATHWAY 2

#### WHAT POSITIVE ACTIONS CAN YOU TAKE TO REMIND YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY THAT YOU CAN OVERCOME DIFFICULT CHALLENGES?

Daunnette is very straightforward about the drug and alcohol abuse, depression, and mental illness on the reservation. But she and others in the film talk about the strength and healing they get from their work and from traditional Native American ways, such as what they call the “medicine” of healing love and kindness, and symbolic ways to heal or reach a positive attitude and outlook, such as smudging, burning a stick of bound sage in one’s home or other locale to symbolically banish bad thoughts and depression to achieve goodness and balance. Symbolic actions exist in every culture.

#### From the Film

*“I didn’t understand why I was so angry . . . , why nobody understands me. . . . It was hard for me to ask for help. . . . I learned how to sew, so then that would keep my mind busy. And then practicing our culture helped me.”*

~ Shelby Webster

#### Discussion Starters

- Daunnette and others in the film took action even when they were depressed or sad, and that helped to focus them. Some of the actions were symbolic, some were directly helping others. What actions, both symbolic and more direct, could help in your class, school, or town? How can you turn symbols into positive change?
- Everyone sometimes has negative feelings. What are the actions that give positive feelings as well as outcomes in your class or school? Could it be an individual act of kindness toward one person? Or speaking to a large group as Daunnette did at the United Nations about the problems on Native American reservations?
- How can an organized movement work to change attitudes and policies for the better?

#### Suggested Projects

- With a small group, create your own symbolic ceremony, song, or act to remind yourself and your class or school that you can help others. Explain how you want to help and present your symbolic ceremony to the class.
- Create a Plan for Positive Change to make your school or town a more inclusive, positive environment and to help anyone struggling with negative feelings. Decide how you will implement the plan. It could start with a club or group that focuses on everyone identifying something positive, funny in a healing way, or just plain fun. Consider how to share that positivity with everyone and with mentoring younger kids. Or it could be an activity where your group creates sculptures or drawings of the negative and then you all destroy them to symbolize overcoming a hard time. Remember to be respectful of each person and only help to destroy their creation if they want you to. Respect the feelings of everyone—your goal is to help.

- Research some of the resources available for helping people with the social and emotional challenges many of us experience while growing up. Make a resource poster or booklet, illustrate it, and distribute it at your school. Two good starting places are the Child Mind Institute ([childmind.org](http://childmind.org)) and CASEL ([case1.org](http://case1.org)). Present what you have learned from these and other organizations to your class. Your school guidance counselor(s) will also be able to help you with more resources.

## THE GUIDE (continued)

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### PATHWAY 3

#### HOW CAN YOU HELP TO ACCEPT THE CHOICES OF OTHERS EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT YOUR CHOICES?

Daunnette's friend is "two-spirited," or identifying with both female and male genders. In Daunnette's tribe, men touch the drum, and both men and women dance. The reservation is a place where they are accepted, but not by all people.

#### From the Film

*"A lot of people treated me differently. Some kindly, a lot with hate and negativity, but I had to grow a thick skin, long time ago. . . . In the end, people grew to be more accepting and open-minded to my choices."*

~ JuRay Cook

#### Discussion Starters

- Daunnette accepts her "two-spirited" friend and values their friendship. How can you respect the differences of others and be friends? Why does Mike think that education is so important to make a positive change? Does he seem proud to have made progress in his education? Why? How did he get help?
- How can you create a safe group space in your class or school for all to be accepted? What behavior is to be respected? What is not acceptable? How do you decide on your class and school values?
- What do you do when you or someone exhibits behavior that is not in your set of values? How can you help to heal the "stumbles?"

#### Suggested Projects

- With a small group or your class, create a statement of your values and expected behaviors. Your school may have a mission statement, as do most companies. Locate some mission statements and compare yours with them. Present your mission statement to the class.
- Next, create a set of measures that your group or class agrees will be the outcomes you will use to evaluate progress. For example, if your mission statement includes acceptance of all students, an outcome might be lowering or eliminating incidences of name-calling or bullying.
- Establish a way to keep a tally of positive and negative occurrences and track your statistics. Make a monthly report citing the numbers, but without naming names or calling out individual students.
- Evaluate your class's progress on improving the class culture monthly with a scheduled get-together. Celebrate your progress! And share your progress with the school.

## **COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS**

Dear Educator,

You and your students, in defining the creative and collaborative details of each Pathway and Project, will implement many different standards not limited to any one content area but focused on critical and rigorous, evidence-based thinking. Below are provided some College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards that appear in the majority of state PK-12 curriculum standards in ELA and Math, and in the Next Gen Science Standards, but you and your students will go beyond those limited standards. Also identified are Social Emotional Competency areas identified by CASEL, a charitable organization that has helped to lead the way in defining and evaluating social emotional learning. We hope you will share your experiences and ideas at [BYkids.org](http://BYkids.org).

