

# From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia

A User's Guide



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A special thanks to the late Lawrence Njoku, one of the students in the film who died suddenly in July 1994. The Guide is dedicated to Lawrence's unstoppable spirit and in his memory.



On the cover, from left to right: Krista Brodie, Amy Stark, Lawrence Njoku, Shingai Nyajeka, Tandi Nyajeka, Shawn Grouse, Cindy Colley

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## Lawrence Njoku IN MEMORY 1975-1994

A devoted member of Black Alive, Lawrence joined the group's debating team, and could always be counted on for his engaging sense of humour and his impromptu rap songs. He was involved in a variety of school and community groups, and was the Master of Ceremonies for the Premiere of **Speak It!** in Halifax in February 1993.

He graduated from St. Pat's High School's grade 12 academic program in June 1994. Lawrence was, without question, one of St. Pat's High's most well-liked students. Those who knew Lawrence were enriched by his presence, his openness, and his genuine goodwill. Lawrence was a keen supporter of the Children's Wish Foundation and with its support was able to fulfil his lifetime wish before his death. About this Guide

This guide was created for teachers, facilitators and workshop leaders who want to broaden their viewers' understanding of the themes and issues explored in the film, *SPEAK IT! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia*. While the film was produced for youth in Grades 7 through 12, it has been used with younger audiences at the upper elementary school level. It has also been screened in university courses and for adults at a variety of workshop, training and conference events.

The material is organized into six sections:

- 1. About the Film:
  - A Synopsis
  - The Social and Historical Context
- 2. Screening Preparation
- 3. Themes and Ideas for Discussion
- 4. Suggested Activities
- 5. Background Notes
- 6. Bibliography of Resources

Section 3: Themes and Ideas for Discussion, includes a summary of the major themes and discussion questions. A list of related film segments appears after each theme, to help you to rescreen sections before starting a discussion or an activity from Section 4: Suggested Activities. There are also pre-screening activities to use where appropriate. Users may adapt *Section 4: Suggested Activities* to suit specific audiences' needs. You are encouraged to integrate them into existing courses and community programs. Related print and visual resources for follow-up work are listed in *Section 6: Bibliography of Resources*.

### Suggested Subject Areas:

- History
- English and Drama
- Sociology
- Education
- Social Studies
- Media Literacy
- Cultural Studies

### A note about terminology:

In this text, the terms African Nova Scotian and African Canadian are used to describe people of African origin. The use of 'African' acknowledges and gives tribute to a heritage and culture which predates slavery and colonialism, and affirms the right to self-definition.

The term 'Black' also appears at various points in the text. For the purposes of this guide, 'Black' should be taken to be interchangeable in meaning to 'African'.





## **A** Synopsis

"This film is about Black youth discovering their history and learning that such knowledge makes them stronger. It's also about collective action – the strength gained by working together, no matter what your age, to effect change." Filmmaker Sylvia Hamilton

What do you do if you are young, inquisitive and Black but you cannot find anything that reflects your experience in school classes?

That's the question driving Tandi, Shingai, Krista, Lawrence and Shawn who are all members of Black Alive, a Cultural Awareness Youth Group (CAYG) chapter at St. Pat's High School.

It's also the guiding force for Sylvia Hamilton, the film's director, who wanted to explore the trials, triumphs and tentative first steps of this brand new CAYG chapter in a predominantly white setting.

The film follows the group for one year. In their classes, conferences and homes, we watch its members debate, march, laugh and probe the reasons for their exclusion from the mainstream of Nova Scotian culture.

Shingai Nyajeka narrates the half hour film. He combines a youthful impatience with an acute awareness of the need to do more than just complain. Still, he does have something to complain about.

He explains, "...there's been a Black community in Nova Scotia for over 300 years, but you wouldn't know it by the history books. You won't find our faces on the postcards. You won't find our statues in the parks... My attitude is you don't have to be from Scotland to have a history."

To learn more about their history, members of the group work with speakers from surrounding Black communities, get involved in drama and do some research in local libraries. They decide to organize a week of events celebrating Black history and culture. The week culminates in a powerful performance of *Black Journey*, a play written and directed by poet and playwright David Woods.

By the end of the film, we see a more self-assured group of teens who are eager to pass on what they have learned to all who will listen.

## The Social and Historical Context

People of African descent have lived in Nova Scotia since the 1600s.

It is mistakenly believed that there was no slavery in Canada since this country was the terminus for the 'Underground Railway.' While it is true that many former slaves escaped to Canada, it is also true that slavery was practised in Canada until the early 1800s. For example, there were slaves in Louisburg and in Halifax, among other places in Nova Scotia, as well as in Quebec. Slavery was finally abolished in the British colonies by passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833.

There were three significant movements of free Africans into Nova Scotia before 1900.

• In 1783, 3000 Black Loyalists arrived in the Loyalist influx following the American Revolution.

• In 1796 the Maroons of Jamaica were exiled to Nova Scotia. Though they had been enslaved on the island of Jamaica, they had freed themselves and fought the British colonists for many years.

• After the War of 1812, a group known as the Black Refugees arrived and eventually established communities throughout Nova Scotia.

In the early 1900s, Black people from the Caribbean, mainly from Barbados, came to Cape Breton to work in the newlydeveloping coal and steel industries. African Nova Scotians live in the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan area and in over thirty small towns and communities throughout the province.

For hundreds of years, Black people have experienced racism both subtle and blatant, including segregation in public schools and the outright denial of basic services enjoyed by other citizens. Discrimination and racism have meant a lower standard of living, chronic unemployment and lowered selfesteem for significant numbers of African Nova Scotian citizens.

In spite of these barriers, many advocacy and community development organizations have worked to promote social justice and change on behalf of the Black community. The Cultural Awareness Youth Group (CAYG) is one such organization working with and on behalf of youth.

During the period when schools were denominational, St. Patrick's High School was Catholic. Very few Black students attended the school, since the majority of Black people in the Halifax area are African Baptist. For the most part, Black students attended Queen Elizabeth High School, a protestant school, located across the street from St. Patrick's. Since 1992, there has been a significant increase in the the Black student population at St. Patrick's.

There have been fewer than three Black high school teachers in Halifax high schools in any given year. In April 1992, the Halifax District School Board established an Anti-Racism Project Office to spearhead the development of anti-racism policies and initiatives.

### note:

- for further information on the history of African Nova Scotians, please see page 24, *Bibliography of Resources*.
- a background note on the Cultural Awareness Youth Group appears on page 22.

## Screening Preparation

Before showing *Speak It!* to your audience, watch the entire film at least once, and twice if time permits. During your second viewing, consult the guide to become familiar with the *Themes and Ideas for Discussion* and the related film segments. We have provided a ruled area on each page for you to record you thoughts or questions as you watch the film.

**2** This film may be used as part of an anti-racist education program. In her book, *Letters* to Marcia, A Teacher's Guide to Anti-Racist Education, Educator Enid Lee responds to questions of why such programs are necessary:

Anti-racist education is a perspective that permeates all subject areas and school practices. Its aim is the eradication of racism in all its various forms. Anti-racist education emerges from an understanding that racism exists in society, and therefore the school, as an institution of society, is influenced by racism. Anti-racist education attempts to equip us as teachers, and our students, with the analytic tools to critically examine the origins of racist ideas and practices... Letters to Marcia, page 8

This book contains a useful introduction to the concept of anti-racist education as well as sections on identifying bias and on the use of language and terminology. (See *Bibliography of Resources*, page 24.)

**3** To establish a context for presenting *Speak It!*, the following pre-screening activities are suggested:

a) The representation of Black people on television:

Ask students to name all the Black people or characters they are familiar with who appear on television. Categorize the people, as lead actors, musicians, comedians, athletes, news anchors, news reporters etc.

Ask them if these persons are from Canada, and to name those who are.

Have students discuss their findings. What conclusions can be drawn?

### b) The history of African Canadians

Find out if the students are aware of the various locations in Canada where Black people live, and how and when they would have arrived there. Ask students whether they believe Canada had any involvement with the slave trade and whether there was slavery in Canada. For reference material see *A History of Blacks in Canada, A Study Guide for Teachers and Students*, by James Walker. (See *Bibliography of Resources*, page 24.)

## Themes and Suggested Ideas for Discussion

"Thematically, the content and emotion of the students' play **Black Journey**, parallels the issues raised in the documentary sequences of the film. There are three characters who, in the Black tradition, testify and bear witness to our historical experiences. Shingai, as narrator, becomes the fourth voice, the one speaking about the experiences of Black youth today."

— Filmmaker Sylvia Hamilton

## The Documentary Film Genre

"It wasn't an acted video. It was almost like a documentary." Grade 9 student

## **Pre-screening** Ideas and Questions for Discussion

This quotation provides an opportunity to engage viewers, before the screening, in a discussion about documentary films. John Grierson, the first Commissioner of the National Film Board, commented that a documentary is "the creative treatment of actuality". Author Arlene Moscovitch cites this definition in her resource book *Constructing Reality*:

"First it emphasizes the documentary form's concentration on the actual, its basis in real-life events, issues and people. As well, it suggests that far from being transparent windows onto reality, documentaries – like all other forms of filmmaking – are mediated constructions, the results of countless decisions made by individuals struggling to produce coherent, thoughtful, and passionate (or so one hopes) interpretations of reality." *Constructing Reality*, p.7

This source book provides comprehensive ideas, activities and resources on the documentary film genre suitable for high school and college students.

