OVERVIEW
Jin Mo-young’s film *My Love, Don’t Cross that River* documents the final years of a South Korean couple, 89-year-old Kang Gye-Yeol and 98-year-old Jo Byeong-Man, who have been married for 76 years. The film, which follows the couple over 15 months, explores the complex and often challenging experience of growing old and facing death.

Through Kang Gye-Yeol and Jo Byeong-Man’s story, students will compare traditions, beliefs and rituals across cultures and generations and reflect on their own attitudes toward aging and death.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
• Explore how we learn and talk about death
• Describe how death is represented in popular media
• Compare attitudes toward and traditions for death and dying across cultures
• Understand perceptions, beliefs and traditions related to death and dying in their own community and how these attitudes and rituals have changed over time

GRADE LEVELS: 8-12+

SUBJECT AREAS
Health Life Skills
Language Arts Social Studies

MATERIALS
• Film clips from *My Love, Don’t Cross that River* and equipment on which to show them
• Student Handouts
  o Student Handout A: Viewing Notes
  o Student Handout B: Comparing Cultural Traditions

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
One 50-minute class period, with homework
**FILM CLIPS**

Film clips provided in this lesson are from *My Love, Don't Cross that River*

**Clip 1: “Lost Children” (4:24 min.)**

This clip starts at 19:34 min. with Kang Gye-Yeol bathing her husband and ends at 24:59 min. with her husband looking down, reflecting on their lost children.

**Clip 2: “Afterlife” (2:16 min.)**

This clip starts at 37:52 min. with Kang collecting clothes and ends at 41:38 min. with Kang standing under her umbrella in the rain.

**Clip 3: “Stay Strong” (4:25 min.)**

This clip starts at 50:08 min. with the couple wearing matching red kimonos, and ends at 53:30 min. after Kang says, “Stay strong, even if it gets a bit cold.”

**PREPARATION**

**Discussing Sensitive Issues:**

This lesson focuses on social and cultural responses to aging, death and dying. Educators and facilitators are strongly encouraged to review all of the materials, activities and film clips to be sure the topic and lesson are appropriate for your curriculum and students.

At the teacher’s discretion, a preliminary discussion with the class may be advisable, and/or it may be advisable to identify students who might be personally or adversely affected by this material. Some students may not be open to talking about death and/or may have recently experienced the death of a loved one. Teachers should consult with school counselors, social workers and/or administrators to provide students with support or the option of not participating in the lesson where appropriate.

**ACTIVITY**

**1. Death as Part of Life**

In this activity, students will examine how we learn about death and how issues surrounding death and dying are represented in the media.

**Popcorn Discussion:** When students arrive, have the following sentence written on the board: Death is not the opposite of life, but a part of it. Have students think about the sentence, then rewrite it in their own words.

When students are ready to share, explain that, after you say, “popcorn,” students can quickly and voluntarily pop up from their chairs one at a time to read their responses.

**Facilitator tip:** Ask two to four volunteers to help take notes during the sharing session and help lead the discussion by identifying common ideas, interpretations and themes.

Discuss:
• Do you agree with the quote? Why or why not?
• Why is it difficult for many of us to think or talk about aging and death?
• Where do we learn about issues like aging, death and grief? (For example: family, friends, community, media.)
• In what ways might attitudes about aging and death differ during different stages of life?
• In your experience, are your peers’ feelings about these issues the same as those of elderly members of your community?

Think-Pair-Share: Give students a few minutes to think and free-write in response to the following prompt: What is an example of a movie, television show or book that depicts death and grief in a way that you found constructive or helpful? What about an example that you didn’t find constructive or helpful?

Divide the class into pairs or small groups and have them share their examples and discuss why they selected them. Have volunteers share their responses with the class and record notable ideas, words and phrases on the board. Discuss: Based on these examples, what conclusions could we draw about our own attitudes toward death and dying?

2. Crossing the River
In this activity, students will view clips from the documentary *My Love, Don’t Cross that River* and discuss how it depicts the characters’ personal and cultural attitudes about loss and grief.

Explain: *Today we will watch excerpts from the film My Love, Don’t Cross that River, a documentary that follows the story of an elderly couple in South Korea—89-year-old Kang Gye-Yeol and 98-year-old Jo Byeong-Man—who have been together for over 76 years.*

Distribute one copy of *Student Handout A* to each student and instruct them to use the worksheet to note behaviors, traditions and beliefs that demonstrate the couple’s personal and cultural attitudes about death, dying and grief.

Play *Clips 1, 2 and 3* and follow with a class discussion using the following prompts as needed:
• What surprised you most about the couple’s story and relationship?
• What traditions and rituals related to the deaths of her dog, children and husband did Kang Gye-Yeol talk about and demonstrate?
• What was the significance of these traditions? What do they tell us about the couple’s culture and how they view death?
• How might the couple’s age influence their attitudes toward death?
• Did Kang have the same attitude toward the loss of her young children as she did toward her own and her partner’s deaths? What were the similarities and differences?
• How did their cultural traditions and rituals help them during their periods of grief and loss?
• When Jo Byeong-Man gets sick, the doctor does not treat him because he is “too old.” Who do you think should make decisions about whether or not to pursue treatment for the very elderly, spouses, children or the patients themselves?
3. Comparing Cultural Traditions
In this activity, students will participate in dynamic discussion groups to compare the couple’s response to death and grief with their own.