### **PATHWAY 1**

#### **CCSS ELA College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards**

CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.

CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes content and style.

CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content in diverse media and formats.

CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a work, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory text to examine and convey complex ideas.

CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.

CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.W.7 Conduct research based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject.

CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCRA.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCRA.SL.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.SL.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

CCRA.SL.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks.

**CCSS Standards of Mathematical Practice**

- MP2 Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
- MP3 Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
- MP5 Use appropriate tools strategically.
- MP6 Attend to precision.
- MP7 Look for and make use of structure.
- MP8 Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

**NEXT GEN SCIENCE STANDARDS, SCIENTIFIC and ENGINEERING PRACTICES**

- SEP 4 Analyzing and interpreting data.
- SEP 5 Using mathematics and computational thinking.
- SEP 7 Engaging in argument from evidence.
- SEP 8 Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

**SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CORE COMPETENCE AREAS (CASEL.ORG)**SELF-AWARENESS:

- Identifying personal and cultural assets
- Examining prejudices and biases

SOCIAL AWARENESS:

- Taking others' perspectives
- Recognizing strengths in others
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- Understanding the influences of organizations/systems on behavior

SELF-MANAGEMENT:

- Setting personal and collective goals
- Using planning and organizational skills
- Showing the courage to take initiative

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS:

- Communicating effectively
- Demonstrating cultural competency
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- Resolving conflicts constructively

Seeking or offering support and help when needed

Standing up for the rights of others

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING:

Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness

Identifying solutions for personal and social problems

Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts

Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions

Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school

Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

**PATHWAY 2**

**CCSS ELA College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards**

CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.

CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.

CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes content and style.

CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content in diverse media and formats.

CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing your own clearly and persuasively.

CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.SL.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

CCRA.SL.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks.

**NEXT GEN SCIENCE STANDARDS, SCIENTIFIC and ENGINEERING PRACTICES**

SEP 7 Engaging in argument from evidence.

SEP 8 Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

## **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CORE COMPETENCE AREAS (CASEL.ORG)**

### SELF-AWARENESS:

- Integrating personal and social identities
- Identifying one's emotions
- Linking feelings, values, and thoughts
- Examining prejudices and biases
- Experiencing self-efficacy
- Having a growth mindset
- Developing interests and a sense of purpose

### SOCIAL AWARENESS:

- Taking others' perspectives
- Recognizing strengths in others
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities

### SELF-MANAGEMENT:

- Managing one's emotions
- Identifying and using stress-management strategies
- Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation
- Using planning and organizational skills
- Showing the courage to take initiative

### RELATIONSHIP SKILLS:

- Communicating effectively
- Developing positive relationships
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- Resisting negative social pressure
- Showing leadership in groups
- Seeking or offering support and help when needed

### RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING:

- Identifying solutions for personal and social problems
- Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, facts
- Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being
- Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

## **PATHWAY 3**

### **CCSS ELA College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards**

CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.

CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes and analyze their development.

CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.

CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes content and style.

CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a work, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing your own clearly and persuasively.

CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.SL.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks.

### **CCSS Standards of Mathematical Practice**

MP2 Reason abstractly and quantitatively.

MP3 Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others. MP5 Use appropriate tools strategically.

MP6 Attend to precision.

MP7 Look for and make use of structure.

MP8 Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

### **NEXT GEN SCIENCE STANDARDS, SCIENTIFIC and ENGINEERING PRACTICES**

SEP 1 Ask questions and define problems

SEP 2 Develop and use models

SEP 3 Plan and carry out investigations

SEP 4 Analyze and interpret data.

SEP 7 Engaging in argument from evidence.

SEP 8 Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CORE COMPETENCE AREAS (CASEL.ORG)**

#### SELF-AWARENESS:

Integrating personal and social identities

Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets

Linking feelings, values, and thoughts

Examining prejudices and biases

Experiencing self-efficacy

SOCIAL-AWARENESS:

Taking others' perspectives

Demonstrating empathy and compassion

Showing concern for the feelings of others

Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones

SELF-MANAGEMENT:

Identifying and using stress-management strategies

Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation

Setting personal and collective goals

Using planning and organizational skills

Showing the courage to take initiative

Demonstrating personal and collective agency

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS:

Communicating effectively

Developing positive relationships

Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving

Resolving conflicts constructively

Showing leadership in groups

Seeking or offering support and help when needed

Standing up for the rights of others

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING:

Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness

Identifying solutions for personal and social problems

Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts

Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions

Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school

Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being

Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts