POV
Community Engagement & Education
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Still Tomorrow
A Film by Jian Fan

www.pbs.org/pov
This film shows distinct female perspectives and centers on women’s issues. The main theme is how a woman gains economic and personal independence and then struggles for freedom in love and in life.

Most of Yu Xiuhua’s poems are about love. For more than twenty years, she has pursued love but never succeeded in finding it. There is no love between her and her husband. For Yu Xiuhua, living a life without love is unacceptable, and she unleashes her emotions in her poems. After her poem collections are published, she gains financial independence and readies herself for divorce. In different social settings, Yu Xiuhua meets many male writers and journalists. She develops feelings for several different people, and she is unwavering in her commitment never to give up chasing love—indeed, she becomes more determined than ever to divorce her husband.

In China, a woman asking for a divorce is often seen as immoral. Yu Xiuhua faces three obstacles to divorce. The first comes from her husband. Out of pride, he does not agree to a divorce at first. It is not until Yu Xiuhua agrees to give him money that he feels duly respected and compensated. The second comes from her mother. This is a bigger conflict, involving the gap between women of different generations. Yu Xiuhua’s mother is a traditional rural woman. She believes that a woman needs to have a marriage, and that having a family is more important than having true love. Yu Xiuhua’s mother has always tried to make plans for her and influence her, yet Yu Xiuhua resists these efforts. However, she is emotionally close to her mother. When her mother is diagnosed with cancer, Yu Xiuhua finds herself in a dilemma. The third obstacle to divorce takes the form of social pressure. In China, a woman may get a bad reputation if she ditches her husband after becoming famous.

Yu Xiuhua also faces other difficult situations. Before Yu Xiuhua became well known, she lived an Emily Dickinson–style life, writing poems in isolation in the countryside. She shares Dickinson’s loneliness and fragility. Yu Xiuhua is also similar to Virginia Woolf, both emotionally and in life experience. Woolf had serious mental illness, and Yu is often in agony over her failed pursuit of love. Pain plays an important role in the work of these women writers: the more pain they feel, the more touching their writing becomes.

Yu Xiuhua inspired a new wave of poetry reading in China. Her readers are mostly women. She gives Chinese women, buried under an onslaught of daily chores, new hope. She has cerebral palsy, but she doesn’t let that stop her from creating powerful literature.
This film also shows the difficulties and challenges faced by a disabled and sensitive woman. Yu Xiuhua hates her disabilities. Cerebral palsy makes it difficult for her to move around and affects her appearance. Yu Xiuhua once said, “I feel my voice cannot adequately deliver my poems; my soul is trapped by my body.” She writes poems to break through the confines of her body, to conquer physical deficiencies with literary beauty and to fulfill bodily yearnings with poetic desires and emotions. Yu Xiuhua’s struggles and pursuit of love are tragic. Even after divorce, she cannot find emotional and bodily fulfillment because of her disabilities. As she writes, “Is it true that there is still tomorrow? / What a pity that there is still tomorrow.”

In addition, the film shows the power of new media in modern China, where a person who appears on the Internet can become well-known overnight. For a time, Yu Xiuhua’s name is the subject of more online searches than the names of movie stars like Daniel Craig. New media changes her fate. Yu Xiuhua says it is like a dream.

Although I am a man, I developed a very good relation with Yu Xiuhua during filming. She sees me as a close friend, since I very carefully read and try to understand her and her poems. She let me film many private moments and was willing to open up to me. Also, women members of my team helped me build female perspectives into the film.

Jian Fan
Director, Still Tomorrow
Yu Xiuhua has spent her entire life in rural China. Living with cerebral palsy and trapped in an unhappy marriage, Yu leads an unremarkable life. That is, until one of her poems goes viral online. She becomes famous overnight—a moving voice for women and people with disabilities who dream of more satisfying lives.

Still Tomorrow (52 min.) follows the poet as she tests the waters of a new life. Yu’s independent income provides access to experiences and choices previously beyond her reach, including invitations to travel and the ability to divorce her husband. But money and fame cannot heal her body or end the discrimination she encounters in society. In Yu’s story, viewers see how lives—even lives constricted by sexism and stereotypes—can be transformed by the power of words.
Still Tomorrow is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to China, disability, art/poetry, marriage or women’s rights, including Ai Weiwei: The Fake Case, Hooligan Sparrow, Last Train Home, Fallen City and High Tech, Low Life, as well as My Way to Olympia, When I Walk and My Love, Don’t Cross That River.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the “Key Issues” section
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries.