- What is a documentary film?
- What distinguishes it from other films?
- What documentaries have viewers seen and which ones did they like or not like?

## **Suggested Activity**

- Supply students with a current television listing from a local newspaper. *Ask them to identify channels and program slots that show documentaries.*
- Have students work in groups to select a documentary to watch; they can choose from television, or others available at school or local resource centres. *After viewing the program, the groups could exchange comments and share their ideas.*

## Post-screening

After viewing *Speak It!* discuss how it might fit the various definitions of a documentary film that students have developed. Have students discuss or write about how is it different from or similar to the documentaries they watched for the above activity.

The Use of Drama

"Drama to me is one of the most important tools we have in terms of expression. I wrote this drama to teach others about the Black experience and make them more aware of some of the human costs of injustice." Playwright David Woods

In the play *Black Journey*, Tandi, Krista and Shawn portray characters who represent three stages of Black history. Music reinforces each section of the actors' monologues – African drumming, jazz, gospel and soul.

Tandi is the voice of Mother Africa before and after the coming of the European invaders. She tells of the ancient African kingdoms like the Ibo in eastern Nigeria or the Ashanti in Ghana.

Shawn is the voice of Reconstruction. He describes the difficulties Black people faced in North America such as slavery, segregation and lynchings. He speaks about some of the contributions Black people have made to North American culture.

Krista is the voice of Black Nova Scotia. She explains how Black people arrived and established communities here in spite of severe hardships. "The performance of *Black Journey* during the film is not there for entertainment," says David Woods. "The play is both an historical and psychological excursion. Its themes echo from the past but resonances are still with us, amplifying and informing the present."

## **Ideas for Discussion**

- The performance of the play *Black Journey* is an essential part of the film. What effect did watching it have on you?
- What do you think the performance meant to the members of Black Alive? What did it mean to the student body at St. Patrick's?
- What do you think the actors would have had to do to prepare themselves for their roles?
- Discuss whether you think these first-time actors were nervous. Put yourself in their place. How would you cope with your fear and nervousness?
- Discuss the way music is used in the dramatic sequences.
- Identify other sequences where music was used. What mood or feeling was evoked by the music?

## **Film Segments**

- David Woods' first meeting with the group
- Any of the three monologues
- Shingai's speech and photographic montage
- Shingai's walk home at the end of the film

## **Black History and Culture**

## "It made me realize how unfair our school system is and how we should be learning about Black history, not just having one month to learn about it." High school student

The marginalization of Black history and culture is an issue being worked on by the members of both Black Alive and the Cultural Awareness Youth Group. In the film they engage in activities that help them learn about their own history and celebrate their Black culture. Through these activities, they are learning how to live within the sometimes hostile "mainstream" culture.

The group uses several tools – debates, Black history quizzes, conferences and drama – to learn facts not found in their textbooks. Black students feel alienated at St.Patrick's High School because they believe some white students and teachers do not know or understand Black culture – or what little they know is negative and based on stereotypes.

But Black students may also be unfamiliar with their own culture because they, like other youth, depend primarily upon the educational system and the mainstream media for information and knowledge. Learning about and exploring their own culture is especially important to help Black youth develop a healthy self-concept. A key component of their exploration is the knowledge that their history and culture did not begin with slavery – that their African ancestors maintained highly developed civilizations before the arrival of the Europeans.

The exploration of Black history and culture is more than just a foray into the dress, dance and diet of the many ethnic groups that make up the African Diaspora. It is an important building block providing inner strength, clarity and an understanding of the past.

## **Ideas for Discussion**

- What did you learn about Black history and culture from the film?
- Was the portrayal of Black people in this film different in any way from what is normally seen on television? Discuss.
- Should the school curriculum be changed to include the history and contributions of people from diverse racial and cultural origins? How would you suggest doing this?
- Why did the students in the film choose the methods they did to educate themselves? Compare these to what usually takes place in classrooms.
- Do you think there is any difference between Black history and Canadian history, or 'world history'? Where does it fit?

## Film Segments

- Shingai's speech and photographic montage
- The three monologues
- Robert Upshaw and students in the library discussion

### note:

The term African Diaspora refers to the way people of African descent have been scattered around the world due to slavery. The African Diaspora, therefore, is the community of Africans living outside of the African continent.

## **Role Models and Youth Empowerment**

## "I liked that the students didn't give up. They pulled together and worked like a team." Grade 9 student

Black Alive succeeded through the commitment and enthusiasm of individual group members and because they could draw on the resources and leadership of the Cultural Awareness Youth Group. Speakers from the surrounding community were invited to guide and support the group.

