

Iraq in Fragments



Synopsis

American director James Longley spent more than two years filming in Iraq to create this documentary of the war-torn country as seen through the eyes of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds. *Iraq in Fragments* is a trilogy of intimate, passionately-felt portraits: A fatherless eleven-year-old is apprenticed to the domineering owner of a Baghdad garage; Sadr followers in two Shiite cities rally for regional elections while enforcing Islamic law at the point of a gun; a family of Kurdish farmers welcomes the US presence, which has allowed them a measure of freedom previously denied. Winner of Best Director, Best Cinematography and Best Editing awards in the 2006 Sundance Film Festival documentary competition, the film was also awarded the Grand Jury Prize at the 2006 Full Frame Documentary Film Festival and was short-listed for the Oscars 2007.

Teachers' Notes

This documentary provides aspects of interest for students studying Film, Media, Citizenship and Religious Studies at AS/A2 and Intermediate and Highers. The three different stories present different aspects of life in Iraq, highlighting aspects of everyday life for those individuals and their communities that are often absent from news media.

Representations

Key questions

- What were your expectations before you saw the film?
- Is this the Iraq with which you are familiar?
- Where do these impressions/ideas come from?
- Did the film challenge any of these ideas?

Documentary

The film presents three different stories. We hear from eleven-year-old Mohammed; then in Sadir's South we have an insight into aspects of religious practise and organisation and finally we see a Kurdish family. The documentary presents these three aspects as part of a single look at Iraq.

Key questions

- What difference do you think it makes to have these dissimilar stories told one after another?
- Do you think there would be a different overall impact if you were to just watch them individually?
- What did you find most interesting, moving or significant?
- Was there a particular story that was more interesting for you?

Documentary is often seen as a more direct means of representing real-life events, rather than for example feature films or dramas.

Key questions

- What processes are common to these forms?
- Do you think that documentaries are more objective than the other forms mentioned above?

Hopes and Dreams

In all of the different stories we hear expressions of hope for Iraq as well as the individual hopes for their own lives. In the first and last stories we see young boys and how the changing Iraq has affected them.

- How important do you think this aspect is to the documentary as a whole?
- How much of a role does education play in transforming the lives of these young boys?
- Is the representation of education the same throughout the different stories?
- Do you share Suleman's view 'I don't want to leave school. I want to go to college and be something.'

Representations of Religion

During the course of the documentary we get a sense that the people shown have a strong sense of God's will, their faith is an essential part of everyday life.

Key questions

- How would you describe the diverse relationships to religion that we see during the course of the different stories in the documentary?
- Do you consider any of these representations stereotypical?

Throughout the documentary people comment on 'life under Saddam Hussein' as well as talking about the current situation. Religion and politics are very closely connected, and are shown to be throughout the different slices of life in Iraq shown here.

Key question

- Is the representation shown in the documentary the same throughout? Is this a familiar picture to you?

Religion and Democracy

In both Sadir's South and Kurdish Spring we hear people talking about the changing political system in Iraq.

Key questions

- Did the picture we see here challenge or confirm your ideas/understanding of Iraq?
- Was there anything you wanted to know more about?
- What value is put on democratic elections by the people that we hear speaking (e.g. the farmer, the religious leader etc.)?

In Sadir's South we hear detailed discussions about the value of the elections and the kind of elected body that they would like to see put in place. This discussion is detailed and raises historical dimensions, as the quote below suggests:

'They had this plan in 1917 when the English occupied Iraq. In the First World War when General Maude took Baghdad. They tried it then but the Shia and Sunni declared unity and so their plan failed.'

Key questions

- How much do you know about Iraq's past?
- How important is this historical dimension to the present situation? (You may need to research this aspect of history.)
- Does this change your understanding/view of the current situation?

Discuss and Debate

Below are statements that you may wish to use as a starting point for class discussions.

- The news media don't make any effort to provide context to the events in Iraq, so we only get a biased view.
- The public shouldn't expect broadcasters to provide history lessons. If people want to know they can look it up.
- Iraq is too complicated for most people. If news reports were too long people would just switch off.
- The media has a responsibility to provide citizens with a full picture of what is happening, there is a demand for detailed information.
- News media is dumbing down to reflect a culture that is only interested in entertainment. In-depth looks at Iraq's history and politics has absolutely no interest for an audience under thirty-five.

There are many sources of information that you can use to develop cases for and against these statements. Think about your own habits regarding the news as a starting point, how much do you consume? Is it from a variety of sources? Does this matter? Think about the views of friends and family. How are these formed? Does this influence you?