

# FUTURESTATES<sup>®</sup>



## *Beholder*

Directed by Nisha Ganatra

**[C] COMMUNITY CLASSROOM**  
ENGAGING STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS THROUGH FILM

PRESENTED BY:  
**[ITVS]**  
Public Media's  
Independent Voice



FUTURESTATES.TV

ABOUT

# FUTURESTATES

## Imagining tomorrow's America today,



SCENES AND BEHIND THE SCENES FROM *FUTURESTATES* FILMS.  
TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT: *Gunny* by Patrick Stettner, *That Which Once Was* by Kimi Takesue, *Laura Keller-NB* by Mo Perkins, and *Beholder* by Nisha Ganatra



*Futurestates* is a series of independent mini-features – short narrative films created by experienced filmmakers and emerging talents – transforming today's complex social issues into visions about what life in America will be like in decades to come. Now in its third season, *Futurestates*, which debuted in March 2010, is available online at [futurestates.tv](http://futurestates.tv).

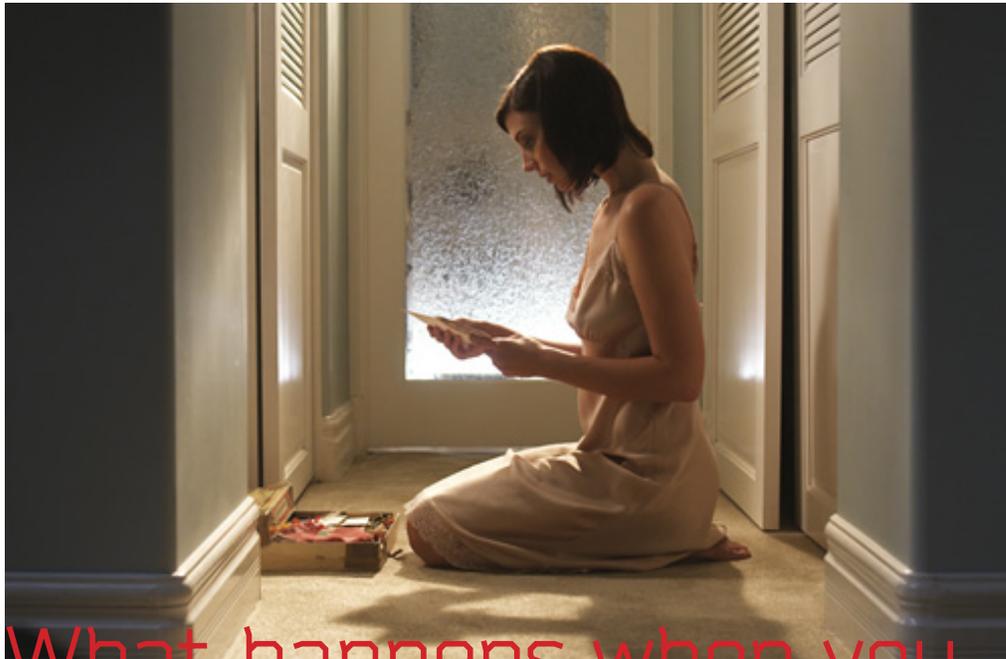
available online at  
**FUTURESTATES.tv.**



Public Media's  
Independent Voice

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy® Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Monday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens, and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue, and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [itvs.org](http://itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

# OVERVIEW



## What happens when you are reluctant to make the choices that others expect of you?

This is a question that high school students face regularly as they continue to move from adolescence toward greater independence. It is also the dilemma that Sasha, the main character of *Beholder* faces. This film is set in a future where technology has allowed for everyone living in the fictional Red Estates gated community to pick and choose all of the genetic features of the children before they are born. When Sasha learns that her unborn child has a genetic marker for homosexuality, knowing that the laws of her community dictate that she must either “fix” the fetus with an inoculation or have an abortion, she begins to question the morality of the place where she has lived most of her life.



### TARGET AUDIENCE:

Grades 9–12  
ENGLISH, SOCIAL STUDIES, HEALTH, OR BIOLOGY

### DURATION:

The main lesson is designed to be completed within a **55-minute class period**, with additional and extension activities that can expand to three or four class periods.

The film itself has a running time of about **20 minutes**.