## **Ideas for Discussion:**

- Define role models and mentors.
- Are there any people who you think of as role models or mentors in your life?
- Why was it important that *Black Alive* use Black role models ? Would it have made any difference if they were white?
- Should role models and mentors be from your own racial or ethnic group, or can they come from various backgrounds?
- What is important and useful about youth-run organizations like Black Alive? What distinguishes them from groups led by adults?
- Would you recommend a group such as Black Alive as a role model for other youth?
- What kinds of experiences did members of Black Alive have which might be shared by young people of any ethnic or racial background?
- Should youth become involved in social issues, or should they concentrate on school work? Why or why not?
- What roles do adults play in the film? Which adults did you agree or disagree with?

## **Film Segments:**

- David Woods' first meeting with the group
- Group meeting after the history class
- Robert Upshaw and the students in the library discussion
- •"Coping with Racism" Workshop with Police Officer Brian Johnson
- Jungle Fever discussion at the theatre

## Self Esteem and Identity

## "It teaches you to be proud of who you are and to speak what you believe." Grade 9 student

Near the film's end Krista Brodie affirms: "But I still have my dream. I still have my dream, Nova Scotia. I am somebody. I am somebody."

The students went to a CAYG-sponsored conference during Black History Month. During one of the workshops they talked about their identity. Historically, people who come from African roots have used different labels to describe their group – coloured, negro, Black etc.. Today the terms African-Canadian and African-American are becoming popular because they acknowledge the ancestry of all Black people. Similarly, it is not uncommon to find Black parents giving their children African names.

One thing Black Alive members gain from what they do within the group is a sense of feeling better about themselves.

## **Ideas for Discussion:**

- Why is it so important for Krista to make such a strong statement about being somebody? How did you feel about her statement?
- What do you think it would be like being the only Black person or person of colour in your class?
- Why was it necessary for the students to participate in a workshop on "identity"?
- Does it really matter what terms people use to identify themselves? Why? Why not?
- What's in a name? Why is it that important? Why does it matter whether somebody else names us, or we name ourselves?

## **Film Segments:**

- Robert Upshaw and the students in the Identity Workshop "Who Are We Anyway?"
- Shawn and Krista's dramatic monologues: they name people who have made contributions
- Shingai's narration during his walk home at the end of the film
- David Woods' first meeting with the group

### note:

"Person of colour", and "people of colour" are terms people of various racial backgrounds use to describe themselves.

"The movie made me think more seriously about

**Gender Dynamics** 

Women continue to play an important role in the Black communities of Nova Scotia, though their contributions may not always be recognized in the same way that Black men's are.

In *Speak It!* Tandi and Krista play key roles in the group, organizing and running meetings and performing in the play *Black Journey*. They are comfortable taking leadership and speaking out about what they believe. In his opening narration, Shingai explains that the idea for setting up the group at the school came from Tandi: "For my sister Tandi, the Rally was a real turning point. She had been wanting to do something around the school for a long time."

## **Ideas for Discussion**

- What might have been some of the factors which gave Tandi the confidence to become a leader?
- Discuss the role of the young women in the film.
- Do you think the film might have been different if one of the young women had narrated it? Why?
- Discuss why you think Shingai was chosen as narrator.
- Give some examples of gender discrimination in society.
- Since there is both gender and racial discrimination in society, what are some of the problems and barriers which Black women may face which Black men might not?

## **Film Segments**

- Tanya Hudson's speech at the Peace and Justice March: "Youth in this province are frustrated..."
- Shingai's accompanying narration during the Peace and Justice March
- Group meeting where Tandi is chairing meeting
- Tandi and Krista's monologues
- Shingai's and Krista's discussion about racism at school

"This movie really opened my eyes. I had not really felt discrimination still existed around here. Of course I see things on TV about black vs. white, but never in Halifax." High school student

"I learned I shouldn't call anyone the 'N' word." Grade 7 student

The images and the opening comments from students, and Shingai's narration at the beginning of the film express what it feels like to be excluded from the place which is your home, and the home of your ancestors. Everyone has a history.

Some people believe racism only involves negative physical or verbal action taken against a person because of their membership in a certain ethnic group. Those who define racism this narrowly think that actions like name calling, physical attacks and police brutality are the only examples of racism.

Another common perception is that if the racism or discrimination was unintentional, it is not as serious. However, what must be kept in mind is the impact of the action on the person – how it felt and what damage it caused – since it may be difficult to determine if the action was intentional or unintentional.

People from marginalized groups point out that the omission of their experience from the "official" story of the country only serves to further exclude them from their rightful place in society.

## **Ideas for Discussion**

Racism

- List the examples given by members of Black Alive of the ways in which their experience is both omitted and excluded within their school.
- Can you list five examples of the way the Black experience is omitted from Canadian society?
- Name calling and other racial insults are damaging. What action should you take if you are subjected to such insults? What action should you take if you witness someone else being insulted?
- After watching the film, one student viewer commented that "racism is in everybody whether you know it or not". Do you share this opinion?
- The students say that racism is one of the reasons that materials on Black History are hard to find, and that Black people on television and in newspapers are often stereotyped.

