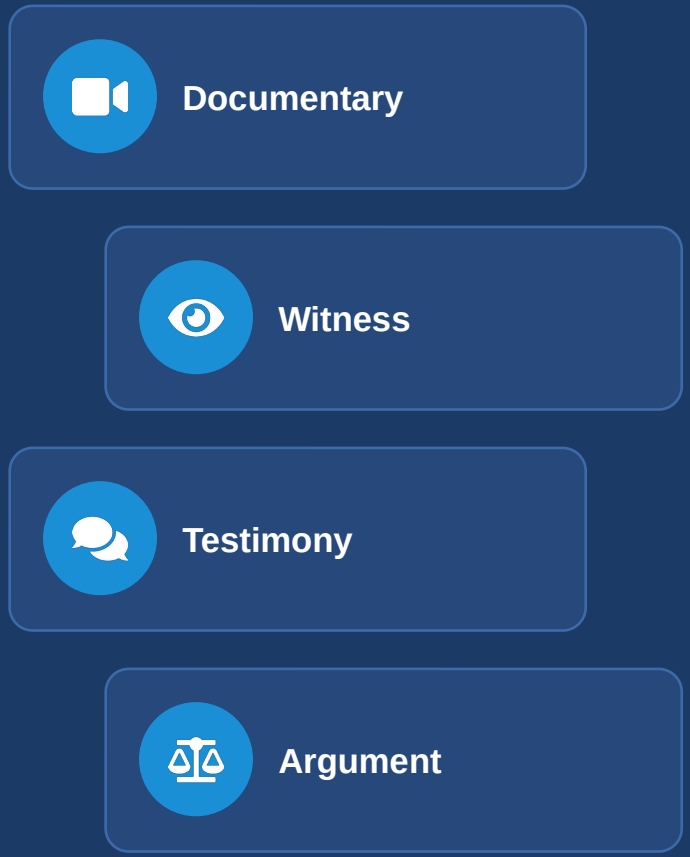
NBE3U Signal and Story, Lesson 5

Witness

The documentary as testimony and argument



Today's goals

We are learning…

- How documentaries use conventions to witness and to argue.
- To evaluate a documentary's perspective and effectiveness.

I can…

- Identify documentary conventions and explain how they create meaning.
- Identify the filmmaker's perspective and how it shapes the film.
- Evaluate how effectively the documentary communicates its argument.
- Respond respectfully to testimony.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–8 min	**Care**	Listen
8–20 min	**Conventions**	Note
20–45 min	**Viewing**	Watch and note
45–62 min	**Perspective**	Analyse
62–75 min	**Evaluate**	Write

Before we watch



These are real lives

Families and communities shared these stories.



Take care of yourself

You may step out or pass.



Support

Hope for Wellness: 1-855-242-3310. Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868.



Listen with respect

We analyse the film's choices, not people's grief.

Big idea

Indigenous documentary makers use the camera as a witness: to record what official histories leave out and to put community voices at the centre. Analysing their techniques shows how a documentary can be both testimony and argument.

The documentary toolkit

interview	People speak to the camera in their own words. *Who speaks first, and longest?*
archival footage	Film, photos or documents from the past. *Reframed for a new purpose.*
observational	The camera watches events as they happen. *No narration.*
narration	A voice guiding interpretation. *Sometimes the filmmaker's own.*

Choose an excerpt

Filmmaker	Documentary
Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki)	Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance (NFB, 1993)
Tasha Hubbard (Cree)	nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up (NFB, 2019)
Alethea Arnaquq-Baril (Inuk)	Teacher-chosen documentary
Katherena Vermette (Red River Métis)	this river (2016)

Teacher's choice. Preview first: several deal with violence and grief.

Watch



Teacher-chosen documentary excerpt

A First Nations, Métis or Inuit filmmaker, from NFB Indigenous Cinema

nfb.ca/indigenous-cinema

While you watch: Note each convention on page 1. Whose voices are heard? What is the filmmaker asking us to understand?

After watching



What do you think the filmmaker wanted the audience to understand?

Sentence starters

“The filmmaker wanted us to see…”

“The voice that stayed with me was…”

“I noticed the film chose to…”

How it works

- Optional sharing.
- Silence is fine.

Witness and argument

Witness

- Records what happened.
- Lets people speak.
- Keeps what officials left out.

Argument

- Selects and orders evidence.
- Leads to a conclusion.
- Asks the audience to act or change.

Most documentaries are both. How does this one balance them?

Perspective

On page 2, in pairs:

1. State the film's argument in one sentence.
2. What is the filmmaker's relationship to the people in the film?
3. How does that shape what we see?
4. What question does it raise about beliefs, values, identity or power?

Model evaluation

Task: How effectively does the excerpt communicate its argument?

The excerpt communicates its argument effectively because it lets community members explain events in their own words before any official account appears. When the archival news clip finally plays, we already know what it leaves out, so the film's structure makes the argument for us. It would be even stronger for a viewer new to the history if it added one on-screen date earlier.

Why it works

- Clear judgement.
- Evidence from structure.
- Considers audience.
- A fair limitation.

Evaluate

On page 2:

1. How effectively does it communicate its argument?
2. Two pieces of evidence.
3. One limitation or question.
4. Four to six sentences.

Taking care



If today's film raised anything for you, talk to me, the school counsellor or a trusted adult.

Hope for Wellness: 1-855-242-3310 (24/7). Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868. Call or text 988. Residential School Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419.

Exit ticket

1. One documentary convention and its effect.

2. The filmmaker's perspective, in one sentence.

3. Your evaluation in one sentence.

Next class: Sound and Language.

Teacher reveal

Witness: key points

Interview: Lets people speak in their own words; choose who speaks and in what order.

Archival footage: Brings the past in; can be reframed against its original purpose.

Observational footage: Watching events unfold; the camera as witness.

Narration: The filmmaker's voice guiding interpretation; sometimes the filmmaker is present on screen.

Perspective: The filmmaker's relationship to the community shapes access, trust and what is shown.

Evaluation: A documentary can be openly argumentative and still be careful with evidence; judge both.