

Cheating Death : TEACHING GUIDE

- **FILM LENGTH:** 24 minutes, can be screened in shorter sections.
- **GRADE LEVEL:** 4 through to post-secondary.
- **SUBJECTS:** Civics, Social Studies, Religion, History, Urban Studies, Supply, Ethics, Politics, Social Justice, Media Arts.
- **TARGET AUDIENCE:** Youth susceptible to gun/gang violence, those interested in addressing the root causes of youth violence, religious groups.

CONNECTIONS to Cheating Death is designed for use immediately before and after viewing the documentary. It seeks to widen perspectives and foster critical thinking.

SUMMARY:

"Certain people weren't meant to be killers, but just through their environment and where they grow up and stuff like that, they just know that they got to do what they got to do." – Gyasi Ferdinand

For ten years, Gyasi Ferdinand sold crack cocaine in Regent Park. In 2000, he got shot and barely survived. Since then he found God and has made big changes in his life. But he is still struggling to stay clear of the streets.

Cheating Death is Gyasi's story. The 24-minute documentary looks at the cascading series of choices he made, from selling drugs on street corners, to picking up a gun, to getting into the street dispute that almost cost him his life and finally sharing his story with youth traveling the same path he once did.

Gyasi's personal experience and frank storytelling provide a unique opportunity to open up discussion with at-risk inner-city youth. **Cheating Death** is an ideal educational tool that promotes healthy choices and smart decision-making.

CONNECTIONS-PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

For discussion or essay

1. What is a decision/choice? At what point does Gyasi make bad/good decisions?
2. A lack of education limits your opportunities for success. What would you like to be? How is your future determined by the choices you make today?
3. Gyasi says, "Some people weren't ment to be killers ... but you got to do what you got to do." What choices did Gyasi have at this point?
4. Gyasi mentions, "The flesh always wants to do fleshy stuff." Discuss.
5. Gyasi has made deep personal changes. Is he happy? What has he lost? Is his life easier now?
5. What is Gyasi's message? To whom is it addressed? How important is it that he gives that message in his own words? Identify unanswered issues.
6. What are some of the barriers that stops someone from doing the right thing?
7. Friendship and belonging are very important. What is a good friend and what is a bad one?
8. Most gang members end up dead or in jail. Discuss.

CONNECTIONS-CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

For Homework/Project

Think of an older person that you look up to. Ask them if you can interview them about their life: values they hold, aspirations they live with, the key decisions they made, key events that shaped what happened to them. What dreams/aspirations did they have in grade school (or the age of the student asking)? How did things pan out and why? What lessons did the person learn that they'd like to share with the student?

For Role-playing module 1

You are out one night with guys you have known since grade one. You see a stranger across the street. Your friend says, "I could use those runners." What do you do?

For Role-playing module 2

Your best friend has a new boyfriend. He seems really nice and does everything for her. She is really happy. Then you hear a rumour that he is a pimp.

For Role-playing module 3

Your brother is in a turf war with another guy. You know someone is going to get shot. (Play this out with various family members and, in a surprise move, have the brother killed.)

CONNECTIONS-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

For discussion or essay

1. If you were asked to introduce outsiders to your neighborhood, what words would you use to describe it? What sounds would you want outsiders to hear? What sights would you include on your tour? What parts of your neighborhood are you proudest of? What do you wish you could change? How do you think outsiders see your neighborhood?
2. Many people see themselves as bystanders-individuals who lack the power and influence to make a difference. Others disagree. They are convinced that there are no limits to what people can accomplish if they join together with others who share their vision. What do you think? To what extent can people stop the violence and regain control of their community?