***Dear Mandela* Discussion Guide v.1**

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**About the Film …………………..**

When Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa, his government was faced with a seemingly insurmountable task: providing a better life for those who had suffered under apartheid. The cornerstone of Mandela’s ‘unbreakable promise’ was an ambitious plan to ensure housing for all. Eighteen years later, as the number of families living in slums has doubled, a frightening tale of betrayal is unfolding. The government is trying to ‘eradicate the slums’ by evicting shack dwellers from their homes at gunpoint, in scenes eerily reminiscent of apartheid-era forced removals. Determined to stop the bulldozers that are destroying homes and communities, a new social movement made up of the nation’s poorest is challenging the evictions on the streets and in the courts. *Dear Mandela* is the remarkable story of Abahlali BaseMjondolo – Zulu for ‘people of the shacks’. It is considered the largest movement of the poor to emerge in post-apartheid South Africa.

*Dear Mandela* brings us into the everyday lives of three dynamic leaders of the movement. Determined to stop the evictions, Mazwi, Zama and Mnikelo met with their communities by candlelight to study and debate new housing legislation. The shack dwellers discovered that the innocuous-sounding Slums Act legalized mass evictions and violated the rights enshrined in the country’s landmark Constitution. They challenged the Slums Act all the way to the highest court in the land - the hallowed Constitutional Court.

The extraordinary achievements of the shack dwellers did not come without a price. Their movement’s very existence is threatened by shack demolitions, assassination attempts and lengthy prison detention without trial. When Zama and Mazwi are drawn into a dangerous mob attack, they learn of the contradictions inherent in the difficult decisions leaders must make, and experience how great leadership is often accompanied by great sacrifice. We invite you to visit our website at www.dearmandela.com for more information.

**Letter from the Filmmakers …………………..**

Over four years, we worked closely with the members of South Africa’s shack dwellers movement to make the documentary *Dear Mandela*. The film follows three courageous young people who live in the vast shantytowns of Durban. A strong social movement rooted in the struggles of ordinary poor and working people, combined with creative use of the law realized an important victory – stopping forced evictions for thousands of people living in shantytowns. The film *Dear Mandela* follows this victory and explores themes of leadership, agency of the poor, democracy and dignity. We are delighted that you are interested in organizing a screening of *Dear Mandela* in your community. We hope these resources help you to develop meaningful events, build relationships and create change. Most of all, we hope that you will use your *Dear Mandela* screening as an opportunity to translate awareness into action. In this Discussion Guide, you will find ideas and resources to help you to encourage your audience to take action – to join and support grassroots movements to end poverty in South Africa, globally, and in your hometown.

Sincerely, Dara Kell & Christopher Nizza, Filmmakers, *Dear Mandela*

**How to Use this Guide …………………..**

This Discussion Guide was created for young people and adults alike, with the purpose of generating thoughtful discussions around the film *Dear Mandela*. *Dear Mandela* is appropriate for any young adult or adult audience interested in sparking an informed dialogue about constitutional rights, legal due process, the impact institutionalized racism, housing laws, urban studies, African studies, grassroots organizing, and more.

The Guide can be used in a variety of ways on campus or in a classroom, as well as in more informal educational settings like festival screenings, workshops, community screenings, after-school programs, private house parties, professional development sessions, or faith-based programming. Ideally, participants will watch *Dear Mandela* in its entirety. The section of Screening Guidelines provides activities that can be performed in a group or individually, before watching the film, while watching it, and afterwards, to provide an opportunity for analysis and making connections. Each section that follows provides specific procedures geared towards individual specialty groups, that drill down into some of the important themes and topics that the film presents, which might be especially meaningful to that particular audience. The extension activities provide opportunities to deepen their exploration of the topics that the film, and this guide, raises, individually or in groups, and the Take Action prompts provide ways for viewers to get involved in the issues after the screening event is over.

The guidelines that follow can be used together or separately depending on your timeframe, audience, and objectives. Implement the procedures as they are written, or, if time does not allow, consider picking and choosing from each section to create your own, tailored agenda. For a brief, less facilitated viewing, you may choose to simply introduce the film, show it to the group, and choose one or two of the discussion questions to guide a post-viewing dialogue.