Still Tomorrow is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- ableism
- cerebral palsy
- China
- disability
- fame
- finding one’s voice
- gender roles/disparities
- love
- marriage, power dynamics in
- poetry
- sexual desire
- sexism
- women’s studies

**USING THIS GUIDE**

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use Still Tomorrow to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit [www.pov.org/engage](http://www.pov.org/engage)
Yu Xiuhua was born in 1976 in Hengdian, China. She was born with cerebral palsy, a congenital disorder that hampered her muscle coordination. She never finished high school, and at points had to beg on the streets to survive. Concerned that their daughter’s cerebral palsy would make it impossible for her to care for herself and would also make her undesirable as a bride, Yu Xiuhua’s parents arranged a marriage for her. She was 19 and her husband, Yin Shiping, was a 31-year-old construction worker. Though the marriage lasted for more than two decades, it was never a happy one. At 27, Yu began writing poetry as a distraction from her sense of being trapped in circumstances she had not chosen.

In November 2014, Yu Xiuhua posted lines from her poem “Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You” on her blog. She was then discovered by an editor at a leading Chinese literary journal, who wrote about the poet and reprinted her work. The poem was posted by the editor on WeChat, a messaging and social networking app, exposing Yu’s poetry to an audience of millions. She published two books of poetry the following spring, one of which, Moonlight Drops on My Left Hand, became the best-selling book of poetry in China in 20 years and sold out overnight. Yu’s success was new, but she had been writing poetry since childhood as an escape from her daily hardships. She described poetry as her crutch “when faltering in the reeling world.” When Yu was growing up in Hubei province in central China, her parents had to carry her to school so that she could attend; Yu began writing poems at a young age and won her first award for poetry in middle school. As of early 2015, her blog had been viewed more than 1.6 million times. When her royalties were substantial enough to provide settlement funds, she finally persuaded her husband to agree to a long-sought divorce.

According to The New York Times, Yu “now lives with her father in a newly built two-story house, a short walk from their old farmhouse. A recent village renovation razed most
of the old buildings and moved residents into new housing, but her family home has been preserved as a tribute to a local celebrity.” Yu has a son who attends a university in Wuhan.

Sources

Divorce in China

For many years, cultural norms and legal barriers suppressed divorce rates in China: the country had fewer than 3 divorces per 10,000 people, until 1978. However, since a new marriage law in 1980 allowing divorces without accusations of wrongdoing, the divorce rate has increased. In 2013, China’s nationwide divorce rate hit 2.2 percent, and in major cities more than one third of all marriages ended in divorce.

As divorce has become more prevalent, social views on divorce are also shifting. According to the 2014 World Values Survey, 31 percent of Chinese respondents believe that divorce is never justifiable, down from 56 percent only a decade earlier. However, divorced women still face greater stigma than divorced men do. A woman who is known to be divorced faces discrimination in the labor market and is less likely to get remarried due to persistent biases that divorced women are “worn-out shoes.” Meanwhile, state-run media
has intensified pressure on younger unmarried women in China to avoid becoming “leftover women.”

Chinese women contemplating divorce also face more economic difficulties than Chinese men. The Supreme People’s Court reinterpreted Chinese marriage law in 2011: the court ruled that residential property would no longer be considered jointly owned and thus divided equally after a divorce; instead, the spouse who originally paid for a residence would keep it. This legal standard negatively affects women seeking divorces, as cultural norms have long dictated that a Chinese man must buy a family home before a Chinese woman will marry him.

Sources


Cerebral Palsy

Yu Xiuhan’s disabilities are the result of permanent brain damage that occurred because of a lack of oxygen during her birth. Her condition is one of several motor disorder conditions that together are known as cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is caused by damage to or abnormal development of the cerebral cortex, which is the part of the brain that directs muscle movement. The three most common movement disorders are stiff muscles (spasticity), uncontrollable movements (dyskinesia) and poor balance and coordination (ataxia); many sufferers of cerebral palsy also have symptoms such as vision, hearing or speech problems and intellectual disabilities.

Worldwide, cerebral palsy is more prevalent among male infants in low-income families and rural areas. It is estimated that cerebral palsy affects two to three of every 1,000 live births. Between 85 and 90 percent of cases of cerebral palsy are congenital, meaning that a child is born with damage that occurred during fetal development or during birth. Cerebral palsy can also be acquired after birth, in cases where brain damage or infections occur.

To improve participation in daily life—by improving aspects such as strength, balance, motor skills and speech—physical and occupational therapy are greatly encouraged.

