



FARMING THE BLACK

A Kontent Films Production

Curriculum Guide

WWW.FARMINGWHILEBLACKFILM.COM

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Dear Educators,

We extend our heartfelt thanks for screening our film and utilizing the educational guide developed in collaboration with the Mill Valley Film festival and California Film Education team. Your dedication to fostering meaningful conversations around food sovereignty, racial equity, and environmental stewardship is inspiring.

By engaging with these resources, you empower students to reflect on systemic challenges and explore solutions rooted in justice and sustainability. We are deeply grateful for your partnership in this transformative work.

The discussion prompts provided offer a range of strategies to encourage small-group or full-class conversations. For students with experience crafting evidence-based essays, the suggested prompts can serve as a basis for a concise writing assignment. Additionally, standalone handouts are available for pre- and post-viewing activities, emphasizing social-emotional learning. There is also a contextual handout designed to enhance understanding of the film's experience, making the screening more meaningful. These resources can be tailored to support varied educational goals.

Thank you so much for all your work in leading the upcoming generations!

Sincerely,

The *Farming While Black* team

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the central issues addressed in this documentary? What new insight did you gain from the beginning to the end of the film?
2. What are some surprising facts you learned from this film? How do these facts shape your understanding of the central issue of the film?
3. Does this documentary feel objective and/or balanced in its presentation of the issues? Why or why not?
4. Describe a moment or a scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about the scene that was especially compelling for you?
5. What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
6. If you could require one person (or group) to view this film, who would it be? What would you hope their main takeaway would be?
7. Were there any perspectives relevant to the central issues of the film that were not included? How would those voices have changed the film?
8. What are the connections between the historic struggle of the Black farmer and the current state of food injustice?
9. What are the challenges of farming in a capitalist system and creating an alternative existence off the land?
10. What is food apartheid, and how does it perpetuate historic racism and systemic injustice?
11. What does it mean to truly and equitably farm for the people?

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. Today there is a growing movement of Black folks reclaiming their agricultural heritage and their lost connection to land. How are the three farmers spotlighted in the film finding and celebrating that connection on their respective farms?
2. Why is land cultivation such a significant part of the fight for freedom for Black people? How does learning skills for sustainable agriculture lead to food sovereignty?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TEDx Talks | Farming While Black | Leah Penniman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QYDXtMiV80>

Soul Fire Farm: An Afro-Indigenous Centered Community Farm

<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/>

More about the farm's vision, mission and commitment to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system.

Soul Fire Farm: BIPOC Trainings

<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/programs/bipoc-trainings/>

More about the Workshop Series and Immersion Programs offered by Soul Fire Farm.

Soul Fire Farm: Braiding Seeds Fellowship

<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/braiding-seeds-fellowship/>

The Braiding Seeds Fellowship, a project of Soul Fire Farm Institute in collaboration with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, carries on the legacy of the braided seeds by providing beginning farmers with resources, professional development, and mentorship to support their livelihood on land.

Soul Fire Farm: Farming While Black Book by Leah Penniman

<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/media/farming-while-black/>

The webpage for *Farming While Black* on the Soul Fire Farm site highlights the book by Leah Penniman as a resource for addressing racial inequities in farming while sharing practical strategies for sustainable agriculture. It celebrates African Diasporic wisdom and offers guidance for reclaiming food sovereignty. The page serves as a hub to learn about the book and its mission, as well as a place to purchase a copy.

Podcast Soil: The Dirty Climate Solution | How to Save a Planet

<https://gimletmedia.com/shows/howtosaveaplanet/39h6wn7>

In this podcast episode you will meet two farmers: One is a first-generation farmer in upstate New York raising fruits and vegetables for the local community. The other is a third generation farmer in Minnesota who sells commodity crops to big industrial processors. What they have in common is bucking modern conventions on how to farm.

Writing the Land: Hunger Poems by Naima Penniman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vC9LeTzcMpE>

Poetry for Wildseed Community Farm and Healing Village, Northeast Farmers of Color

The Truth Behind 40 Acres and a Mule | African American History Blog

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/the-truth-behind-40-acres-and-a-mule/>

The story of the "40 acres and a mule" promise to former slaves.