**Key Statistics…………**

To Come

**The Issues………………..**

To Come

**Hosting a Viewing of *Dear Mandela* …………………..**

Hosting a viewing of *Dear Mandela* is a great way to initiate an action-focused dialogue around issues such as constitutional law, grassroots organizing, housing inequality, and the long shadow that is cast by a country’s history of institutionalized racism. Your viewing might be a university course, an informal house party, a festival, workshop, campus event or other setting, but whatever the occasion, this guide will serve as a roadmap for fruitful and comprehensive conversations about the film and the issues it raises.

*Dear Mandela* can be viewed in a variety of settings, with more or less facilitation, depending on your objectives, time frame, and audience. With larger groups, consider having a moderator. Your discussion might also benefit from including local experts, such as economists, policy makers, professors from local universities, or other stakeholders to supplement the video content and address audience questions. Other kinds of events to consider include: a separate follow-up session for participants to create economic action agendas; a workshop for a longer, more informal and participatory experience; piggy-backing on a larger community event, or a formal classroom activity that spans multiple class periods. The following tips can help in the planning of a screening event.

*When you decide what is right for you, we’d love to hear about it. Please share anecdotes, pictures, and/or videos from your event with us and we may showcase them on our website. Send your stories to info@dearmandela.com*

* Pick the Tone

Your event can be anything you wish – from a campus meet up to a get-together for your office staff, to an outdoor family movie night at your church or synagogue. It can be a call to action for your community, or an educational ‘salon’ that can start a meaningful conversation. Be creative, and don’t be afraid to customize your approach to fit your group of friends, neighbors, or colleagues.

* Consider Timing and Agenda

This film can be used in a variety of settings, depending on your own needs and restrictions. Time is one of the most important considerations. The film itself is 93 minutes, and for an effective event, you need to add at least 15 minutes before the film to set the tone, and 30 to 45 minutes after the film for a follow-up discussion and dialogue. To assist with the post-film discussion, you might consider inviting a moderator, or assembling a panel of local experts or stakeholders, such as elected officials, religious leaders, or educators. If a 3 - hour event feels overwhelming, you might consider a series of two or three meetings, which would allow more time for an in-depth follow-up, or for the group to develop a community action plan. As you begin to envision your event, you should set the agenda and format depending on your desired outcomes.

* Choose a Date

When picking the date and time for your screening, consider the academic calendar, holidays, and local events, as well as the general preferences of your invitees. A weeknight evening is often a good time to host an adults-only event, as it allows professionals to come straight from work and does not conflict with major weekend plans. But if you are considering a family-friendly event, a weekend evening or afternoon might be best. If you are choosing between days, do not hesitate to ask an expert, such as an administrator at your church or synagogue, about when they’ve had the most success with attendance.

* Plan the Event

Four Weeks Prior

* Put together your invitation list.
* Design and mail or email your invitation. Make sure your invitation outlines all the details of your event: including the name of the film, and a description of the activities you have planned (panel discussion, moderated Q&A, open group dialogue, small group activities, etc). If you are planning a potluck or bring-your-own-picnic event, make sure you detail this expectation in your invitation as well.

Three Weeks Prior

* Plan the food and drinks you will serve. Will you serve drinks and light snacks? A full buffet meal? Do you need to rent tables, chairs, plates, glasses, and utensils, or purchase disposable ones?
* Prepare an agenda for your event. This can be as formal or as informal as you wish, but you should decide on the timing for arrivals, introductions, starting the film, and starting the post-film discussion or supplemental activities. Be sure to allow time for a bathroom and refreshment break after the film ends. This guide provides questions and discussion prompts for creating a unique, dynamic dialogue.

Two Weeks Prior

* Send out a reminder to those guests who have RSVP’d yes, or not RSVP’d at all.
* Consider providing RSVP’d guests with links to the film’s website, the film’s official Facebook (www.facebook.com/dearmandela) or Twitter (@DearMandela) to set the tone, garner involvement in the issues, and get your guests excited about your event.

One Week Prior

* Purchase the necessary food, drinks, and other party supplies.
* Set up your technology – whether it is a projector and screen or a simple TV and DVD player, you want to ensure you have it up and running before the day of the screening. You should also play through the entire DVD at least one time before your event to make sure there are no jumps, snags or scratches.
* Confirm with your invited guests one more time, and consider resending links to any late RSVPs.
* Prepare and practice an introduction to the film and a welcome to your event.
* Think through ways to best facilitate a productive dialogue around the film – including what your objectives for the conversation will be. Refer to the *Screening Guidelines* section of this guide for tips on how to prepare.
* Create a short, online evaluation form so you can collect feedback on your event. Sites such as [Survey Monkey](http://www.surveymonkey.com) are great for simple, customized questionnaires.

The Day of the Event

* Test the tech before guests arrive. Give yourself ample time to test the DVD player, projector, and/or sound equipment to make sure everything will run smoothly.
* Arrange your space to accommodate your guests, and to create a welcoming space for a meaningful event and discussion.
* Don’t forget your agenda. Make the most out of your time by following the agenda you created. Introduce the film and explain why you are bringing it to the group. Before the film starts, let your guests know that there will be a short discussion, panel discussion, or activities in small breakout groups afterwards.

The Day After

* Send a thank-you to all your guests and encourage them to continue the discussion and/or the action plan that was started at your event.
* Send a link to your online evaluation form to collect feedback from your guests.

**Screening Guidelines …………………..**

The following screening guidelines can be used when hosting a viewing of the film. They also can be used as a group activity after individuals have seen the film independently, or in a classroom or lecture hall. The pre-viewing activities help facilitators make the most out of the screening, by preparing viewers to look for specific topics as they watch the film. The post-viewing discussion prompts can help transition viewers from absorbing information, to analytical thinking, and then towards a broader more action-based application of the content.

* Before You Screen
* Watch the film yourself. As you preview the film, consider and take note of places that might be appropriate to stop the film for interim discussions, if you so choose. Create a list of the film’s main points for post-screening discussion. These points might include, among others:
* The importance and impact of social movements, activism, and grassroots organizing
* The importance and protection of universal, basic human rights – including the right to housing and representation
* The political process – and how we hold our elected officials to their campaign promises once in office
* The process of crafting, interpreting, and enforcing constitutional law
* The issue of informal settlements in South Africa - the living conditions in the settlements, as well as the treatment of their residents by police and other governmental officials
* Homelessness at home and abroad – and how a larger society deals with the problems of homelessness and the rights of homeless people
* The long-lasting effects of institutionalized racism and bias, on society and individuals
* The importance of education
* The importance of alliance building
* Know your group. Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have the members of the group dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion and socioeconomic class all can have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point-of-view.
* Agree to ground rules regarding language. Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and aid clarity. Typically, such rules include prohibiting yelling and the use of slurs, as well as asking participants to speak in the first person (“I think . . .”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that . . .”). Try to give everyone an opportunity to be heard. Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion.
* Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue. This will be especially important in preventing a discussion from dissolving into a repetitive, rhetorical, political or religious debate. In a dialogue, participants try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.
* Encourage active listening. Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas.
* Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experience. Everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and each of them may be accurate. It can help people understand one another’s perspectives if in addition to sharing their views, speakers identify the evidence on which they base their opinions.
* Take care of yourself and group members. If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space for participants to “vent,” perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces.
* Pre-viewing Activities

1. Before the group views the film, provide a brief introduction. Refer to the *About the Film* section of this Guide for a general description. Then, communicate some of the main themes of the film:

* The need for the poor/ underrepresented and for youth to have a voice (social movement)
* The need for equal access to education
* The need for equal access to housing
* The importance and power of democracy in action
* The need for a fair and unbiased legal system
* The need for socio-economic balance among all citizens
* The ongoing legacy of institutionalized racism / apartheid

1. Display the following graphic organizer on the screen, or copy it onto the white board, chalkboard, or on a piece of chart paper so the group can see it. Alternatively, make copies of it and distribute it to the group.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Empowering/**  **Validating** | **Disempowering/**  **Victimizing** |
| **Connecting/ Alliance**  **Building** | **Disconnecting/**  **Divisive** |

1. Instruct the group to copy the graphic organizer onto a piece of paper. Explain that they will be taking notes on this chart as they watch the film. Whenever they see an example of something that is empowering to the shack dwellers, they should jot it down in the upper left hand box. Disempowering, upper right. Examples of experiences that helped to connect people, and build alliances, in the bottom left, and things that were disconnecting and divisive, list in the bottom right. Encourage viewers to be thoughtful and make connections as they watch, as these notes will help to inform their post-viewing discussion.
2. In addition, ask viewers to write any other thoughts, reactions, or questions that come up for them as they watch on the back side of their paper.
3. Let viewers know that you will not be collecting their writings, but that they are for their own use to help them remember what they were thinking as they watched the film, and help recall specific examples and instances in the post-viewing discussion.
4. Conduct a short, whole-group discussion using some or all of the following questions as a guide:

* What do you know about the housing crisis in South Africa? How does the housing crisis, and homelessness in South Africa compare to the US –quantitatively, qualitatively, and historically?
* Do you think that the right to housing is a basic human right?
* Discuss the concept of reparations. What are the arguments for and against reparations?
* What do you know about Civil War general William T. Sherman’s Special Field Order #15, which was issued in 1865 and prescribed each freed American slave “40 acres and a mule”? Do you know how this field order relates to constitutional law in post-apartheid South Africa?
* In times of crisis or dissent, how does democracy work?
* Give some examples of social movements started by the masses that have made huge changes in national or international policy.