Organize the class into groups of four to six students and explain: *In this activity, we will compare the couple’s response to death and grief with our own traditions and attitudes as discussed earlier in the lesson.*

Distribute one copy of *Student Handout B* to each student and instruct them to use the worksheets to take their own notes throughout the activity. Have the groups begin by discussing the following questions:

- How are the couple’s attitudes toward and traditions surrounding death and grief similar to/different from your own?
- How do these traditions and rituals help us cope with times of grief and loss?

Once every member of the group has contributed to the conversation, ask half of the students from each group to move to a different group while the rest remain where they are. Have the reshuffled groups discuss the following questions:

- What influences our personal attitudes and traditions about grief and death? (For example: family, friends, community, media.)
- How is the film’s depiction of death and grief similar to/different from other depictions you have seen (including the example you selected for Activity 1)?

Again, ask half of the students from each group to move to a different group while the rest remain where they are. Have the new groups discuss the following question:

- What is the benefit of talking about death and understanding and sharing our responses to it?

Have students return to their original groups and ask for one volunteer from each group to share and discuss their responses with the class.

4. Reflection
Review and discuss the lesson with the class:

- What new ideas and/or information did you encounter through this film and lesson?
- In what ways, if any, did Jo and Kang’s story influence your own attitudes toward death and dying?

Conclude the lesson with a brief journaling activity in response to the following prompt: If you could, how would you improve the depictions of death and grief in film, television, books and other media?

5. Homework: Sharing Across Generations
How does your family/community address grief and loss, and what role does age play in our relationship to death and dying?

Have students interview elder members of their community to compare attitudes about death and grief across generations. Have students prepare their questions in advance using the following prompts for guidance and then share their interviews with the class in the form of an audio/video oral history, blog, slideshow or essay:

• What was your earliest experience with loss and grief and how did you respond?
• What rituals and traditions did you participate in then, and how have these practices changed over the years?
• Have your feelings about death and dying changed over the years? If so, in what ways?
• If you could go back in time and share one insight or piece of advice about death and grief with your younger self, what would it be?

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

Aging America
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of people over the age of 65 will increase from 13 percent in 2010 to 20 percent by 2030 (to approximately 70 million people). This shift is driven by two factors: 1) increased longevity in the United States and 2) the baby boom generation aging. Have students research the effects on society and culture as a large generation reaches retirement age, as well as how this shift might influence our attitudes toward aging, death and grief.

Resources:
• United States Census Bureau: https://www.census.gov/
• Population Reference Bureau: http://www.prb.org/

Community Support
There are many programs that offer support for adults and youth experiencing grief and loss, but people are often unaware that these resources are available. Organize students into research groups and have them identify local youth resources that help with loss and grief. Groups should compare at least two organizations’ missions and programs and evaluate the resources each provides for the youth they serve. Each group can share its research with the class and collaboratively create fliers, booklets and/or web pages to raise awareness throughout the school community.

Ageism and Stereotypes
Age is a relative measure of biological development and time, yet attitudes toward aging and the elderly can be complex and fraught with negative stereotypes. Have students examine their own attitudes about older people and consider the similarities between how teenagers and the elderly are negatively stereotyped. They should also explore how negative attitudes about aging
influence public policy, health, careers and social programs. Finally, have students consider how ageism relates to other biases, such as racism and sexism, and how ageist attitudes affect us as we get older.

RESOURCES

The Film
POV: *My Love, Don’t Cross that River*
http://www.pbs.org/pov/mylovedontcrossthatriver/
The film’s official POV site includes a discussion guide with additional activity ideas and resources.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films
http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Leadership Council of Aging Organizations
http://www.lcao.org/
This coalition of organizations provides services for and information about the aging population in the United States.

National Institute on Aging
www.nia.nih.gov
The website of the National Institute on Aging, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides information on resources and services for older adults.

United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development: Aging
https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/
This U.N. program aims to raise awareness about the global situation of older persons and increase recognition of human rights for older persons.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12
topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume and clear pronunciation.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly, concisely and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and task.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence and add interest.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning and evidence and to add interest.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning and evidence and to add interest.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.7 Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Content Knowledge: a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

- Behavioral Studies, Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.
- Health, Standard 3: Understands the relationship of family health to individual health.
- Health, Standard 4: Knows how to maintain mental and emotional health.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Allison Milewski has developed media education resources for a range of award-winning filmmakers and national media organizations, including PBS LearningMedia, Independent Television Service, Latino Public Broadcasting, HBO Documentaries and Tribeca Film Institute. She is also the founder of the international media education program, PhotoForward.org.
Instructions: Watch the film clips and make notes in response to the following questions. In the box below, record general notes about scenes and quotes that surprised, confused or interested you:

1. How did Kang demonstrate her ongoing grief in response to the deaths of her children? What traditions and behaviors best illustrate her beliefs about death and the afterlife?

2. When Kang’s husband became ill, what did she do for him and how did she begin to prepare for his death?

3. What did Kang and her family do when her husband, Jo, passed away? What did she say to him when she visited his grave?

Viewing Notes:
Instructions: Discuss the following questions with your group members and use this worksheet to take notes throughout the activity:

GROUP 1

1. How are the couple’s attitudes toward and traditions surrounding death and grief similar to/different from your own?
2. How do these traditions and rituals help us cope during times of grief and loss?

Discussion Notes:
GROUP 2

3. What influences our personal attitudes and traditions about grief and death? (For example: family, friends, community, media.)

4. How is the film’s depiction of death and grief similar to/different from other depictions you have seen (including the example you selected for Activity 1)?

Discussion Notes:
GROUP 3

5. What is the benefit of talking about death and understanding and sharing our responses to it?

Discussion Notes: