

# F★R★E★E



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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# ABOUT THE FILM



**F•R•E•E** IS AN AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY FILM THAT FOLLOWS FIVE OAKLAND, CA TEENS THROUGH A TRANSFORMATIVE YEAR IN THE DESTINY ARTS YOUTH PERFORMANCE COMPANY.

Each year, a diverse group of teens audition for one of twenty spots in this Oakland program, where they will spend months working together to create an emotionally charged performance based on their lives. In a city plagued by violence and high student drop-out rates, Destiny Arts Center provides a safe haven for the teens to share their stories, to build community, and to express themselves through dance and performance art.

Central to the film are the stories of the five teens.

**Jamany**, who once thought guns, violence, and drugs were the way to fit in, barely escapes juvenile hall.

**Nee Nee's** mother has breast cancer and struggles to pay the bills.

**Alaysia** is trying to cope with a childhood rape.

**Omar**, who has been through 11 foster homes, is diagnosed with HIV.

**Tilly** has little outlet for the pain of a difficult relationship with her girlfriend and resorts to cutting.

Yet as they unite beyond differences to create their production, the teens find voice and community.

Their journey, under the guidance of Destiny's artistic director Sarah Crowell, reveals how collaborative art can be a foundation for **personal strength, liberation, and hope.**

*"... I don't know where I would be without dancing. I wouldn't know myself, I wouldn't know my breaking point..."*

*Without dancing, I would be scared of myself."*

**- Jamany**





## MESSAGE FROM THE FILMMAKERS

### STORYTELLING IS A WAY TO MAKE SENSE OF OUR WORLD

On a chilly autumn night, we sat in a circle while the youth of Destiny Arts Center shared their stories with each other. They began with the words ***“If you really knew me ...”*** We knew we were witnessing something important.

***“If you really knew me, you would know that I spend most of my day on Facebook.”***

*“... you would know that my parents split when I was five.”*

Each time around the circle, deeper stories emerged.

***“If you really knew me, you would know that my father was abusive.”***

*“... you would know that these are cigarette burns.”*

*“... I was raped as a little girl.”*

*“... I was shot when I was eight.”*

The young people were from Oakland, California, and this was the start of a new Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company, a select group of teens chosen each year to create a performance based on their lives. Plenty of hip hop dance moves were made that day—hinge kicks, tutting, chest pops—but the sharing played a special role in bonding the group.

We filmed the young people in the company over the course of a year, documenting the process as they turned their stories into art. The product is the film you are about to watch.

After making **F•R•E•E**, we understand the immense power in the simple act of sharing a story. Whether by listening or by telling our own, walls come down, bridges of empathy are built, and real change can happen when we begin with:

***“If you really knew me ...”***

– **Suzanne LaFetra & David Collier,**  
filmmakers



# INTRODUCTION

Thank you for choosing to screen **F•R•E•E** with your class or group!

We hope that, like us, you are inspired by the teens' stories and their performance.

With the help of educators and Destiny Arts Center, we've created this discussion guide as a road map to help you and your students navigate the issues raised in the film.

**There are two versions of the film:**

- Classroom Version: 56 minutes
- Feature Length Version: 73 minutes.

*The feature length film can be screened in two segments. Stop it a little after 42 minutes.*

*This is right after the scene where Tilly talks about her relationship with Rashidi.*

**This guide is intended primarily for high-school age youth, but is appropriate for ages 13 and older.**

The activities are meant to supplement the film, to give your class or group the opportunity to share their stories and ideas, to discuss the themes in the film, and to experience first-hand some of the exercises taught at the Destiny Arts Center.

**F•R•E•E** tackles a variety of relevant issues affecting today's youth.

**As the story unfolds, themes emerge in the film...**

POVERTY COMMUNITY HOPE  
 FREEDOM TRUTH FAMILY  
 STRUGGLE GENDER  
 VIOLENCE SELF EXPRESSION  
 SAFE SPACE

# SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Here is an outline of a sample lesson plan. Feel free to use this one or customize your own with the more detailed plan.

Allow at

DISCUSSION

STEP 1

## MOVEMENT EXERCISES

STEP 2

STEP 3

Here are some Destiny Arts Center signature movement and theater exercises. They are a great way to explore the themes of the play and our bodies.

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## WRITING EXERCISES

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## GOING DEEPER – EXERCISES

If you'd like to go expand your lesson plan and explore more themes, here are some exercises to choose from.

### THEIR PATH, MY EMPATHY

#### PERCEIVE, KNOW, CARE ABOUT

**Length of Activity:** 15-30 minutes

**Set-Up:** Provide students with pictures of the main characters: Jamany & Jamany.

Have each student pick one character and write the answers to the questions they chose.

- What's a strong memory you have of this person?
- What's something that this person feels strongly about?
- What's something or someone that this person cares about?
- What advice do you think this person would give?

Split the class into groups based on which teen they wrote about. Have the groups answer the above questions. After the smaller groups have had a chance to share, the larger group share some of their answers and thoughts with the

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