*Note*: Keep in mind that each viewing group will be different. Be sensitive to the level of maturity, exposure, and experience of each audience and structure discussion and activities to reflect each group’s abilities and interests. Refer to the specialty group sections of this guide for questions that can customize your screening.

* Post-viewing Activities

1. Lead a post-viewing discussion about the film. Use some or all of the following questions as a guide.

* Who were the main people depicted in this film? What are some of the traits that they all have in common? What were some of the ways in which they differed?
* What is Abahlali baseMjondolo (ABM)? What makes it unique as a grassroots movement?
* What did you notice about the informal settlements? What were your first reactions as you saw how the shack dwellers lived?
* What was the function of the community center where Zama worked?
* Why were there numbers spray-painted on the shacks?
* How are the activist groups organized?
* How does the constitution provide a platform and a place of power for the activists?
* At one point, one of the people in the film says “What [Mandela] was jailed for, has never been achieved.” Do you agree with this statement? Explain.
* What is the Minister of Housing’s official position?
* What allies do the activists engage outside of the settlements?
* How do the activists organize within the settlements?
* What hurdles do the activists face? Are they able to overcome these hurdles?
* What is the “Slums Act”? How does the Slums Act perpetuate apartheid?
* How does the homeless crisis in South Africa differ from homelessness in the United States? Explain.
* What impact do the violent attacks have on the activists? On their organization? On their morale? On their outcomes?

*Note*: For a more detailed discussion, refer to the *Questions for Further Discussion* section of this Guide.

1. Encourage members of the group to share one observation from their graphic organizer, with a question about their observation.
2. Encourage other audience members to answer each other’s questions to initiate cross-dialogue.
3. On the board, an overhead projector, or on chart paper, create the following chart:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Changemaker** | **Tactics and Strategies** | **Outcomes and Impact** |
| Parent |  |  |
| Law Enforcement |  |  |
| Grassroots Activist |  |  |
| Teacher |  |  |
| Elected Official |  |  |
| Lawyer |  |  |
| Community Organizer |  |  |
| Student |  |  |
| Other |  |  |

1. Elicit examples of additional “changemakers” from the group, and complete the chart together, listing examples of tactics and strategies from the film. Then, as a group, list the outcomes and impact for each – as depicted in the film, as anticipated by the group, or as experienced by individuals in the group themselves.
2. As a conversation starter, ask participants: “What is a social movement? What are some of the ways that individuals affect change in a society?”
3. Alternatively, divide the group into small groups and assign each group a ‘changemaker.’ Have each group come up with strategies and outcomes. Once each group has compiled a short list, reconvene as a whole group to share responses. Chart small group contributions on chart paper, the overhead projector, or on the chalkboard.
4. Once the chart is complete, evaluate the results as a group, with the goal of establishing how all these people work together to affect change in society.

