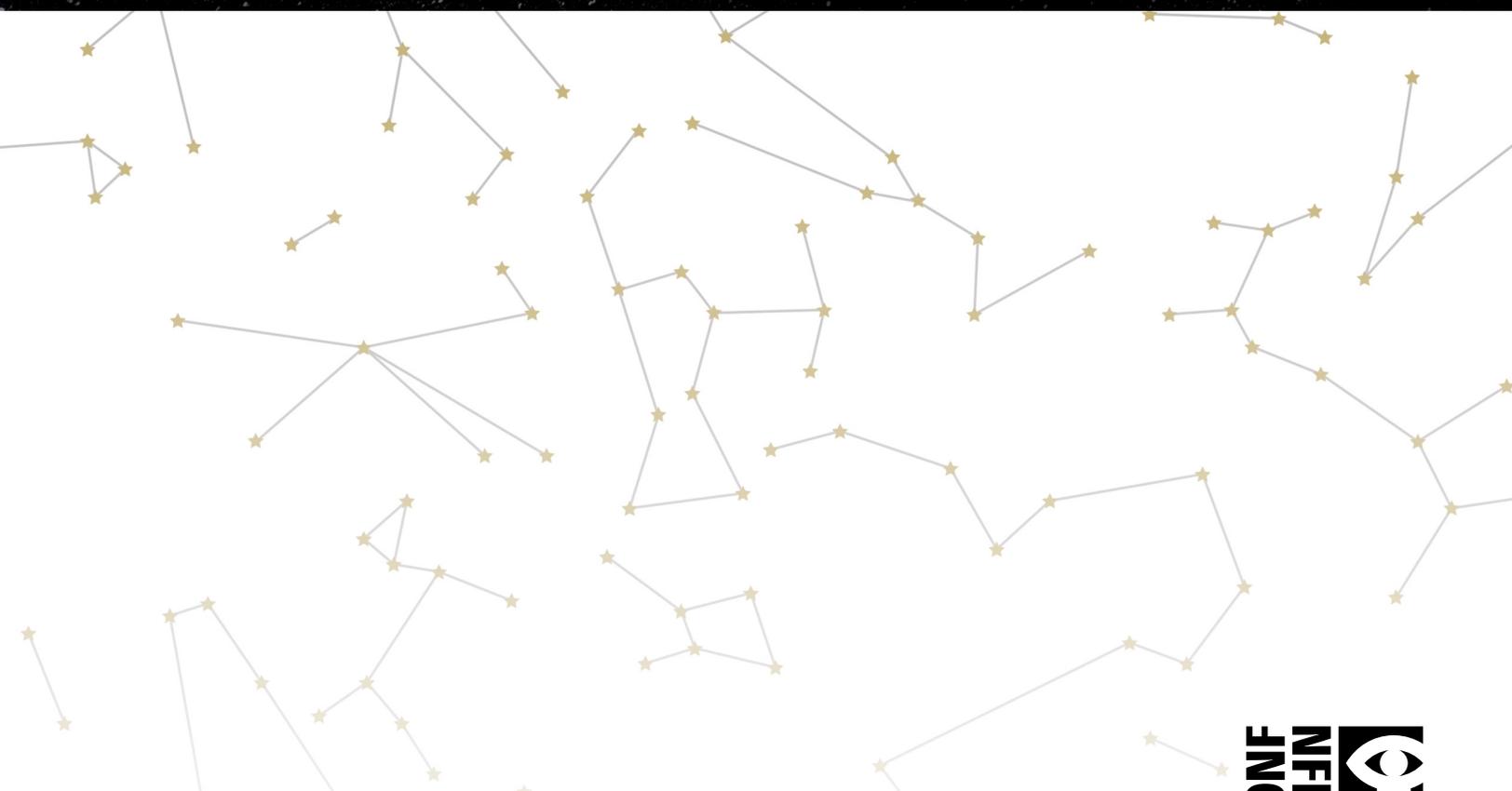




# UNIVERSE WITHIN

DIGITAL LIVES IN THE GLOBAL HIGHRISE



**EDUCATOR'S GUIDE**



# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the National Film Board of Canada	03
About the NFB's CAMPUS	03
About <i>Universe Within</i>	03
Recommended Age Level	04
Recommended Subject Areas	04
Digital Interactivity in the Classroom	04
Key Themes	04
Technology and Digital Activism	05
Cities	05
General Classroom Use	05
Pedagogical Outcomes	06
Video Content Summary	06-08
Classroom Activities	08-09
Video Lesson #1: Secret Life – Guangzhou	09-10
Video Lesson #2: Ottawa Connections – Innovation or Invasion?	11-14
Credits	14

