

**TENT CITY**  
**LESSON PLAN**

**FUTURESTATES**



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



PRESENTED BY:



**FUTURESTATES.TV**



## COMMUNITY CLASSROOM

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COMMUNITY CLASSROOM is an innovative education resource providing short documentary video content and accompanying curricular materials, lesson plans, and homework assignments to high school and community college instructors and youth-serving community-based organizations. Film modules are drawn from documentaries scheduled for broadcast on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*. Content is grouped into subject specific segments that correspond to lesson plans and educational activities. All COMMUNITY CLASSROOM lesson plans are designed with key education standards in mind, and are available free of charge online, along with the film modules.

COMMUNITY CLASSROOM is a program of the Independent Television Service, created with support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Lesson plans were developed with guidance from the American Association of Community Colleges, KQED Education Network, National Association for Media Literacy Education, National Council for the Social Studies, National State Teachers of the Year, and PBS Teachers.

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# Building a Story within a Story

## Lesson Plan Overview

*Tent City* is a frame story. In the outer story, Matthew seeks to provide for his wife and son Ivan by taking a job he dislikes but that enables them to live in a house. One night Ivan asks Matthew to tell him a story, and it forms the plot of the inner story. In the inner story, a robot discovers that he has been programmed to unleash a deadly disease in the city. The robot's programmer plans to make a fortune by providing the only cure. In an attempt to thwart the plan, the robot kills himself, unwittingly releasing the disease and infecting the city. The narrative then returns to the outer story, in which Ivan convinces Matthew to quit his job. As a result, the family is evicted from their home and moves to Tent City, a community of homeless people on the edge of town.

As the two stories unfold, the viewer will note parallels between the two stories, with the inner story emphasizing the conflict in the outer one. This lesson treats the film as a text, asking students to analyze the filmmaker's choice to create an effect that strengthens the impact on the viewer.

Extension activities at the end of the unit encourage students to respond creatively to the issues presented in the lesson.

### Topic

This lesson focuses on the narrative techniques of a frame story. Extension activities invite students to write their own frame stories and to research tent cities of the Depression era and of today.

### Target Audience

This lesson is designed for high school students of all ability levels.

### Total Duration

This lesson will take 2-3 days, depending on the class.

### Summary of Lesson

Students will analyze the parallels between the inner and outer stories to determine what the narrative tension adds to the story.

### Educational Standards

This lesson addresses the following Common Core Standards in literature:

*For grades 9-10*

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

*For grades 11-12*

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.



# Procedures

## Teacher Preparation

- Preview the film, which is a little over 17 minutes long, not counting the credits.
- Read the synopsis and watch the film “The Making of *Tent City*.” The comments in “The Making of *Tent City*” will help the viewer understand the writer/director’s intent.
- Set up web access to view the film online.
- Have a projector available so that all students can view the film.
- For the introduction, bring a small, empty picture frame and a large picture, poster, or map.

## Objective for the Lesson

Students will analyze the effect of parallels identified in the two plots of *Tent City*.

## Lesson Structure

*Introduction to the concept of a frame story (5-10 minutes)*

Direct students’ attention to a large picture, poster, or map. Hold up the smaller frame in front of the larger picture. Ask students, “If I put this frame right here, what happens, at least for a moment, to your attention?” Students should respond that the frame causes them to focus mostly on the framed section of the picture. Help students reach the conclusion that the frame’s purpose is to draw attention to what is inside it.

If students are not already familiar with the concept of a frame story, take a moment to explain it to them. Explain that this is an ancient storytelling technique. The purpose of the outer story is usually to introduce the inner story, which is the more important plot. Some stories, however, establish a narrative tension so that the outer and inner stories influence one another. That is the case with the story for today.

*Pre-viewing activity (15-20 minutes)*

Divide the class into small groups and give each group one set of questions (below) to discuss. After 5-10 minutes, ask them to share their thoughts with the whole group.

- When people lose their homes in your community, where do they go? How do they cope? Does anyone try to help them?
- Sometimes young people notice aspects of a situation that older people don’t see. If you disagreed with a major decision your parents were making, how might you approach them?
- What can people realistically do when corporations act illegally or when their actions are legal but have a negative impact on a community?

*Middle (about 50 minutes)*

Distribute the *Tent City* viewing guide. Explain to students that you will show the film twice. Prior to the first viewing, ask students to just watch the film to understand what is happening. They will not be expected to analyze the film until they see it a second time.

After showing the film the first time, allow a couple of minutes for comments or for questions about anything students did not understand.

Explain that students should take notes using the viewing guide as they watch the film a second time. Because it can be difficult to watch and take notes at the same time, they might want to divide up the work with a partner.

Then show the film a second time. When it is finished, give students a few minutes to complete their graphic organizers and compare answers. Then engage students with the post-viewing discussion questions (see Teacher’s Guide):



- When Matthew said that he had no choice, was he making excuses, like Ivan said, or was he seeing a bigger picture that a child can't see?
- Do you agree with the family's decision? Why or why not?
- Would you have made the same decision for your family?
- What do you think Tent City will be like? How will people treat Matthew and his family when they move into the Tent City?
- At what point did you guess that the story would end the way it did?
- The director chose to use black-and-white photographs for the inner story. How does this affect the telling of the inner story? What does this add to the overall narrative?
- What elements of the inner story highlighted or emphasized the conflicts that were taking place in the outer story?

