

MVFF

EDUCATION

October
6-16

GROW EXPLORE CONNECT DISCOVER

Path of the Panther



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 6-12

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Instructor Resources

A Letter to Educators	ii
Discussion Questions	iii
Interpretive Essay Prompts	iii
Additional Resources	iv
Standards	iv
About CAFILM	iv

Student Handouts

About the Film	1
Contextual Information	2
Viewing Activities	3
About Film Festivals	8



Dear educators,

Thank you for attending the 45th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival's screening of *Path of the Panther*. We are excited to return in our 2022 fall season with a combination of both in-person screenings for local schools and online screenings for those of you joining us from afar.

This year, our film selections for school screenings continue to focus on increasingly relevant issues of global empathy and active citizenship, and we believe this film will be a powerful and engaging text to use in your classroom. These curricular materials are designed to get students to engage deeply with film by the common-core aligned skills of developing an evidence-based interpretation of a text.

The discussion questions on the following page offer a variety of options for fostering small-group or whole-class dialogue. If your students are already familiar with a process of writing evidence-based interpretive essays, consider using the suggested essay prompts for a short writing piece. Additionally, individual handouts for before, during, and after viewing are provided as stand-alone activities to be used individually or in sequence. We have also included a handout that provides some context for the film festival experience, which may help to introduce your screening experience.

Thank you so much for your tireless work!

Sincerely,

The CAFILM Education Team

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the main events that occur in this film? What has changed between the start and the end of each chapter?
2. What are the primary emotions you felt during this film? What are some secondary emotions?
3. Consider the editing and the tempo of this film. Did things move quickly or slowly? How come?
4. What do you see in this film that reminds you of other stories from your life or other stories you know?
5. What are some background details you noticed in this film? How do these details provide information about the time or place in which this film was made?
6. Consider other films you've seen. What makes this film unique or important? What are some connections between this film and other films?
7. Were there any voices or perspectives you thought were missing from this film? If so, how might the inclusion of those perspectives have changed the film and its message?
8. Which of Ward's panther photographs were most striking or beautiful? What was most surprising about Ward's process for capturing these images?
9. What does this film show about the relationship between art, technology, and science?
10. How does the protection of the Florida panther's habitat connect to conservation issues closer to your own home?

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. How can human actions—at either the individual or collective level—impact the habitat of the Florida panther in positive or negative ways?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation

<https://floridawildlifecorridor.org/>

A foundation with a mission to champion a collaborative campaign to permanently connect, protect and restore the Florida Wildlife Corridor. They combine conservation science with compelling imagery and rich storytelling to heighten the visibility of the Florida Wildlife Corridor and inspire its protection.

National Geographic: Saving the Florida Wildlife Corridor

<https://youtu.be/K9-7WEPyZ4o>

A 10-minute film on the Florida Wildlife Corridor. Through the voices of farmers, fisherman, ranchers and conservationists, the film offers a glimpse into one of America's most unique and complex conservation opportunities, and highlights the need to collaborate to ensure its survival.

Carlton Ward Photography

<https://www.carltonward.com/>

The official website of wildlife photographer Carlton Ward.

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B

Apply grades 9-10 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., "Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning").

ABOUT CAFILM

The nonprofit California Film Institute celebrates and promotes film as art and education through year-round programming at the independent Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, presentation of the acclaimed Mill Valley Film Festival and DocLands Documentary Film Festival, as well as cultivation of the next generation of filmmakers and audiences through CAFILM Education programs.

The California Film Institute and Mill Valley Film Festival are located in Marin County, California, on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary homelands of the Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo peoples. This includes the Southern Pomo and Graton Rancheria Tribes. These tribes were removed or displaced from their lands. We recognize this history and the harm to present-day Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo peoples and to their ancestors. The California Film Institute commits to moving forward from a place of authenticity and working with present-day tribes to elevate their stories, history, and present-day legacy through film.

Follow the Mill Valley Film Festival on social media

 @millvalleyfilmfest  @MillValleyFilmFestival
 @mvfilmfest  californiainstitute #MVFF45

Path of the Panther



ABOUT THE FILM

In the southern Everglades, a wildlife photographer, veterinarians, ranchers, conservationists, and indigenous people join forces to track and protect the endangered Florida panther. In this moving documentary, stunning images of the big cats spur the movement to restore a majestic keystone species as well as dwindling wilderness. While *National Geographic* photographer Carlton Ward, Jr. employs camera traps to capture thrilling video and still portraits of panthers and other marshland creatures, biologists track the elusive wild felines, vets rehabilitate them after car strikes, and ranchers preserve working land and prevent overdevelopment. Creating wildlife corridors through ranch lands and nature preserves is the long-term plan. Through Ward's art, the Florida panther and the swampland itself speak eloquently of their right to continue. A gripping tale of survival, *Path of the Panther* offers hope that we can follow our love of beauty and nature toward better stewardship of the Earth.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR: ERIC BENDICK