Black-Owned Farms to Support

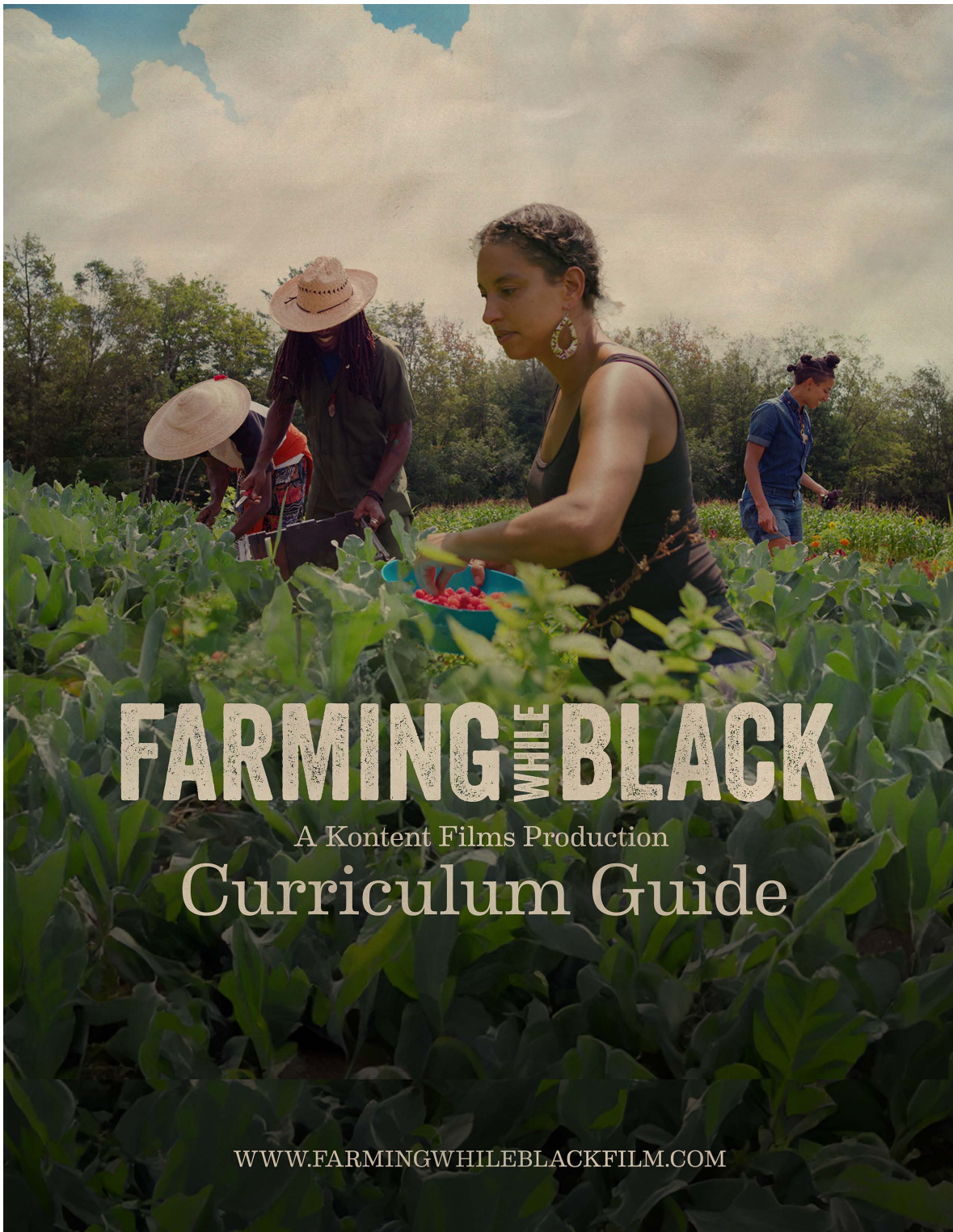
<https://blackfarmersindex.com/>

Farms Together

<https://caff.org/farmstogether/>

Farms Together coordinates collaboratives of small and mid-scale family and BIPOC farmers to provide healthy, fresh, and local food to California families in need while opening up access to new and emergent marketplaces for local food.

Name: _____



ABOUT THE FILM

In 1910, 16 million acres of land—14% of all farmland—was owned by Black farmers. Today, 98% of farmland is White-owned. Today there is a growing movement of Black folks reclaiming their agricultural heritage and their lost connection to land. The film you are about to see is the story of three farms finding that sacred connection in upstate New York, Maryland, and the Bronx.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER MARK DECENA

Raised by an immigrant single mother, Mark Decena spent his formative years softening hard adobe clay soil with compost. Besides keeping him in line, it infused Decena with a love of growing things—to date: feature films, television shows, and short film series.

