

# **MONKEY DANCE**

a documentary film by Julie Mallozzi



**Classroom Activities for use in grades 8-12**

## Dear Teachers and Students,

*Monkey Dance* is a 65-minute documentary film about three teenagers coming of age in Lowell, Massachusetts. Like many young Americans, these teens argue with their parents, hang out with friends, work part-time jobs, worship their cars, and strive to get into college. But Samnang, Linda, and Sochenda also happen to be Cambodian-American. Their parents are refugees who fled the Khmer Rouge genocide in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and resettled in Lowell hoping to find employment, safety, and a chance to faithfully rebuild their culture. But for teens growing up in Lowell, the city offers a dizzying array of choices, many of them dangerous.

We watch Samnang, Linda, and Sochenda try to make up for the failures of older siblings who joined a gang, did drugs, or committed crimes. At times they honor their parents' culture, at times they rebel against it. Surprisingly, it is traditional Cambodian dance that ultimately helps them navigate the minefield of urban adolescence. Dance gives these teens confidence, a sense of their roots, and a means of self-expression — especially through the *Monkey Dance*, a traditional folk tale that has been electrified by the troupe's addition of hip hop choreography.

*Monkey Dance* can help young people understand cultural and generational issues. We hope it inspires students to think critically about how the choices they make will impact their future. In classrooms or youth programs, the film can be a starting point for anything from a 20-minute discussion to a three-week learning experience. The film and activities fit into the following curriculum areas:

- US History (Immigration, Vietnam War)
- World History (Vietnam War)
- English
- Media Literacy/Journalism
- Sociology
- Anthropology/Foreign Cultures
- Asian Studies
- Social Issues/Teen Issues

The stand-alone *Viewers' Guide to Monkey Dance* is designed to provide background information for all ages (including adults) before or just after viewing the film. This Classroom Guide presents a series of exercises and activities for students in grades 8-12 to complete after the screening; you may want to hand it out beforehand so that students can look for answers along the way. Some questions can be answered by reading the *Viewers' Guide*, and others only from watching the film critically. The activities progress in complexity and required creativity, with the last few activities appropriate for first- and second-year college students.

Enjoy the film, and please be sure to visit our website, [www.monkey-dance.com](http://www.monkey-dance.com), to participate in the film's interactive community.

— Julie Mallozzi, *Monkey Dance* director

— Chuck Caragianes, teacher and curriculum developer

**[www.monkey-dance.com](http://www.monkey-dance.com)**

Name:

Date:

## **Monkey Dance Video Fact Sheet**

Today in class we will be viewing the film *Monkey Dance*. *Monkey Dance* is a true story about three teens facing difficult choices as they grow up in the city. As you watch the film please answer the following questions using complete sentences:

1. In what city does *Monkey Dance* take place?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are the names of the three main characters in the film?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. From what country do the three characters' parents originate?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What are the occupations of the main characters' parents? Do the families have a lot of money?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why is Linda's older sister in prison?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What do the three main characters do in their spare time?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What does Sochenda want to do when he grows up?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What sport does Samnang play?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What happened to Linda's car?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What is the "Monkey Dance"?

Name:

Date:

## **Monkey Dance**

### **Quotes**

Choose three of the following quotes from *Monkey Dance* and on the bottom and back of this sheet write a one-paragraph response to each one. Discuss what the character meant when they said it, and how it relates to other characters in the film and to your own life.

1. Sam: "My brothers made a lot of bad choices that they're going to think about for the rest of their lives."
2. Sam's mother: "We try so hard to raise Sam to follow the right path."
3. Linda: "People are just waiting for me to fail."
4. Linda's father: "My liver swells with pride."
5. Sochenda: "I feel like I'm changing every day, with all the stress and everything."
6. Sochenda's mother: "My children don't know anything about hardship and hunger."

Name:

Date:

## Monkey Dance Creative Response

Choose one of the following activities:

1. Write a song or poem about growing up in the city — or about being in a refugee camp.
2. Pretend you are a Cambodian-American teen writing a letter to a cousin in Cambodia: do you recommend they move to Lowell or not?
3. Imagine you are a gang member trying to convince someone else to join.
4. You will be spending a week in Cambodia. Plan your itinerary using ideas from the film and outside sources.
5. Choose a side character from the film and use your imagination to expand on their story (examples: Linda's older sister, Sam's girlfriend Kanitha, a parent, the Stop & Shop manager).
6. Draw your own political cartoon about an issue raised by the film (see example below).