(continued on next page)

- What do you think a stereotype is? What is upsetting about a stereotype?
- What do the terms "prejudice" and "discrimination" mean to you? Is it always wrong to discriminate?
- What do you think "institutionalized racism" is?
- Can you think of any examples?
- Can you think of other groups in Canada whose experiences may be similar to that represented in the film?

## **Film Segments**

- David Woods' first meeting with group
- Graffiti on bathroom walls
- Krista and Shingai's discussion
- Robert Upshaw's discussion with the group in the library and his wedding cake example
- Peace and Justice March
- "Coping with Racism" Workshop with Officer Brian Johnson
- Shingai's narration during his walk home

## **Interracial Relationships**

"I think that people should be with who they want to be with no matter what colour they are just as long as they're happy." Grade 9 student

Some people believe it is wrong for people of one culture to date or marry someone from another culture. In the film, Shingai says what is most important is that the two people care for each other and that it's society's problem, not the couple's.

Interracial relationships concern students from a variety of backgrounds and often bring young people into direct conflict with their families and members of their communities.

## **Ideas for Discussion**

- What kinds of interracial relationships do you see portrayed on television, in films or in literature? What cultural or racial groups are represented? Are there differences in the way various groups are shown?
- Do you agree or disagree with Shingai's statement that the problem is society's and not the couple's? Explain why you feel as you do.
- Why do you think this issue is often so divisive for families?
- Do you think families and others would have the same kind of difficulty if the relationship were just a friendship?
- If students find themselves in this situation, what strategies would you suggest they use to handle the conflict?

## **Film Segments**

• Jungle Fever discussion

• Opening Sequence: Krista's comment, "I don't care if he is..."

### note:

An NFB video titled *Domino*, by filmmaker Shanti Thakur, explores the stories of six interracial people's search for their identity. Each person tells how their identity was affected "by the experiences of their parents' history, family politics, the hierarchies of race, gender roles and class." Preview recommended before screening. (NFB# 9194 019)

## "It showed the perspective of Afro-Canadians from their side. It opened up new channels for me to think about how I act." High school student

Marshall McLuhan, a well-known Canadian social analyst, once observed that "We don't know who discovered water, but we can be reasonably assured it wasn't the fish." McLuhan's point was that we take certain things for granted, and that our perspective greatly influences the way we understand the world around us.

Shingai says "It's not like everybody at the school is KKK. But almost everybody is white – white teachers, white history, white culture. It's like if you're white you belong. But if you're Black, you're just sorta here."

## **Ideas for Discussion**

• Why do you think he says this?

**Points of View** 

- What do you think is meant by the term "white culture"?
- Shingai, while talking to Krista, says that many of his teachers think there is no racism at the school. Why do you think their teachers' perceptions of the same situation are so different from their own?
- When Shingai presents his speech, he says he would have different headings in his history book. From whose point of view are history books generally written?
- During the conference's discussion about interracial relationships, several opposing points of view were stated by people from the same cultural group. Why do you think people from certain racial or cultural groups are so often expected to agree when, for example, the same might not be expected of all women, or all white people?
- It is often said that there is a Black community in Nova Scotia. Would you say there is a white community? Why or why not?
- One student viewer said, "I didn't really enjoy this movie because it made all whites look bad." Do you agree? Why might this student feel this way?

## **Film Segments**

- Shingai's narration: opening of the film. "My attitude is..."; Scene in the library – "My grade 7 history book..."
- Jungle Fever discussion
- Krista and Shingai's discussion

## **Suggested Activities**

## 1."Let's Write About It!" First Follow-up Activity

The "Let's Write About It !" response sheet may be used as an immediate activity following the screening of the film. Consider posting the responses throughout the classroom before discussion. Leave time for students to walk about and read the responses and to quietly reflect on what they have seen in the film and what they have written as their responses. If posting and viewing are not possible, you may want to try the "pair exchanges" in the exercises which follow.

## 2. Creative Expression

Have students express their feelings about the film using the medium of their choice: write a poem, song, story, skit, draw or paint a picture, shoot a video, or make an audio tape.

If students have access to video cameras or tape recorders, they could tape a personal monologue and present it to the group. Students could work individually or in small groups.

In groups, students could interview each other, or help each other make the tape. Suggest time limits for audio and visual segments to keep presentations within a manageable time frame and to make the most use of the tapes. Encourage students to identify a specific section, theme or character to help them focus their piece.

## 3. Points of View

## Activity 1

Ask students to choose two or three quotations from the list on page 20 and to comment on them.