A three time Sundance alumni, Decena's first feature, *Dopamine*, won the Alfred P. Sloan Prize. Decena's documentary work spans across themes of social justice, sustainable design and the environment. He wrote and directed the Redford Center film, *Watershed*, and was a writer and producer on *Stand Up Planet*, a Gates funded project that aired on Participant Media's channel, Pivot and KCET. His latest feature film, *Not Without Us*, premiered as the closing night film at the S. F. Green Film Festival and aired nationally on PBS. Decena's latest short films, *Remothering the Land*, co-produced with Patagonia Films, premiered at the DC Environmental Film Festival, and *Me & My Robot* premiered at COPDOX and aired on PBS. Decena is also the founder of Kontent, a boutique production company based in San Francisco, housing a Kollektive of award winning filmmakers, producers and creatives working on original and branded works.



BEFORE VIEWING ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions:

The film you are about to watch addresses the injustice of our food system and how race and racism are back at the forefront of food injustice and food apartheid. Use this guide to think about your current position on the food system. Read each statement below and place an X on the line below it indicating how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Then, write one or two sentences explaining why you placed the X where you did.

The American food system is built upon stolen and exploited labor.

Strongly Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

Hunger and poverty are perpetuated by undemocratic systems of power.

Strongly Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

Environmental justice leads to food sovereignty.

Strongly Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

DURING VIEWING FARMING WHILE BLACK NOTECATCHER

Directions:

The film examines and celebrates the growing movement of Black folks reclaiming their agricultural heritage and their lost connection to land. Use the note catcher to record details about each of the three farms that are finding that sacred connection.

Farm One: Soul Fire Farm, Upstate New York	
About the Farmer What do you learn about the farmer, their personal history, their beliefs, and their experience farming while Black?	About the Farm What do you learn about the farm, their place in the community, and their connection to the movement?



DURING VIEWING

FARMING WHILE BLACK NOTECATCHER

Farm Two: The Bronx, New York

About the Farmer

What do you learn about the farmer, their personal history, their beliefs, and their experience farming while Black?

About the Farm

What do you learn about the farm, their place in the community, and their connection to the movement?

Farm Three: Brandywine, Maryland

About the Farmer

What do you learn about the farmer, their personal history, their beliefs, and their experience farming while Black?

About the Farm

What do you learn about the farm, their place in the community, and their connection to the movement?

AFTER VIEWING VALUES, IDENTITIES, ACTIONS

Directions:

Take some time to reflect upon the social, political, and cultural aspects of the film by answering the following questions, then digging a little deeper with any of these questions.

VALUES	
<p>What values does this film invite you to think about? These are the kinds of things that people value – e.g., fairness, justice, safety, respect, traditions.</p>	<p>Dig a little deeper with any of these questions. Are they your values? Others' values? Does the film affirm or challenge or raise concerns about these values?</p>

IDENTITIES	
<p>Who is this film speaking about? And who is it trying to speak to? These are not necessarily the same people.</p>	<p>Dig a little deeper with any of these questions. Is anyone left out of the film that should be in it? Do you fit in, or not so much for this film? Why?</p>

ACTIONS	
<p>What actions might this film encourage? These could include doing something concrete, refraining from doing something, or just learning more about the topic.</p>	<p>Dig a little deeper with any of these questions. Whose actions—yours, others, which others? Why?</p>

A Thinking Routine Borrowed from Harvard Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education
<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

AFTER VIEWING RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Directions:

Respond to each question, referring to specific scenes, events, and dialogue from the film as evidence for your interpretation.

1. What is the history of land ownership in this country? What is the truth behind the broken promise of “40 Acres and a Mule”?

2. According to the film, what is the root cause of climate change, and how are these farmers and farms confronting it?

3. According to the film, what is the real work of the farmer who is committed to cultivating a relationship with the soil and actively confronting climate change?

4. What is the Justice for Black Farmers Act? What are the details behind its inception, and how is it connected to the Black farming movement?

5. What is the connection between the plantation economy and industrial agriculture?

6. What is the urban agricultural movement, and why is it important for ending food apartheid?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

HUNGER POEMS, PART 1

Poetry Analysis

Farming While Black features Naima Penniman and ends with a spoken word performance of her poem “Black Gold.” Her poetry looks at the historic accounts of hunger, famine, and starvation, and her work is part of Poetry X Hunger. This extension activity encourages you to dig deeper into “Black Gold,” or read and analyze a hunger poem posted on the Poetry X Hunger website in order to examine historical accounts of hunger, famine, and starvation.