**Questions for Further Discussion ……………..**

1. Compare issues around homelessness, illegal (informal) shelters, and evictions in different countries around the globe, such as the US, Germany, the UK, Syria, and others. How are the situations similar, and how are they different?
2. How are issues of homelessness and dispossession in society arranged by color lines, historically and today? Compare in South Africa vs. the US.
3. Discuss the different ways people can make change in their communities. Which do you think is the most effective – grassroots organizing, political reform, nonviolent resistance, armed conflict, or others? Explain your thinking.
4. Discuss the relationship between education and knowledge and self-assertion and empowerment within the Abahlali Basemjondolo movement.
5. How did the international community support or hinder Abahlali Basemjondolo and the resistance of the shack dwellers? How do international policy and/or international opinion affect other human rights struggles within other countries? Explain.
6. How is race perceived in South Africa, currently and historically? How is it perceived in the United States, the UK, and other nations? How do these compare to the perception of race in other countries? What societal variables affect a culture’s perception of race?
7. What role do social movements play in a democratic society?
8. What is a leader? Discuss various moments in the film where people show themselves to be leaders.
9. How is Zama a leader within her family? What sort of a role model is she for her children?
10. What potential impact could the Abahlali movement and their Constitutional Court case have on the overall housing situation in South Africa? If the type of movement we see in Durban were to become more widespread, as is modestly happening on the ground now, what influence might this have on efforts to resolve the growing housing crisis? Why?
11. The shack dwellers are well aware of ANC’s original promises of housing for all, and even of Mandela’s call for patience saying that it could take five years. More than a decade later, they are still waiting for that promise to be kept. If you were part of the ANC administration, what would you do to transform Mandela’s ideals into reality? Who would you involve in the process?
12. Speaking to a crowd of housing activists, Mazwi says “Down with the ANC.” How do you explain the silence that follows that chant? What does the response reveal about generational differences? In terms of political organizing, how effective is Mazwi’s attitude towards the ANC? If you were an ANC member, what would you say to Mazwi?
13. Given what you know about informal settlements, evictions and the law, did the film change your thinking on the issues? Describe one new insight you received from watching this film. What actions might you take as a result of that insight?
14. Were there any other questions you wanted to ask, after having seen this film?
15. Share a moment from the film that you found to be particularly inspiring or disturbing. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
16. What emotions did the film evoke for you?
17. How have new technologies, particularly the mechanization of mega agri-businesses, global urbanization, and the elimination of family farms affected the housing crisis worldwide?

**Specialty Group Addenda ……………….**

* For Community Organizers

1. How does Abahlali Basemjondolo organize? Who is leading? How do they recruit people into the movement? What is their philosophy of collectivism vs individualism?
2. What is the role of history and culture in the Abahlali Basemjondolo? What is the role of history and culture in your local community?
3. What is the difference between “living politics” and “top-down politics?” Are they mutually exclusive, or symbiotic? Explain your thinking.
4. How does “divide and conquer” relate to the success or failure of grassroots movements, particularly in the context of the poor?
5. What is an activist? How do you think you can be an activist in your own community? What are some of the organizations or groups that you could be a part of, and support in your area?

* For Campus Organizers

1. What role do youth play in Abahlali Basemjondolo, and in the grassroots activist community as represented in the film?
2. Consider Mnikelo’s final statement in the film: “*You don’t need to be old to be wise. That is why we think we need to show our character while we are still young. So that when your life ends it mustn’t be like a small obituary that said ‘You were born, you ate, you go to school, you died.’ You know when you are dying you must die with credibility. The people must talk about you, especially good things, saying you were the man amongst the men. Not just an ordinary man*.” Is this statement representative of your peers, and the youth on your campus? Explain how the youth in your community are similar or different in their attitudes and behaviors.
3. What is the relationship between education and grassroots activism?
4. How can universities work against, or, conversely, enforce the divide between rich and poor in a society?

* For Faith-Based Organizers

1. What is the role of religion in Abahlali Basemjondolo?
2. How did religious leaders respond to the attacks on Abahlali Basemjondolo? How did their reaction affect society’s response as a whole?
3. Is protecting every citizen’s basic right to clean and safe housing society’s moral obligation?
4. Discuss the importance of allies, such as the white lawyers who decide to work with the shack dweller movement.
5. If one basic human right, such as the right to shelter, is threatened, are all human rights, on some level at risk?

**Take Action …………………..**

* **Join or support Abahlali baseMjondolo**, the Shack Dwellers Movement of South Africa. There are many ways to do this and they welcome alliances and visitors. They also have a fantastic website with a rich library of articles and readings. Please visit their website at <http://abahlali.org/>
* **Host a screening of *Dear Mandela***for your school, church or in your home. For assistance with hosting your event, please contact us at [sleepinggiantfilms@gmail.com](mailto:sleepinggiantfilms@gmail.com).
* **Support public interest lawyers**. To find out more, visit the SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA (SERI) at www.seri-sa.org. SERI is a non-profit organization providing professional, dedicated and expert socio-economic rights assistance to individuals, communities and social movements in South Africa.
* **Contact your local councilor** to engage him / her on the needs of your community. See our companion guide, ‘Making Local Government Work: An Activist’s Guide’, included in the Dear Mandela toolkit.
* **Organize a protest**. See our companion guide, ‘Protesting Your Rights: The Regulation of Gatherings Act, Arrests and Court Processes.’

**Additional Resources …………………..**

* ABAHLALI BASEMJONDOLO - www.abahlali.org