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### ABOUT THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) creates groundbreaking interactive works, social-issue documentaries and auteur animation. The NFB has produced over 13,000 productions and won over 5,000 awards, including 9 Canadian Screen Awards, 7 Webbys, 12 Oscars and more than 90 Genies. To access acclaimed NFB content, visit [NFB.ca](http://NFB.ca) or download its apps for smartphones, tablets and connected TV.

### ABOUT THE NFB'S CAMPUS

The National Film Board of Canada has been a trusted educational resource for over seven decades. Today, thousands of NFB titles in every form and genre are instantly available online. Educators who subscribe to CAMPUS can explore more than 3,000 productions: documentaries, animation, feature films and interactive works. CAMPUS guides, playlists, learning bundles and sharing features allow educators to better tailor their lesson plans to meet their students' needs.

Activate your CAMPUS subscription [here](#).

### ABOUT UNIVERSE WITHIN

*Universe Within* is a multiplatform digital representation of global stories contained by and thriving in highrise apartment structures across the globe. This project is the final component of *Highrise*, the National Film Board's innovative documentary exploration of international urban development. Students will not only learn about geography but will also engage in the lives of real people, with contemporary, challenging and sometimes controversial concerns. Each story illustrates the social and cultural realities of urban living while at the same time balancing the overarching political and economic truths. This project also engages students in an innovative and interactive method of content delivery.

The individuals who are highlighted in these stories illustrate the potential for electronic media to change oftentimes oppressive realities. Each of the stories shows how activism begins in the home; highrise living is the setting for engaged activism on a personal level. At the same time, the stories illustrate the complex issues involved with these technologies. Some of the stories explore the problematic nature of surveillance and privacy, while others document individuals who use social media technology to improve educational access and human rights, and even to protect housing and the environment. Stories also illustrate how these new technologies can be used to problem-solve situations circumvented by politics, gender and economic concerns. These are bold stories told from local perspectives.



# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### RECOMMENDED AGE LEVEL

[Universe Within](#) is suitable for students aged 13 and up. It is recommended that educators preview [Universe Within](#) or the [Universe Within](#) video capsules prior to showing them to students.

### RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS

- Social Science
- Geography
- History
- Media Studies
- Ethics
- Journalism
- Political Science
- Democracy
- Health
- Gender
- Politics
- Economics

### DIGITAL INTERACTIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

[Universe Within](#) tells the stories of several global participants who use digital technology to enhance various aspects of their lives. The context for each story is presented in an organized and organic fashion through the digital platform. In fact, students can begin to develop an understanding of the complexity of world issues through the interactive nature of this platform. The project promotes a reading of the world through a digital frame, making effective use of new and developing technologies.

On the interactive website, general users access the [Universe Within](#) content via three avatar figures that function as informational guides. In this context, the three guiding avatars highlight issues of digital representation, and the material is organized thematically. In fact, the three Web avatars situate the users by asking them questions about Internet and digital media consumption. These questions lead users to a set of possible responses. The responses form the core content of the [Universe Within](#) website.



### KEY THEMES

Storytelling is at the core of the project, and the individual short documentary videos provide students with a means of learning about global issues and the technologies available. These stories from global-citizen perspectives reveal the potential of new technologies to improve and change life circumstance. Housing activism, access to information, surveillance issues, sexual orientation, and the variety of communication technologies available are some of the broader subjects explored in this series of globally connected documentaries. Moreover, both secondary and post-secondary students can actively learn about complex international challenges and the role that digital technology can play. On the site, students navigate the content of [Universe Within](#) to explore the individual stories of people using technology, ranging from social media activism to broadening opportunities for work and worship. Here are some of the key themes:

- Social Responsibility
- Justice
- Equity
- Privacy
- Housing
- Surveillance
- Family
- Independence
- Activism
- LGBTQ Rights
- Law
- Education Access

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL ACTIVISM

[\*Universe Within\*](#) highlights the activist orientation of more than a dozen urban dwellers in various circumstances. For instance, through the story of John, who lives in the African city of Accra, Ghana, students will explore the larger impact of providing long-range Wi-Fi service to a community. The argument put forth in the video illustrates that such technology enhances economic, educational and social opportunities for these local inhabitants. John is also an example of a citizen who's committed to making a difference by providing access to technology for those who would otherwise remain disconnected. Students from a wide range of grade levels and perspectives can begin to develop a cross-cultural understanding of digital activism while navigating the delivery technology themselves.