Directions:

1. **Watch & Listen Again.** Watch Naima Penniman performing “Black Gold” two or three more times. You will catch something new or different each time:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTq2jrC_KP4
2. **Read.** Read one or more of the poems in the archives on the website Poetry X Hunger.
<https://www.poetryxhunger.com/hunger-poems/poems-by-naima-penniman>.
Read them two or three more times. You will catch something new or different each time.
3. **Go Deeper.** For this extension activity you will go deeper in order to uncover the meaning of a hunger poem.
4. **Poetry Analysis.** The instructions on this worksheet will help you uncover the meaning of a hunger poem.

Analysis Guide

Title: What does the title of the poem mean?

Summarize: Write a brief summary of the poem in your own words.

Meaning: What do you think the poem means? Think about the meaning of the poem beyond the literal words.

Questions to consider before writing your analysis:

1. Who or what is the subject of the poem?
2. What are they talking about?
3. Why do you think the author wrote the poem?
4. When is the poem happening?
5. Where is the poem happening?
6. What is the historical and cultural context of the poem?
7. What is the theme or central idea of the poem?
8. What is the poet’s attitude? What is the poet’s message?

Write: What is the meaning of the poem? Thinking about what you learned from watching the film and digging deeper into “Black Gold,” write an interpretive analysis in which you explain and describe the meaning of the poem and its historical and cultural significance.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

HUNGER POEMS, PART 2

Spoken Word

Spoken Word is a broad designation for poetry intended for performance. Though some spoken word poetry may also be published on the page, the genre has its roots in oral traditions and performance. Spoken word can encompass or contain elements of rap, hip-hop, storytelling, theater, and jazz, rock, blues, and folk music. Characterized by rhyme, repetition, improvisation, and word play, spoken word poems frequently refer to issues of social justice, politics, race, and community.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/spoken-word/>

Poetry X Hunger is bringing a world of poets to the anti-hunger cause.

While you may not have experienced hunger first-hand, you can still speak up about it. Everyone can contribute to the Poetry X Hunger cause by writing a poem about hunger: its causes, its history, or its impacts. Poetry can help raise awareness in the fight against hunger.

<https://www.poetryxhunger.com/hunger-poems/poems-by-naima-penniman>

Directions:

- 1. Create:** Write a poem about hunger—its causes, its history, and/or its impacts.
- 2. Prompts:** <https://www.poetryxhunger.com/prompts-to-help-you-get-started.html>
Begin your poem with one of the following phrases . . .
 - “This is what the hungry say . . . ”
 - “The hunger years were then and are now . . . ”
 - “This is what it will take to end hunger . . . ”or write a poem that incorporates a phrase from an **historical account of hunger** . . .
 - “From the Ancient Mediterranean region . . . ”
 - “From Sudan . . . ”
- 3. Perform:** Share your poem with the class.
- 4. Submit:** Submit to PoetryXHunger@gmail.com.



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

FILM REVIEW

Directions:

After watching the film *Farming While Black* write a review of the film.

While a film review is an evaluation of a movie, it is not simply a viewer-response expressing the writer's feelings about the film. Instead, a film review attempts to do three things for the reader:

1. **Summarize** what the film is about (the story)
2. **Interpret** the film/filmmakers' intended meaning (the themes and claims)
3. **Evaluate** whether the film is successful in expressing the intended meaning (its effectiveness in conveying the themes and claims)

A review will support its perspective with evidence from the film, such as descriptions of important moments, characters, and scenes.

Suggested Structure

Introduction

- Introduce the film: title, director, and any relevant credentials (award wins for the film, other films by the director, origins for the film's story, etc.).
- Summarize what the film is about - briefly, and without any "spoilers" that give away plot twists and surprises.

Body

- Offer an interpretation of what the film/director is trying to say through this story. In other words, what is the film's theme, message, or primary claim?

Conclusion

- Evaluate whether the film is successful or not in conveying its intended message.
- Identify who the intended audience is and how effective the film is in meeting their needs. Is the film for a particular age group or social group?

Final Tip: Make sure to include some critical appraisal of the film in the first and last sentence, but try to weave it throughout the review as well.