As a guideline, ask them to think about:

- what the students meant by the quotations; why they might have said what they did.
- whether they agree with the quotations; why or why not?

Try to provide time for students to exchange and talk about their written responses in pairs. As one way of helping students to consider the point of view of others, have each member of the pair explain the opinion or point of view of the partner. Mutual respect for the opinion and views of others should be encouraged.

If there is a large number of students, you may want to shorten the exercise by asking for volunteers, by drawing names of students to make the presentations, or by asking students to work in pairs of pairs. Discuss the importance of understanding the opinions of others even, and perhaps especially, when they are different from your own.

## Activity 2

Have students – individually or in small groups – watch a television program which they might not normally watch. Have them discuss or write responses to the following points:

- Describe whose point of view is presented.
- Is it the same as your point of view? How would you describe your own point of view?
- Is there anything to learn from seeing things from someone else's point of view?
- How could you find more points of view on topics which interest you?

## 4. Public Speaking Exercises and Debates

The themes discussed earlier in this guide and the quotations (see page 20) provide topics which you could offer students for public speaking exercises and debates.

## **Public Speaking**

To introduce the topic, ask students to identify sequences in the film during which some form of public speaking took place. In this context, public speaking means any occasion when a person speaks in a public, or group setting. (Examples: Shingai's speech in class, the discussion following the film *Jungle Fever*, the youth conference, and the dramatic presentations.)

- Have students place themselves in any of those positions.
- Discuss what it might have felt like for the various speakers.
- Have students select a topic and prepare a brief presentation for the class.

## **Debates**

While the discussion in the film about the movie *Jungle Fever* was not a formal debate, both speakers presented their arguments on the subject of interracial relationships. Divide the class into small teams, select topics (from the themes and quotations) and organize a set of debates. Invite other classes to be the audience.

## 5. Monitoring Exercises\*

In these exercises, students are encouraged to explore and analyse situations to see who is and who is not represented, and the type of representation which is present.

## Media: television

Choose a prime-time period of two hours on one night and assign each student or team of students a different channel to monitor. Ask them to keep a log in which they:

- record each time they see a Black person, note whether the person was female or male, the name, subject and type of the program (for example, game show, sportscast, commercial, sitcom, drama, etc.) and the role the Black person played.
- chart the results with the class and discuss if there were differences in the results depending on the channel, whether the program was Canadian or American, and the type of the representation.

## Media: newspapers/magazines

Using the same approach, have students choose newspapers and general magazines such as *Maclean's*, *Chatelaine*, *Time* or *Newsweek*. In print, as in television, advertising can be monitored to see who appears in ads, what type of ads, and how frequently.

## Your community

Applying the same monitoring technique described above, students can explore different locations within their community, beginning with their school. For example:

- Survey the school library for books, magazines, A-V resources.
- What photos, posters are on the walls of your school?
- Who teaches at your school, in what positions?
- Who is invited as guest speakers and resource people for school events, etc.?
- What types of greeting cards are available at local card shops? What images or pictures are on them?
- Tour public places in your community. For whom are buildings, parks, streets named? Who are your government representatives – municipal, provincial, federal?

## 6. Other Activities

- Mount displays on Black History, Literature, and Culture in the school or Community Centre
- Project Africa: working in teams or small groups, develop several projects which explore aspects of African history and culture both past and present; teams could choose different countries and time periods, display the resulting projects in the school, invite guest speakers, organize book and cultural displays.
- Organize film screenings on related topics; pre-screen films or videos to determine appropriate audience and to prepare for a post-screening discussion. (See *Bibliography of Resources*, page 24)
- Start a cultural awareness and drama group in your school or community.

\* These exercises may be adapted to explore general issues of representation - race, culture, gender, age and sexual orientation.

## From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia

## **Let's Write About It!**

Name:	
Class:	Date:

1. What are five things you learned from this film?

a)	
b)	
c)	
d)	
e)	
2. What I liked best about the film was	
3. I think the film might have been better if	
4. The part of the film which affected me the most	was

## What some of the youth in SPEAK IT! say:

## On Culture and Identity

"Sometimes we're ignorant ourselves of our own heritage." *Krista Brodie* 

"Our culture is not reflected in the school books." *Shingai Nyajeka* 

"I've never seen a movie on our great kingdoms in Africa." *Shawn Grosse* 

## On Racism

"A lot of the teachers think (school) is a racism-free environment. And I just don't see how they can be so naive, when it's spitting right in their face." *Shingai Nyajeka* 

"I remember I walked in the last stall of the bathroom and it said, 'niggers should be locked up in chains'. It makes you wonder who's writing it? Are people just writing it to be funny? Well, they're not funny." *Krista Brodie* 

"Once a year we'll have International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and that's it." *Tandi Nyajeka* 