Whether researching how various faiths are practiced in a global community, or how access to Internet networks provides basic tools for building a small business, citizen storytellers also illustrate how international work is being done through technological innovation. Through [\*Universe Within\*](#), users will also begin to understand the challenges and similarities among and between various world cultures. They will be able to research, discuss and share these perspectives. In particular, students may be able to deepen their experience of digital technologies and their complex implications.

[\*Universe Within\*](#) presents citizen accounts of Internet and technology activism. In this Web mode of delivery, student users interact with three avatars, each of which provides multiple-choice selections based on a series of critical questions. Throughout these projects, the potential for technology is investigated against the backdrop of densely populated highrises in a variety of locations, from Europe and the Middle East to Asia and North America. While the assumption may be that both highrise living and Internet technology decrease the sense of community, [\*Universe Within\*](#) illustrates some of their empowering possibilities. Above all, the Web, film and educational platforms illustrate the complexities of 21st-century urban living.

### CITIES

Individuals from Toronto, Accra, Baku, Guangzhou, New York City, Ottawa, Tokyo, Seoul and elsewhere highlight key issues in their global context. Each of the stories underlines a local issue and a form of digital technology that is employed to solve and/or resolve the challenge at hand. As users navigate the website, they are introduced to individual stories of how Internet technology, social media, and communication platforms can also be tools of social change and activism. Users are also asked to think about media consumption and its impact on their lives.



### GENERAL CLASSROOM USE

Internet access is necessary whether the classroom engages with the material in a large group, task-oriented research groups, issue-oriented focus pairs, individually, or other teacher-guided formations. The classroom context may dictate approaches to subject matter and themes, as well as the pedagogical purpose of the lesson. Students, however, may also experience the stories individually via Internet-enabled laptops, desktops or tablets in Wi-Fi-enabled areas. Working independently, students can develop adaptive techniques for using the technology as they encounter issues and information that they will process. Students may also be directed to view the material on larger classroom screens or digitally enabled learning-centred facilities. Regardless of the interactive method, student success with the material can be fostered through a thematic approach to the learning. Students will encounter challenging ideas, but with guidance can develop critical-thinking skills to unpack the material. Student users will also be navigating an innovative platform delivery.

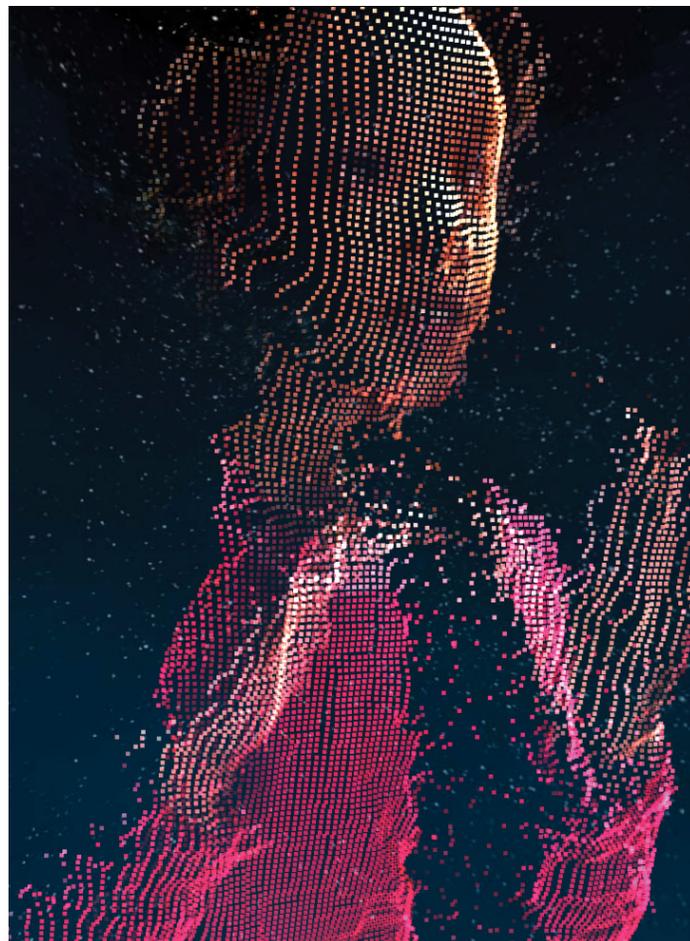
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## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### PEDAGOGICAL OUTCOMES