Eric Bendick is an Emmy-winning director, producer, and writer whose films explore connectivity, conflict, and ingenuity at the intersection of human and wild spaces. He has led storytelling expeditions to the heart of many of the last intact and untamed landscapes on Earth, as well as to the frontlines of habitat destruction and fragmentation. His films for National Geographic, PBS, the Smithsonian, and The History Channel, among others, have garnered numerous awards from major film festivals around the world. Bendick is a current grantee of the Redford Center and a graduate of Brown University and Montana State University. Leading up to the production of *The Path of the Panther* he directed *The Forgotten Coast* (PBS), *The Last Green Thread* (Mountain-film) and *Chasing Ghosts* (National Geographic), all within the Florida Everglades ecosystem.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Florida Everglades

The Everglades are subtropical wetlands whose fresh water system begins near Orlando in the Kissimmee River. The water moves from the Kissimmee River to the shallow Lake Okeechobee, which averages 12 feet deep and covers 730 square miles. Historically, during the wet season the water moved from the lake into a slow-moving and shallow 50-mile wide river flowing across the Everglades saw grass and toward the mangrove estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico. Elaborate water control systems now disrupt much of this natural flow of water. Water and fire shaped the Everglades, which experienced frequent flooding in the wet season and droughts in the dry season. The Everglades encompass freshwater habitats, hardwood hammocks, saltwater habitats, cypress swamps, saw grass marshes, mangrove forests, and subtropical pine forests.



Over time, the diverse ecosystems in Everglades National Park have been the home of many pre-contact and historic period American Indian tribes. Major tribes in the area included the Calusa, Tequesta, Jega, Ais, and later the Seminoles. The Calusa, who primarily inhabited the southwestern region of this area, are considered to have been the largest and most powerful tribe in South Florida from 1000 B.C. until the 1700s. Other tribes including the Tequesta, Jega, and Ais, lived along the eastern coast.

The Florida Panther

While once common in the region, now there are fewer than one hundred Florida panthers living in the wild in south Florida. The main threat to their survival was once bounty hunters leading to near extinction by the mid-1950s, but now the primary threat is habitat reduction. Top predators of the region, panthers are strictly carnivores with their diet mainly consisting of feral hog, white-tailed deer, racoon, and armadillo. Panthers prefer mature upland forests over other habitat types. Upland forests include hardwood hammocks and pinelands which provide dry ground for panthers to rest and have higher prey density than lower habitats that are prone to flooding. Since the Everglades are mainly wetlands, the panthers in the park are smaller and fewer.

The Florida Everglades excerpt from The National Park Service: "Florida: Everglades National Park" (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/everglades.htm>)

The Florida Panther excerpt from the U.S. Geological Survey: "Ecology of Everglades National Park" (<https://www.usgs.gov/geology-and-ecology-of-national-parks/ecology-everglades-national-park>)

BEFORE VIEWING: PRIOR KNOWLEDGE FREEWRITE

Directions:

The film you are about to watch follows a photographer with a mission to capture images of the elusive Florida panther. Consider your own personal familiarity and connection to these topics by responding to **one** of the following prompts in a short free-write.

PROMPT 1: PHOTOGRAPHY

What makes a good photograph? What are the skills of a great photographer? How can photographs inform or influence changes in society?

PROMPT 2: FELINES

What do you know about panthers or other cats? What are some typical feline behaviors or traits? How do domestic house cats differ from wild cats?

DURING VIEWING: NOTEATCHER

Directions:

This film centers on wildlife photographer Carlton Ward and his efforts to photograph the Florida panther. Throughout the film, you will meet other people involved in the fight to protect the panther and its habitat, and also learn about human activities that disrupt the natural habitat of the panther. As you watch, record observations of the different actions that humans take, placing each observation on the line below with respect to how much that action is harmful, neutral, or beneficial to the Florida panther.



AFTER VIEWING: RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Directions:

Respond to each question, referring to specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your interpretation.

1. What is the overall importance of the Florida Wildlife Corridor? What are the most important things humans must do to preserve it?

2. What life experiences and observations informed Carlton Ward's passion for protecting the panther?

3. What were the greatest challenges Ward had to overcome to capture images of the panther? How did he overcome these challenges?

4. How are the indigenous Miccosukee perspectives on the panther unique or different from Western perspectives?

5. What laws or restrictions do you think should be imposed at either the state or national level to protect wildlife such as the Florida panther?

AFTER VIEWING: FOUR C'S

Directions:

Respond to each prompt in complete sentences, citing specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your response.

CONNECTIONS

What connections do you draw between the film and your own life or other learnings?

CHALLENGE

What ideas, positions, or assumptions do you want to challenge or debate in the film?

CONCEPTS

What key concepts or ideas do you think are important and worth holding on to from the film?

CHANGES

What changes in attitudes, thinking, or action are suggested by the film, either for you or others?