"Youth in this province are frustrated that the opportunities to succeed in the metro community and this province appear to be denied to us because we are Black. We are frustrated that our views, hopes and concerns are not taken seriously." *Tanya Hudson* 

## The School System

"It just doesn't seem right for a school, a school system, to think that way, not to include a race of people. They're supposed to be an institution of learning." *Tandi Nyajeka* 

"I think that there's so few Blacks in school, compared to white students, that I don't think they really want to make the effort just to please 30 or 40 kids in one school." *Shawn Grosse* 

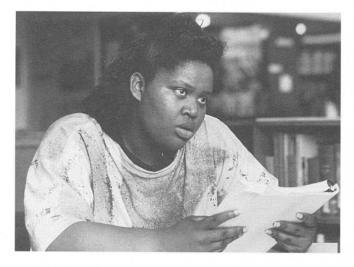
"I remember my grade 7 history text had 380-odd pages, one and a half about us. We've done more than a page and a half." *Shingai Nyajeka* 

Note: There are additional quotations throughout the guide.

## • • • • Appendix • • • • • • •

## **Student Profiles**

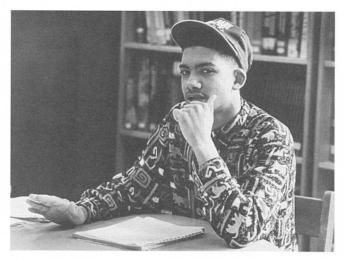
These profiles reflect the students at the time the film was made during August 1991-September 1992.



## Krista Brodie (Grade 11)

Krista joined Black Alive soon after it began and became one of its active members. She is the group's treasurer, and also has been on its Black History Month quiz and debating teams. Born in Beechville, the same community from which filmmaker Hamilton comes, Krista lived for a short time in Virginia, where she went to a predominantly Black school.

She returned to Halifax in 1990. Krista thinks negative stereotyping is among the problems facing Black youth, but believes groups like CAYG help to fight its effects. Krista is no stranger to these stereotypes because they also plague Halifax's Mulgrave Park, a public housing development, where she used to live. She thinks education is one of the ways to combat stereotyping and says **Speak It!** will have a positive effect on the educational system because "...it has opened people's eyes to the needs of Black youth".



## Shawn Grouse (Grade 11)

Low teacher expectations can have a harmful effect on some students. But Shawn Grouse who lives in Mulgrave Park has worked to overcome attitudes such as those held by one of his early teachers who believed he had no real future. Years later Shawn is coping well with the difficulties faced by a young Black male.

Believing he could make a difference, he has helped to organize social and cultural activities for Black Alive, participated on the group's Quiz team, and delivered talks to students at other schools. Before joining the group, the idea of speaking in public or performing on stage frightened him. "Being involved in Black Alive has built up my confidence and given me experience in organizing," he says. Though he first joined the group out of curiosity, Shawn says it has given him a useful outlet for his energies and greater respect for the contributions of his people. Shawn says *Speak It!* "tells a lot of kids like me they can make it."



## Shingai Nyajeka (Grade 10, French Immersion)

Shingai joined Black Alive as part of his drive to know himself. He wondered why Black people were missing from the Nova Scotia story and the school curriculum. In the group, he discovered he was not alone. He began reading books written by Black authors, talking about Black issues and listening to elders who were invited to speak to the group.

His most memorable experience, however, is his visit to Zimbabwe in 1988 with his sister Tandi and their parents. It was the first time he had visited a country where Black people were the majority and held positions of authority.

Shingai says, "Being involved in *Speak It!* was a good experience for me. It opened my eyes and made me realize that other Blacks were having similar experiences. It forces people to deal with the reality of Black youth today. They can no longer sweep our concerns under the rug."



## Tandi Nyajeka (Grade 11, French Immersion)

Tandi is a model of what can happen when young people focus their energies positively. She started Black Alive, the CAYG chapter at St. Pat's after getting involved in organizing the 1991 Peace and Justice March for CAYG which is shown in *Speak It!*. Tandi was inspired by other youth in CAYG because they were committed to planning, organizing and speaking out publicly about issues that affected them. As well as being the President of the group, Tandi also joined the debating and Black History Quiz teams. In between her studies, and CAYG work, she entered public speaking contests at St. Pat's and eventually won the city-wide Halifax public speaking championship.

Tandi says being involved in *Speak It!* was important because it gave her something positive and made the group stronger.

## **Cultural Awareness Youth Group of Nova Scotia (CAYG)**: A Model CAYG Motto: "Community Development through Youth Education"

The Cultural Awareness Youth Group (CAYG) was founded in 1983 by David Woods, to foster the educational and cultural development of African Canadian youth in Halifax-Dartmouth high schools. Membership is open to students of all racial and cultural backgrounds.