### STANDARDS:

Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature:

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

## BEFORE

(5–10) minutes

Based on the time available, ask students to consider one or more of the following questions and topics:

1. Currently, there are a lot of tests that can be done on babies before they are born to look for birth defects and other abnormalities. Soon, there are likely to be tests that can identify other qualities, such as an eye color, intelligence, markers for alcoholism, athletic ability, danger of leukemia, and so on. Ask students to consider some of the following:
  - What traits would you like your children to have and which ones would you not want them to have?
  - If you could control these qualities prior to birth, would you?
  - Would you predetermine hair color and height? Would you make your child more physically attractive?
  - Would you try to prevent the possibility of certain diseases?
  - What would be the lines that you might not cross?
2. Think about laws currently in place in which the government tells an individual what to do: mandatory seatbelt laws in cars, helmets for motorcycle riders, and drug laws. Do you think the government has a role to play in the decisions you thought about in question #1? Why might it be in the best interest of a society to prevent or create certain genetic aspects in its members? Should some of these decisions be left to the government, not the individual?
3. What does the phrase “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” mean? What do you think a film with this title might be about?
4. According to the director, this film is partly a response to California’s Proposition 8. This ballot measure was approved by voters in 2008 and includes the following provision to the state constitution: “...only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.” Regardless of how you feel about the issue of same-sex marriage, what do you know about the reaction to the law at the time and since? Or, what do you imagine might be the response to a similar law in your state? This film could also be seen as a comment on the current state of women’s reproductive rights. What do you know about your state’s laws about women’s access to abortions, contraception, and family planning information?
5. The fictional community where Sasha lives is called “Red Estates.” This is likely intended to make the viewer think about the way that political commentators in the U.S. have identified Republican or Democratic leaning states as “red” or “blue.” It is important that students have some background on these terms and the social issues that often distinguish the voters in these states. There are many images available of the US map described in these terms; here is one that shows the results of the 2008 presidential election: <http://www.vaughns-1-pagers.com/politics/red-blue-states-summary.htm>
6. Additional previewing activity: If students have not been asked to view film critically before, you may want to consider taking some time to review **film terminology** with students, using the lesson on the *Futurestates* For Educators page.

## DURING

(22) minutes

As students watch the film, direct them to complete the Viewing Guide, which asks them to keep track of the theatrical elements – costumes, props, and set design – as well as the cinematic elements – framing, lighting, sound, etc. – of the film and infer what’s happening in Sasha’s head as she faces her dilemma.

If this is their first time viewing film critically in this manner, you may want to assign half of the class to keep track of the theatrical/cinematic elements and the other half to keep track of Sasha’s thoughts. Afterward, students can pair up with someone who took notes on the other topic.

## AFTER

(8–10) minutes

Based on the time available, ask students to consider some of the following questions and topics:

1. How does the director establish the setting of this future world in the opening minutes? Ask an artist or two in the class to sketch out a particularly striking image from the film that captures the essence of Red Estates.
2. How do the director and the actress who plays Sasha help the audience to understand what was happening in her mind as she wrestles with her decision?
3. Red Estates is supposed to look both old fashioned and futuristic. Why was it presented this way? How did the director create this feeling?
4. What are the pressures that Sasha feels to conform to the society of Red Estates? How are they similar or different from the pressures that her husband Bobby faces? Why does she choose to leave, while he chooses to remain?
5. Ask students, in pairs, to act out a dialogue between Sasha and Bobby as they debate the merits of staying in Red Estates.
6. How does the director contrast Red Estates with the Coasts? What is the purpose of this contrast? Why does the audience not see anything of the Coast until Sasha does?

## ASSESSMENT

(10) minutes

Ask students to imagine they were Sasha after the birth of her child, and to write a letter to **her husband** explaining the reasons for her departure. Or, they could choose to be Bobby, **writing a letter to Sasha**, explaining why he will not be joining her outside of the dome. Both letters should include references to the way that each person views Red Estates differently, as illustrated by the theatrical and/or cinematic elements used in the film.

If you have additional time for this assessment, you may want to have students create a podcast or a picture slide show of Sasha’s first days at the coast. Students can access legally acquired photographs and video at [creativecommons.org](https://creativecommons.org).

# ADDITIONAL MEDIA LITERACY ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine that Sasha returns to Red Estates a year later to run a campaign against her husband and some of the policies that led to her leaving. Develop the ad campaign that she might use in the election. You can find resources to assist you at: <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/lessons>. Working in a group, students could:
  - a. Design a campaign poster with an appropriate slogan
  - b. Write a speech she might deliver
  - c. Make a TV or radio ad that would be broadcast in Red Estates
2. View the *Making of Beholder* documentary that is available on the website (running time: 5 minutes) or read the excerpt below of an interview with the director, Nisha Ganatra. What was she hoping her film could do about the political dialogue in this country, specifically around issues like California's Proposition 8 and women's reproductive rights? What are some specific choices that the director and her team made in order to achieve her stated goals? Is the director presenting a balanced or a biased view on the issues? How does the science fiction genre allow the filmmaker to comment on current political and social issues?