The *Universe Within* material can support a wide range of pedagogical outcomes:

- Supporting visual literacy;
- Strengthening reading and listening comprehension;
- Developing complex critical assessment and research skills;
- Enhancing written and verbal communication;
- Supporting argument development and organizational strategies;
- Raising awareness of social justice issues pertaining to human rights, equity, sexuality, privacy, surveillance, access to technology and education, along with geopolitical realities concerning faith, culture, language, sustainability, and exchange of ideas;
- Using online search tools to navigate information effectively and productively.



### VIDEO CONTENT SUMMARY

Users of the platform will be exposed to how the Internet and communication technologies provide opportunities for citizens around the world. The stories also highlight some of the complex issues that arise from this innovation. Any of these subject areas can be approached from a local perspective, while navigating a platform that is global in nature. Each grade level can participate meaningfully in a number of subject areas, from language and literature to gender and social studies, history, geography, economics and philosophy. Students can develop basic research and writing skills, alongside creative approaches to culturally oriented studies presented by the platform.

Here's a summary of the issues highlighted in the short video for each city (available on CAMPUS):

**Accra, Ghana** – In this short, users learn how locals are given Internet access to develop a variety of interests, business and otherwise. Students can begin to understand the larger sociopolitical and economic impact of Internet technology.



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_accra](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_accra)

**Baku, Azerbaijan** – This episode presents Ahmed, a blogger and peace activist, who talks about peace-building strategies made possible through mobile-phone technology and social media sites such as Facebook. Students learn about the complexity of conflict and the potential role that communication media can play.



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_baku](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_baku)

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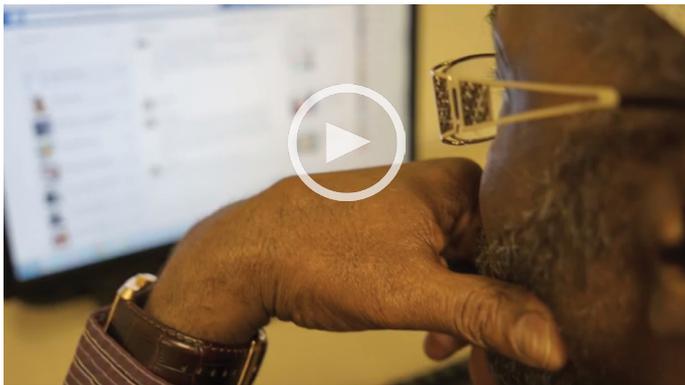
## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

[Guangzhou, China](#) – This segment introduces us to lesbian activist Ling, who tells the story of “mock marriages” in China. The video highlights the situation of LGBTQ citizens who are caught between their identities and traditions. Ling illustrates how Internet technology can be used in this struggle.



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_guangzhou](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_guangzhou)

New York City, USA – There are two stories from New York City: [One is the story of Al](#), who reconnects with his son through Facebook after 23 years in prison. [The other story](#) documents the devastation and crowd-source mobilizing that took place after Hurricane Sandy left hundreds stranded in highrises in South Brooklyn.



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_new\\_york\\_city](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_new_york_city)



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_new\\_york\\_city\\_hurri](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_new_york_city_hurri)

[Ottawa, Canada](#) – This episode presents the story of how one woman has installed Wi-Fi-connected sensors in her elderly mother's apartment. In this video, Cathy grapples with issues related to surveillance and privacy.



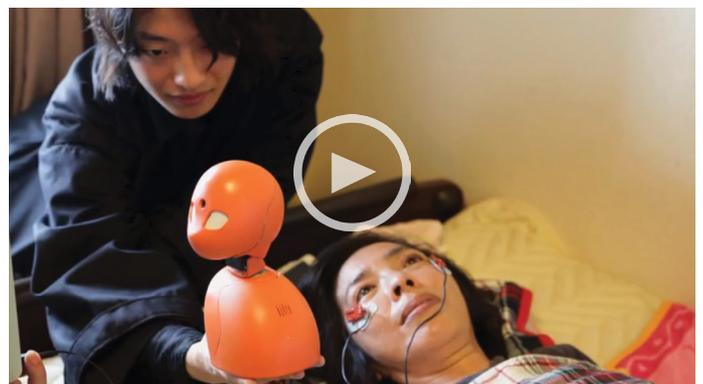
[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_ottawa](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_ottawa)

[Seoul, South Korea](#) – This piece explores the conditions of Ruin and his team of professional gamers, who share an apartment and workspace in a Seoul highrise.