Each high school has its own chapter. CAYG's central office co-ordinates inter-chapter activities and provides administrative support. Chapters meet weekly to plan a range of activities – fund raising for their own and worthy community programs, speakers' series, debates, plays, films, Black History events, magazines, community trips and quizzes. David Woods served as CAYG's director for seven years, then went on to found *Voices Black Theatre Ensemble*. He has written over a dozen dramas, many of which have been performed by different CAYG chapters. He uses drama to teach, to clarify issues and to celebrate the Black experience in Nova Scotia.

The CAYG model's strength is its emphasis on inviting young people to decide and define educational and cultural programs based on their own interests and needs. The concept – that adolescents can develop self-esteem and confidence by learning about their heritage while gaining respect for cultures different from their own – can be applied in diverse cultural situations.

## About the Filmmaker

As a Black student in a Halifax high school in the 1960's, racism was part of the daily lesson plan for Sylvia Hamilton. "My teacher called me aside my third day at the school, and gave me a form she wanted my mother to sign: a form for general studies."

"If you finish this program you may get a little job for yourself," the teacher offered. "She may have thought she was being helpful," Hamilton says, "but what she did was wrong and you have to challenge that."

Her mother refused to sign the form, and Hamilton became the first person from Beechville – a Black community near Halifax – to graduate from high school. She earned a B.A. from Acadia, and in addition to writing and filmmaking, is pursuing a Master's Degree at Dalhousie University in Halifax.

Now, in her second film *SPEAK IT! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia*, she draws upon her first-hand knowledge of the isolation Black students feel in majority white schools to pay tribute to the pioneering work done by the Cultural Awareness Youth Group. "There was nothing like CAYG when I was in high school," she says.

Hamilton has chosen to work in the medium of film because she believes it is important for Black people to see realistic, varied images of themselves, and to have a space from which to articulate their feelings.

"I want to give something back. We're all indebted to those who have gone before, and to those around us who lend support and encouragement." But she didn't want to give back just anything. She wanted a gift that would last, that Black youth could make their own, to use and be proud of.

"There's a strong oral tradition in Nova Scotia's African Baptist Church, where people are encouraged to give witness or offer their testimony during the service. I try to draw on this tradition in my films."

"Our youth are not given many opportunities to speak," she says. "We adults often pre-empt their speech. We dismiss them because we think... 'they're only just kids anyway.' My hope was that *Speak It!* could be a vehicle to give this lively group of young people an opportunity to offer their testimony, to give their witness."

## **Film Production Team**

Direction & ResearchSylvia Hamilton
CinematographyMike Mahoney
EditorAngela Baker
Sound RecordingJane Porter
Story ConsultantBob Lower
Narration Written byBob Lower
Narrated byShingai Nyajeka
Sound EditorJane Porter

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## Distribution

*Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* was released at St. Patrick's High School in Halifax before an audience of 1000 people and was screened in cities across Canada in February 1993.

It is available to rent or purchase from National Film Board Offices across Canada in 16mm and VHS video format. (Order # C 9192 139; 28 min, 50 sec.) *Dites-Le! Etre Jeunes et Noirs En Nouvelle-Ecosse* (Order # C 9292 139), which is the french version of the film, is also available.

For distribution information in the United States, contact: Filmakers Library 124 East 40th Street, New York, NY 100016 telephone: (212) 808-4980 fax: (212) 808-4983

### Awards

- Gemini Award: 1994 Canada Award, Toronto
- AMTEC Media Festival Award of Excellence, Lethbridge, 1994
- Maeda Prize, 21st Japan Prize International Educational Program Contest, Toyko, 1994
- Rex Tasker Award for Best Atlantic Canadian Documentary, Halifax, 1993

## Festivals

Femi: Festival of Women's Films, Guadeloupe, 1995

Contemporary Films of the African Diaspora Festival, New York 1994

Melbourne International Film Festival,

Melbourne, Australia, 1994

16<sup>èmes</sup> Festival International de Films de Femmes, Créteil, Paris, France, 1994

Atlantic Film Festival, Halifax, 1993

Margaret Mead Film Festival, New York, 1993

## **Bibliography of Resources**

## **Films/Videos**

African Canadian experiences in Nova Scotia and in Canada available from the National Film Board of Canada:

## Contact your nearest NFB library or call toll free:

	Voice and TDD:		1-800-267-7710
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Kneeling: Mark Simkins; Front row: Jane Porter, Krista Brodie, Amy Stark, Robert Upshaw, Sylvia Hamilton, Shingai Nyajeka, Lawrence Njoku, Sherry Borden, Tandi Nyajeka, Shawn Grouse, Cyndi Colley. Back row: Paul Mitcheltree, Mike Mahoney.

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## SPEAK IT! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia A User's Guide for the Film

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