*End (Time determined by needs of the class)*

Invite students to respond creatively to one of the following scenarios by developing and presenting a digital story. Encourage them to use the frame story narrative technique.

- Tent City continues to grow. It develops problems with crime, sanitation, and chronic unemployment. What happens to Ivan and his family?
- Tent City continues to grow, and eventually the people of Tent City become the largest block of voters in the city. They want programs to help them get back into their homes. City Council, however, is strongly influenced by Zone Bank, which wants the houses vacant. What happens next?
- Ivan and his family are still living in Tent City when he graduates from high school. Does he have any regrets? What will he do after high school?
- After Mr. X fell into the city's water supply, things happened just the way the president of InkaZone planned: there was an epidemic, and the company made billions of dollars selling the only available cure. Did the company get away with it?
- Someone fished Mr. X out of the reservoir and repaired and re-activated him. What happened next?

## Suggested Assessments

Teachers may wish to use one of the following sites to assist in developing a rubric to assess student work:

Evaluating Multimedia Presentations  
<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/647>

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators: Multimedia  
<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/assess.html#multimedia>

Overview of Evaluating Projects  
<http://www.digitales.us/evaluating/index.php>

## Additional Resources

Other titles that use the frame story device:

- *The Panchatantra* (collection of short stories from India)
- *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer
- "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" by Mark Twain
- "Alice's Restaurant" (song) by Arlo Guthrie
- *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman



# Viewing Guide

*Tent City* is an example of a frame story, an ancient narrative device (storytelling technique). Typically a frame story starts with the “outer” story, which establishes a reason to tell the “inner” story.

Use this viewing guide to compare and contrast the characters in the inner and outer stories. First, watch the film without taking notes in order to understand what is happening. The second time you watch the film, take notes to help you with analysis.

	Matthew	Robot
<b>Where does he live? (Include details.)</b>		
<b>Who does he work for?</b>		
<b>Describe his family.</b>		
<b>How are oranges involved?</b>		
<b>What is the company's plan?</b>		
<b>Which is more important to the boss, people or money?</b>		
<b>How does he feel about his job?</b>		
<b>How does Ivan feel about the job?</b>		
<b>Explain the final irony.</b>		



# Viewing Guide (Teacher's Edition)

*Tent City* is an example of a frame story, an ancient narrative device (storytelling technique). Typically a frame story starts with the “outer” story, which establishes a reason to tell the “inner” story.

Use this viewing guide to compare and contrast the characters in the inner and outer stories. First, watch the film without taking notes in order to understand what is happening. The second time you watch the film, take notes to help you with analysis.

	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Robot</b>
<b>Where does he live? (Include details.)</b>	<b>The city contains many empty homes and fenced-off areas. It used to be nice but has fallen on hard times.</b>	<b>The Gleaming City is described as “amazing” and “beautiful,” with parks, outdoor cafes, and great people.</b>
<b>Who does he work for?</b>	<b>Zone Valley Bank</b>	<b>InkaZone</b>
<b>Describe his family.</b>	<b>He has a wife and a son.</b>	<b>He has a wife and a son.</b>
<b>How are oranges involved?</b>	<b>Matthew brings a bag of oranges home, a rare treat.</b>	<b>The robot mispronounces “orange” when he orders some juice.</b>
<b>What is the company’s plan?</b>	<b>The bank’s plan appears to be to evict all the people and leave the houses vacant.</b>	<b>The robot will unleash a deadly virus. After a few weeks, the company will release the only cure and make millions of dollars.</b>
<b>Which is more important to the boss, people or money?</b>	<b>Money</b>	<b>Money</b>
<b>How does he feel about his job?</b>	<b>He doesn’t like it, but he doesn’t think he has a choice. He wants to provide for his family.</b>	<b>He is horrified. He tries to avoid unleashing the virus.</b>
<b>How does Ivan feel about the job?</b>	<b>He doesn’t like it because the kids at school won’t talk to him. He thinks his father should quit.</b>	<b>He thinks the robot should take a stand rather than just give up and kill himself.</b>
<b>Explain the final irony.</b>	<b>Matthew’s family ends up at the place he told the other families about: Tent City.</b>	<b>The robot’s suicide causes the epidemic he hoped to avoid.</b>



# Post-viewing Discussion Questions

A good narrative will accomplish each of the following tasks. As you watch the film, your job is to determine how it accomplishes each task.

**When Matthew said that he had no choice, was he making excuses, like Ivan said, or was he seeing a bigger picture than a child can see?**

**Do you agree with the family's decision? Why or why not?**

**Would you have made the same decision for your family?**

**At what point did you guess that the story would end the way it did?**

**The director chose to use black-and-white photographs for the inner story. How does this affect the telling of the inner story? What does this add to the overall narrative?**

**What elements of the inner story highlighted or emphasized the conflicts that were present in the outer story?**



# Post-viewing Discussion Questions (Teacher's Edition)

A good narrative will accomplish each of the following tasks. As you watch the film, your job is to determine how it accomplishes each task.