Adapted from Harvard Project Zero's Think Routine Toolbox:

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/the-4-cs>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

Take inspiration from Carlton Ward's mission to photograph the Florida panther and start your own foray into wildlife photography. Though you might not be able to create the elaborate camera traps used in the film, you can still celebrate the biodiversity of your own environment by documenting some of the local wildlife.

Directions:

1. Identify an animal species that lives in the wild near you - no pets allowed! Challenge yourself by picking something elusive, but also make sure you pick something that you can photograph safely.
2. Take a photograph of this animal in its natural habitat. You may want to research the animal's sleep habits and habitat preferences to help you know where and when you can find it.
3. Share your photograph! Lots of regional park systems have social media accounts that might post your image if you send it to them. You can also look for wildlife photography contests to submit to.

Tips for Taking Wildlife Photographs:

- If you are using a camera phone, shoot in landscape mode, with your phone horizontal. This framing is usually better for capturing animals as well as their surrounding landscape.
- Use the zoom function so you can keep a safe distance from your subject and not startle them. Be careful not to zoom so much that the resolution becomes pixelated.
- Take lots of photographs! You can always delete the weaker images and pick the best ones later.
- Compose using "the rule of thirds." This means imagining your frame is divided in thirds both horizontally and vertically, and placing the main subject of your film along those third lines.
- If your camera has an adjustable shutter speed, use a fast shutter speed to reduce motion blur of your subject.



ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

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What is a film festival?

A film festival is an event in which multiple movies are presented over the course of one or several days. Depending on the size of the festival, all of the screenings may take place in a single theater or may involve multiple venues throughout a city. Festivals also include special events like panel discussions with filmmakers and actors. Typically, filmmakers submit their works to a festival, where a team of curators selects the best entries for inclusion in the festival. For independent and international filmmakers, festivals are often an important way to raise awareness of a film, generate an audience, and/or attract a studio to purchase the rights to distribute a film in a wider release. Acceptance into a major festival can add significant prestige to a film, with some festival awards (such as the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or) considered among the highest honors a film can receive.

There are many film festivals through-

out the world, with some focusing on particular themes, such as highlighting LGBTQ films/filmmakers, specific cultural groups, or particular genres. While some of the more famous festivals may be in distant locations, there are hundreds of small festivals spread through every corner of the world and, increasingly, festivals are using streaming access to make it easier for the public to view their curated programs.

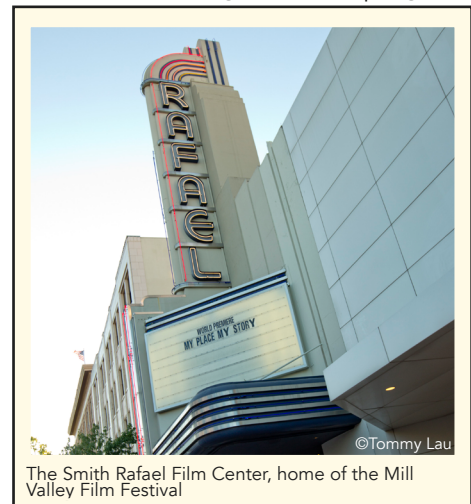
History of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Since founding the Mill Valley Film Festival in 1977, Executive Director Mark Fishkin has shepherded this once small, three-day showcase into an eleven-day, internationally acclaimed cinema event presenting a wide variety of new films from around the world in an engaged, community setting.

The festival has an impressive track record of launching new films and new filmmakers, and has earned a reputation as a filmmakers' festival

by celebrating the best in American independent and foreign films, alongside high-profile and prestigious award contenders. The relaxed and non-competitive atmosphere surrounding MVFF, gives filmmakers and audiences alike the opportunity to share their work and experiences in a collaborative and convivial setting.

Each year the festival welcomes more than 200 filmmakers, representing more than 50 countries. Screening sections include world cinema, US cinema, documentaries, family films, and shorts programs. Annual festival initiatives include Active Cinema, a forum for films that aim to engage audiences and transform ideas into action; Mind the Gap, a platform for inclusion and equity; and ¡Viva el Cine!, a showcase of Latin American and Spanish-language films.. Festival guests also enjoy an exciting selection of Tributes, Spotlights and Galas throughout the program.



The Smith Rafael Film Center, home of the Mill Valley Film Festival

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Questions to Consider:

1. What is the purpose of a film festival? What are the benefits for filmmakers? For the audience? For the community?
2. How might the films at a festival differ from the films available to watch at your local movie theater?
3. What qualities do you think festival curators might look for in a film? If you are watching a festival film with a class/school group, what aspects of the film do you think made it appealing to the curators?

Get Involved!

Many film festivals, including the Mill Valley Film Festival, have student film categories. If you are a filmmaker, explore FilmFreeway (www.filmfreeway.com) for a database of worldwide film festivals where you can submit your film. The call for entries for MVFF opens in late February and closes in June. Youth filmmakers do not have to pay an entry fee. MVFF also offers many opportunities for volunteering. Find out more at <https://www.cafilm.org/volunteer/>.