Sources


Cerebral Palsy Foundation. http://yourcpf.org/


Selected People Featured in *Still Tomorrow*

**Yu Xiuhua** – Poet.

**Yin Shiping** – Yu’s husband.

**Zhou Jinxiang** – Yu’s mother.
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- If you had to summarize the main message(s) of the film in a tweet, what would you say?
- Did you see anything in the film that was familiar? How about surprising?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

- If you could ask Yu Xiuhua, her husband or her mother a single question, what would you ask?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose the title Still Tomorrow?
- What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
- If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What would you hope their main takeaway would be?

Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to __________.
Love, Sex and Romance

In response to a query about why her poems mention love so often Yu Xiuhua says, “If a woman can’t find love, her life is a failure.” If you were having a friendly conversation with Yu, how would you respond to that observation?

Yu defiantly says that she’ll write what she wants and adds, “I’m a slut, so what?!” Does thinking or writing about sex make Yu a “slut”? How does the division of women into “good girls” (who don’t talk publicly about sex) and “bad girls” (who acknowledge sexual desire) reinforce sexism? How does it create a no-win situation for women?

Yu describes her dissatisfaction with her marriage: “He never came to take me in raining days. The road was all muddy. He never came to walk with me, to hold me. On the contrary, if I fell, he’d laugh at me. These small things... they hurt me.” When Yu demands a divorce, Yin Shiping asks, “What did I do wrong?” What do you think he’s not seeing in terms of what Yu needs or wants from him? What do you think she’s not understanding about his views of a husband’s responsibilities?

Yu asks her mother, Zhou Jinxiang, if she lives for herself or for others. Her mother answers, “For others.” Yu responds, “Pah! Live for others? This idea is wrong.” How would you answer the question? Why might Yu object to her mother’s answer? Why might people like Zhou see Yu’s response as selfish?

Responding to her mother’s cancer diagnosis, Yu says, “I’d rather it was me. Not my mom. Suddenly fame means nothing in my life. I can’t make it clear. I can’t find words for my feelings now... Since she was ill, I never cried in front of her. She said that my heart is harder than the elm wood.” What messages do we get about acceptable ways to show emotion? How about showing strength? Do you think the messages you have learned have served you well?
Marriage, Divorce and Money

Yu’s mother, Zhou Jinxiang, says, “It was not bad. My son-in-law was very healthy. He’d accept my daughter, so I accepted him, right?” How and why do Yu and her mother see marriage differently? How do the expectations that Yu and her husband, Yin, have of marriage differ?

Yu and Yin argue about sex. She demands that he pay her if he wants to sleep with her. He thinks it would be absurd to pay a wife for sex. In your view, what are the obligations of marriage? Why might Yu equate her marriage with prostitution?

Yu says that she would have divorced years ago if not for her disability. “I had no money. My husband never gave me any money. I had to ask every time, for every little thing. I quarreled with him every year. But he’d never go get the divorce done.” How does Yu’s financial dependence put her at a disadvantage? How is money tied to power in marriage?

Yu worries that her reputation will suffer (and will affect her son’s marriage prospects) if people believe that she callously “ditched” her husband after becoming famous.

Do you think that would be a concern if she was a man? Should society see divorce as a stain on someone’s character?

Zhou Jinxiang strongly opposes her daughter’s divorce, saying, “In one’s life, nothing is more important than a harmonious family.” Would you agree? Do you think that family harmony is more important than individual satisfaction or happiness? Is family harmony possible with an unhappy marriage?
Disability and Discrimination

At one of Yu’s speaking engagements an audience member says, “You will always be viewed first as a cerebral palsy patient. What do you think?” She answers, “Labeling is wrong. And discriminatory.” Exactly how does labeling lead to discrimination? What’s the difference between being realistic about a person’s abilities or limitations and judging them in a way that leads to discrimination?

Why do you suppose people are surprised that a woman with cerebral palsy writes about love and sex?

What are some preconceptions you have about people with disabilities? Did Yu’s story complicate or change any of these ideas?

Explaining why she arranged Yu’s marriage to Yin, Zhou says, “If my daughter had been healthy, she could have picked a man she really liked, and she’d be happy. But look at us here. What can we do?” How would you combat the stereotype that people like Yu are somehow “damaged goods” or “undesirable” and should therefore be grateful for any spouse willing to accept them?

In response to a student’s question, Yu says, “I still cannot fully accept myself.” How is Yu’s difficult relationship with her body similar to and different from issues that many able-bodied women have with their bodies?

Yu says that she has no advice to give because she has no experience being a “happy woman.” How does Yu’s unhappiness and longing for “true love, flesh and soul,” serve as motivation? How does it hold her back?