**When Matthew said that he had no choice, was he making excuses, like Ivan said, or was he seeing a bigger picture than a child can see?**

*Answers will vary. Matthew is a sympathetic character and is certainly seeing a bigger picture. When he says the bank will just replace him if he quits, he is not wrong. However, by choosing to move to Tent City, he seems to agree with Ivan.*

**Do you agree with the family's decision? Why or why not?**

*Answers will vary. The important part of the response is the reason given.*

**Would you have made the same decision for your family?**

*Answers will vary. The important part of the response is the reason given.*

**At what point did you guess that the story would end the way it did?**

*Answers will vary. The important part of the response is the clue the student cites.*

**The director chose to use black-and-white photographs for the inner story. How does this affect the telling of the inner story? What does this add to the overall narrative?**

*Answers will vary. By using black-and-white stills, the director makes a clear distinction between the two stories, making it possible for the same actors to appear in both stories without confusing the audience. This makes it possible to emphasize that the inner story is in a way about Matthew and his struggle to reconcile himself to his job. Black-and-white stills also parallel the black-and-white drawings hanging on Ivan's bedroom wall – possibly Matthew's work. Stills are also more like the graphic novels that Matthew used to create, so they are appropriate for a story that Matthew tells.*

**What elements of the inner story highlighted or emphasized the conflicts that were present in the outer story?**

*The writer/director adds emphasis by using the same actors in both stories and by giving their characters comparable issues to deal with.*

*When Matthew and the robot make different choices, the contrast highlights the importance of the choice.*

*When Matthew later changes his mind and makes a choice comparable to the robot's, the respect that accompanies the robot's motives (if not his result) transfers to Matthew.*



# Extension Activity: Predict-O-Meter

## Objectives

- Investigate and analyze predictions for *Tent City* as posted on the FUTURESTATES Predict-O-Meter.
- Formulate and post their prediction on the FUTURESTATES Predict-O-Meter site.

## Beginning (5-7 minutes)

Reactivate prior knowledge by reviewing discussions related to the film.

## Middle (30-35 minutes)

Students will investigate predictions as presented on the Predict-O-Meter located on the FUTURESTATES website. After selecting and evaluating three of the predictions using the evaluation rubric, students will develop at least one prediction to post on the website. The proposed prediction will be evaluated by a peer and approved by the instructor before posting. The predictions may alter the course projected in the Predict-O-Meter predictions. Students may require an example of a valid prediction. Using the rubric to instruct the students, prepare a sample prediction and lead the class in an analysis of the statement. The following is an example of a proposed prediction and the evaluation of it using the prepared rubric.

Proposed prediction: "In 2030, census data reveals that 50% of the urban population lives in tent cities."

- *Is the prediction based on realistic possibilities?*  
Yes. Tent cities are growing, and the economic recovery is very slow.
- *Do the consequences of the prediction support the film?*  
Yes. The tent city is growing in the film.
- *Do known events in the past support the prediction?*  
Yes. We can look to the Hoovervilles of the Great Depression as support.
- *Is this prediction plausible?*  
This is the evaluator's opinion based on the evidence presented in defense of the prediction.



*FUTURESTATES Predict-O-Meter Activity Instructions*

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 *Tent City*. The center row consists of predictions submitted by viewers. The far right row contains dates of known 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 *Tent City* 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:** \_\_\_\_\_

	No 1	Somewhat 2	Yes 3	Don't know 0
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.)				
Total: (add column)				

Overall Total: (Add totals for each column together) \_\_\_\_\_ Score:  $\frac{\text{Overall Total}}{5} =$  \_\_\_\_\_

**Film:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Year:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Prediction:** \_\_\_\_\_

	No 1	Somewhat 2	Yes 3	Don't know 0
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.)				
Total: (add column)				

Overall Total: (Add totals for each column together) \_\_\_\_\_ Score:  $\frac{\text{Overall Total}}{5} =$  \_\_\_\_\_



**Film:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Year:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Prediction:** \_\_\_\_\_

	No 1	Somewhat 2	Yes 3	Don't know 0
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.)				
Total: (add column)				

Overall Total: (Add totals for each column together) \_\_\_\_\_ Score: Overall Total = \_\_\_\_\_  
5

**Personal prediction for** \_\_\_\_\_ **(film name)**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Evaluator:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Year:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Prediction:** \_\_\_\_\_

	No 1	Somewhat 2	Yes 3	Don't know 0
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.)				
Total: (add column)				

Overall Total: (Add totals for each column together) \_\_\_\_\_ Score: Overall Total = \_\_\_\_\_  
5

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

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

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

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



## **LESSON PLAN CREDITS**

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### **About FUTURESTATES:**

Imagining tomorrow's America today, 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. The first season of FUTURESTATES debuted in March 2010, and is available online at [futurestates.tv](http://futurestates.tv).

### **About ITVS:**

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 Tuesday 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.