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_seoul](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_seoul)

[Tokyo, Japan](#) – In this segment, users meet Yoko, a 50-year-old woman who has been diagnosed with ALS. She is testing assistive technology so that she will be able to communicate with her family as her abilities decline.



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_tokyo](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_tokyo)

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

[Toronto, Canada](#) – The “Digitally Assisted Prayer” episode explores the use of the Internet to facilitate prayer as daily routine. This section elaborates on how one family maintains its larger sense of community and practice of faith.



[nfb.ca/film/universe\\_within\\_toronto](http://nfb.ca/film/universe_within_toronto)

For the full selection of cities featured in [Universe Within](#), please visit the interactive website:



[universewithin.nfb.ca](http://universewithin.nfb.ca)

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### Urban Studies and Geography: Reading Cities and Citizens

For each segment, a preview of general research about the urban area can begin the lesson. This can be assigned to the entire class, among groups, or between pairs, depending on the segment and the issue being explored.

#### Discussion Questions

##### Cities and Urban Housing

1. Research the city being presented: location, climate, population.
2. How do you get there from where you live?
3. Research current events associated with this place.
4. What is the issue being explored in this *Universe Within* segment?
5. Do you know of any similar issues in your community?
6. What is the role of Internet technology here?
7. How does technology enhance or limit citizen action?

#### Study Questions

##### Living and Technology

1. Research the history of a residential building in your city or town.
2. Outline some of the responsibilities of local municipal government.
3. Define the term “citizen.”
4. How can you make an area sustainable? How can technology be used?
5. What is the role of technology for cities and individuals?
6. How do you use communication technology every day?

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### Writing Activities: Putting Information Together

- 1) Write a paragraph about the first time you accessed the Internet.
- 2) Write a short story about someone from two hundred years ago who travels forward in time to visit you. What do they notice first?
- 3) Write a letter to someone in local government about an issue in your town.
- 4) Develop an argument for and against the use of technology. Debate this.

### VIDEO LESSON #1: SECRET LIFE – GUANGZHOU

**Themes:** LGBTQ rights, tradition, family, marriage, partnership, identity, privacy, culture, power

**Materials:** Internet-enabled computer, tablet, mobile device or desktop; Wi-Fi or wired connection to the Net

**Grade level:** Grades 10–12, post-secondary

The video runs 3 minutes and 43 seconds.  
English subtitles.

**Synopsis:** This story presents viewers with the reality of “mock marriages” in Guangzhou, China, used as a means of protecting gay and lesbian citizens who feel social pressure to marry. Ling’s story illustrates the complexity of the subject and the very real challenges facing an LGBTQ person who confronts this issue.

### Summary of Content (for teacher use)

00:01–00:15 – Establishes geographic location – zooms in on Guangzhou.

00:15–1:00 – Introduces Ling, who explains “mock marriages”: Suitable partners are found online for members of China’s gay and lesbian population who are under pressure to marry.

1:00–2:00 – Ling elaborates on the circumstances of her “mock marriage” in 2007, which ended in divorce by the end of that same year. As she was her husband’s legal partner, Ling discovered that she was also responsible for his financial situation.

2:00–2:30 – Ling discusses China’s Facebook equivalent, QQ, and how users may have multiple accounts for different purposes. In this segment, she also highlights the reality for those who identify as gay or lesbian in China.

2:30–3:00 – Ling discusses the Internet as the main tool for “mock marriages” in China, acknowledging that along with this comes what she experienced as a misleading and unrealistic way of relating.

Students can be divided into small groups to do online research and respond to any of the questions below BEFORE viewing the video.

### Preview Questions

1. Where is Guangzhou? What do you know about this part of the world?
2. How do you get there from where you are?
3. What are some of the traditions associated with this place?
4. What are some of your family traditions? What is expected of you at home?
5. What does LGBTQ stand for?