How would you describe the scene at the beach and Yu’s encounter with waves?
Poetry

An interviewer asks, “Your poems talk about sex openly and widely. Will that be misread as lewd and vulgar?” How do you draw lines between artistic expression and vulgarity? Why do we draw such lines at all?

The filmmaker recalls Yu saying, “Poetry is your walking stick when you are stumbling around.” Yu explains, “It’s a metaphor. Poetry makes me understand that it’s important to live on. It supports me. Without poetry, life is empty. When I write, I feel poems give me peace and tranquility.” Have you ever created art that made you feel that way?

At an awards ceremony, the emcee says, “For many people, her poetry embodies a woman’s endurance and pursuits in the face of difficulties and hardship. Her poetry is just like her personality. Bold. Independent. Open-minded.” Where in the film do you see examples of these qualities? How would you interpret or characterize these excerpts from various poems included in the film:

Silent wheat in the moonlight, the slight frictions between them
Are the love-making of all the things on the earth
Late at night, I see father smoking, his back to the moon
Thousands of acres of wheat have grown on that back now narrowing down
I’m pleased to land here,
Flying through like a sparrow, holding the blue of the sky in its beak
I never believe that she would die like this
For till this moment
Her waist is stronger than mine
Her breasts are bigger than mine
Is it true that there is still tomorrow
What a pity that there is still tomorrow

Additional media literacy questions are available at:
www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
• To remedy the isolation that people with disabilities often experience, create small mixers or get-togethers over meals where people can get to know neighbors with disabilities and they can get to know their neighbors. Together, figure out how to establish ongoing contact. When planning community events and other gatherings, take into consideration the accessibility of the environment. Think about all the barriers that one might encounter and plan solutions that extend beyond simply adding a ramp at the front door. What would full participation mean? Think about all five senses and consider issues such as smell sensitivity, sign language interpretation and visual description.

• Host a poetry night where women share work that reflects their experiences of relationships, marriage and hopes for the future. As part of the event, share some of Yu Xiuhua’s poetry (see Resources section for links to English translations).

• Start a book club to read works of modern Chinese literature and poetry. Discuss what the works reveal about life in contemporary China.

• Host a panel discussion to explore why discussion of sex is taboo in so many cultures (despite the universality of sex), especially for women.
ABILITY MAGAZINE: “THE BIRTH OF A POET”
https://abilitymagazine.com/poetic-documentation-yu-xiuhua/
This article offers interesting background about Yu Xiuhua and the making of the film.

CEREBRAL PALSY FOUNDATION
http://yourcpf.org/
The Cerebral Palsy Foundation website offers fact sheets and additional information on cerebral palsy.

CHINA.ORG: “RURAL WOMAN’S POEMS GO VIRAL ONLINE”
http://www.china.org.cn/arts/2015-01/23/content_34634374.htm
This Chinese feature piece on Yu Xiuhua includes a rough English translation of the poem that sparked her fame, translated here as “Crossing Half the Country to Sleep with You.”

NATIONAL CENTER ON DISABILITY AND JOURNALISM
http://ncdj.org/resources/organizations
This organization’s website has a comprehensive list of organizations that support people with disabilities in a variety areas, from social services to employment and civil rights advocacy.

POETRY INTERNATIONAL: “LETTER FROM BEIJING: NEW POETS AND NEW TRENDS IN CHINA”
San Diego State University’s Poetry International journal features international poets. This report on the journal’s website by Ming Di explores contemporary Chinese poetry and poets and includes a translation of Yu Xiuhua’s poem “A Woman on the Roof.”

UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY
www.ucp.org
United Cerebral Palsy focuses on helping people with disabilities live independently and productively. Its website provides a variety of resources, including fact sheets, disability “etiquette” tips, legislative updates, advocacy and links to support services.
HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order Still Tomorrow for home use, go to https://www.journeyman.tv/film/7112.

Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television’s premier showcase for nonfiction films. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world’s boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 37 Emmy® Awards, 21 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, and the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, three IDA Awards for Best Curated Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. Learn more at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Spark (www.pbs.org/pov)

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department has continually experimented with web-based documentaries, producing PBS’ first program website and the first Snapchat-native documentary. It has won major awards for its work, including a Webbby Award and over 19 nominations. Now with a singular focus on incubating and distributing interactive productions, POV Spark continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its co-productions, acquisitions and POV Labs, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms.

Front cover: Yu Xiuhua.
Photo courtesy of Jian Fan

POV Engage (www.pbs.org/pov/engage)

The POV Engage team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 800 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia arts organization dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. AmDoc is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

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