### From the Interview:

- “ We had the obvious challenge of creating what the future looked like – even with a limitless budget this is a big task. Our team came together in an inspiring way to use our resources and assemble the proper aesthetic. Red Estates had to look like a futuristic near-Utopia. Everything from the doctor's office to the park had to take on a pristine, sanitized appearance that was nearly oppressive in its perfection.”
- “ Costume design was another important factor. When coming up with a design concept, I sat back and thought about what the residents of Red Estates might want to look like. And then it hit me: since the whole philosophy behind the community was centered on a return to “simpler times,” a sort of 1950s fashion sense was a natural choice.”
- “ Javiera Varas, our designer, helped come up with the palette for the world and for the Health Center. We went full circle from a very empty white space to an old-fashioned doctors office in a home to landing back on a white palette with a clean and modern look.”
- “ Our cinematographer Eric Koretz was able to change the look of everyday things by using LED ribbon lights; a simple addition to a white desk suddenly took on a futuristic shape. Eric ensured that each frame was its own beautiful picture, lit gorgeously with a soft and perfect glow.”
- “ Since we aspired to create a different look for the future and since our story was grounded in political theory, we decided on a futuristic set with retro costumes and design. Also, we made sure Red Estates was clearly removed from nature; all of the natural-seeming things in Red Estates are synthetic. We extended that to the art work in their homes, which were all framed *depictions* of natural scenes. This all works as set up, so that when Sasha's character does arrive on the coasts there is a contrast to the sterility of Red Estates.”
3. Using the free online software Morf Thing <http://www.morphthing.com/>, students can “make their own baby” by combining photos of themselves with those of others, including celebrities. Or, have students go through magazines and determine what they think their child would look like, which they could post on construction paper, for a gallery tour. Students can discuss whether they picked the typical beautiful media-types or went for more of a “real” look.

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Have students use the Predict-O-Meter tool on the *Futurestates* website. First, using the forms at the end of this lesson plan, students will evaluate up to three predictions from this film based on scientific facts and their own knowledge. Then, they have an opportunity to make a prediction of their own about an issue raised in the film and have it evaluated by another student. Finally, if they have made an interesting and a likely prediction, they can have it posted onto the *Futurestates* website.
2. Explore the historical and literary representation of utopias and dystopias. Students who have read *The Giver* and *The Hunger Games* already have some familiarity with the genre. Ask students to describe or draw pictures of their own personal utopias and to describe the elements that could transform it into a dystopia. Then, ask students to read one or more of the following: "Harrison Bergeron," "Those Who Walked Away from Omelas," *Brave New World, 1984*, or *The Handmaids Tale*. How is the utopian/dystopian theme presented in these texts similar or different ways than in *Beholder*?
3. It's clear that the director made this film in order to examine a political issue that she does not agree with. Identify school, local, or national issues that you feel strongly about and write a film treatment – a description that covers the basic ideas and issues of the production as well as the main characters, locations, and main story idea – that explores and comments on that issue. For example, if you think that the administration in your school is being unfair in banning cell phones in school, your film could be an action film that shows how students' cell phones were instrumental in preventing an alien attack on the school. In groups, decide on one person's film proposal to film the story and present it to a community or school group.
4. This film examines the often-difficult balance between an individual's rights and a community's expectations of behavior. Choose a topic in which one person's rights may be in conflict with the community (such as gun and drug laws, dress codes in school, or women's reproductive rights) and deliver a persuasive speech to your class, trying to convince them of your point of view.
5. Politically, the director of the film appears to be much more in favor of the Coasts (which represent the blue states and liberals) than Red Estates (or red states and conservatives). But, what would the film be like if it were made by a more conservative filmmaker? In other words, describe what the Blue Estates might look like, and what laws would they have in place that someone might want to leave behind, as Sasha did in this film?

BEHIND THE SCENES OF *BEHOLDER*.

An essential way to analyze this film is to examine the choices that the director makes in terms of costumes, props, and set design. Keep track of these elements of the Red Estates community, as well as the choices in the setting at the end of the film.

**Theatrical Elements** (costumes, props, set design)  
and/or **Cinematic Elements** (shot type, angle, lighting, sound, etc.)

Another key component of this film is Sasha's character development as she faces her dilemma, and because she can't really talk to anyone of her concerns, much of her development happens within her own mind. Keep track of what you think is happening in Sasha's mind that she is not saying to others.

**In Sasha's Mind**

# Futurestates

## Predict-O-Meter

Log on to [www.futurestates.tv](http://www.futurestates.tv). Go to the Predict-O-Meter. There are three rows of predictions. The row on the far left contains the predictions based on the *Futurestates* films, including *Beholder*. The center row consists of predictions submitted by viewers. The far right row contains dates of know events. For this activity, click on the green *Futurestates* predictions. The number that appears in each green square is the number of predictions related to the specified year. Be certain to scroll down to see all predictions for a given year. At the end of each prediction is the tag for the film associated with each prediction. Find as many predictions as you can for the *Beholder* film. Choose three predictions to evaluate using the rubric below. When the assigned evaluations are finished, create at least one prediction of your own. Your prediction will be evaluated by another student. If the evaluation is at least a “3”, you may post it on the *Futurestates* website.

FILM: \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR: \_\_\_\_\_

PREDICTION: \_\_\_\_\_

KEY- No:1 Somewhat:2 Yes:3 Don't Know:4	VALUE
Is the prediction based on scientific possibilities?	
Do the consequences of the prediction support the film?	
Does the prediction directly lead to the next prediction?	
Do known events in the past support the prediction?	
Is this prediction plausible? (This is your opinion.)	
<b>Overall Total:</b> (add up the values)	
<b>Score:</b> (Overall Total ÷ 5)	

FILM: \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR: \_\_\_\_\_

PREDICTION: \_\_\_\_\_

KEY- No:1 Somewhat:2 Yes:3 Don't Know:4	VALUE
Is the prediction based on scientific possibilities?	
Do the consequences of the prediction support the film?	
Does the prediction directly lead to the next prediction?	
Do known events in the past support the prediction?	
Is this prediction plausible? (This is your opinion.)	
<b>Overall Total:</b> (add up the values)	
<b>Score:</b> (Overall Total ÷ 5)	

**FILM:** \_\_\_\_\_ **YEAR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PREDICTION:** \_\_\_\_\_

KEY- No:1 Somewhat:2 Yes:3 Don't Know:4	VALUE
Is the prediction based on scientific possibilities?	
Do the consequences of the prediction support the film?	
Does the prediction directly lead to the next prediction?	
Do known events in the past support the prediction?	
Is this prediction plausible? (This is your opinion.)	
<b>Overall Total:</b> (add up the values)	
<b>Score:</b> (Overall Total ÷ 5)	

**PERSONAL PREDICTION FOR** \_\_\_\_\_ **(film name)**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **EVALUATOR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FILM:** \_\_\_\_\_ **YEAR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PREDICTION:** \_\_\_\_\_

KEY- No:1 Somewhat:2 Yes:3 Don't Know:4	VALUE
Is the prediction based on scientific possibilities?	
Do the consequences of the prediction support the film?	
Does the prediction directly lead to the next prediction?	
Do known events in the past support the prediction?	
Is this prediction plausible? (This is your opinion.)	
<b>Overall Total:</b> (add up the values)	
<b>Score:</b> (Overall Total ÷ 5)	

**Should this prediction be posted to the website?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher's approval** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date posted** \_\_\_\_\_

**If not posted, explain the reason for declining.**

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# CREDITS

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## **CURRICULA WRITER**

John Golden

John Golden is currently a curriculum specialist for high school Language Arts in Portland, Oregon. He is the author of *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom* (NCTE, 2001) and *Reading in the Reel World: Teaching Documentaries and Other Nonfiction Texts* (NCTE, 2006). John has delivered presentations and led workshops around the country in order to help teachers use film actively in the classroom as a way for students to improve their reading, analytical and critical thinking skills.

## **FUTURESTATES SERIES MANAGER**

Karim Ahmad

*ITVS*

## **EDUCATION MANAGER**

Annelise Wunderlich

*ITVS*

## **CURRICULUM ADVISERS**

Joe Fatheree

*National State Teachers of the Year Association*

Kara Clayton

*National Association for Media Literacy Education*

Timothy Shea

*English Professor, Millersville University of PA*

Alan Teasley

*Professor of Master of Arts in Teaching, Duke University*

*National Council for Teachers of English*

## **SENIOR DESIGNER**

Michael Silva

*ITVS*

## **GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Brittany Truex

*ITVS*

## **EDITORIAL REVIEW**

Julie Larner

### **Cover Images:**

#### **SCENES FROM FUTURE STATES FILMS.**

**TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT:** *Gunny* by Patrick Stettner, *Advantageous* by Jennifer Phang, *Asparagus* by Robby Henson, *Laura Keller-NB* by Mo Perkins, and *Worker Drone* by Sharat Raju