Encourage students to take note of the images used alongside the commentary, for future reference. Also ask students to note, as they watch the episode, HOW the information is presented using photographs, images and video. Have students prepare ONE critical question to begin the initial post-viewing discussion.

### For Discussion

In this segment, students will encounter a young woman who has not been able to be open about her sexuality. Ling must negotiate the cultural and traditional pressure to marry but at the same time navigate her own sexuality. This is an opportunity for students to engage in discussion about family, cultural expectations, identity and activism, among many other topics. Some students may prefer to reflect privately, while others may be more vocal. Below are activities that can be organized to encourage either end of this spectrum.

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

- Individual journal writing
- Individual blog entry
- Individual preparation of personal questions for Ling
- Prepare a letter for Ling – do you have suggestions?
- Identify a powerful image in the short documentary and explain its importance.

### Group Discussion

In small groups, ask students to develop a series of critical questions. If they could speak with Ling, what would they ask? How would they relate?

### Study Questions

- How difficult would it be for Ling to conceal her sexuality?
- What would it take for her sexuality to be accepted?
- What do you think of “mock marriages”?
- What is your expectation of marriage?  
What is your family’s approach?
- What is the situation in your community?

### Research Questions

Each of the questions below affords an opportunity for students to research local, provincial, national or international perspectives.

- What are some of the available statistics on those who identify as gay/lesbian?
- What are some of the contemporary debates on sexuality?
- What are some of the available statistics on conventional marriage?
- Define marriage. How do other places define marriage?
- What is the law with regard to LGBTQ concerns?

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Statistics Canada:  
[statcan.gc.ca](http://statcan.gc.ca)

Federal legislation and Human Rights Campaign:  
[hrc.org/resources/federal-legislation](http://hrc.org/resources/federal-legislation)

Guangzhou city information:  
[travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/guangzhou.htm](http://travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/guangzhou.htm)

Contemporary views on homosexuality in China:  
Jamie Fullerton (April 9, 2015)  
[news.vice.com/article/chinas-attitude-toward-homosexuality-is-beginning-to-shift-with-parents-leading-the-way](http://news.vice.com/article/chinas-attitude-toward-homosexuality-is-beginning-to-shift-with-parents-leading-the-way)

Same-sex rights in Canada:  
CBC Timeline (May 25, 2015)  
[cbc.ca/news/canada/timeline-same-sex-rights-in-canada-1.1147516](http://cbc.ca/news/canada/timeline-same-sex-rights-in-canada-1.1147516)

### NFB RESOURCES

image+nation@NFB LGBTQ Playlist – National Film Board of Canada:  
[nfb.ca/playlists/lgbtq\\_en](http://nfb.ca/playlists/lgbtq_en)

In 2014, the NFB and the image+nation: Montreal LGBTQ Film Festival partnered to create a playlist of titles from the NFB’s LGBTQ film collection.

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### VIDEO LESSON #2: OTTAWA CONNECTIONS – INNOVATION OR INVASION?

**Themes:** Privacy, surveillance, individual rights, autonomy, shifting demographics, aging, caretaking responsibility, identity roles

**Materials:** Internet-enabled computer, tablet, mobile device or desktop; Wi-Fi or wired connection to the Net

**Grade level:** Grades 7–12, post-secondary

The video runs 2 minutes and 40 seconds.  
English subtitles.

**Synopsis:** This segment introduces us to Cathy, whose mother lives 2,000 kilometres away in Ottawa, Ontario. Cathy has installed Wi-Fi devices in her mother's apartment to alert her to various activities, such as her mother's use of appliances. In the video, Cathy discusses some of her feelings about observing her mother in this way. On the one hand, the technology allows Cathy to ensure her mother's safety and well-being; however, the short also explores the complexity of the issue of privacy and surveillance.

In this two-and-a-half-minute story, viewers are presented with the growing reality of Canada's aging population and the responsibilities of caretaking, particularly from a distance. The use of technology to facilitate this may raise important questions about personal privacy and invasive technology. At the same time, however, the technology allows some form of personal autonomy. These are some of the key issues surrounding the use of technology.

### Summary of Content (for teacher use)

00:10–00:15 – Cathy is introduced and she explains her living situation. She notes that her mother lives 2,000 km away. The video opens with the statement: "I get an e-mail every day the first time the fridge door is opened, and if it hasn't been opened by a certain time, then I will get an e-mail..."

00:25–00:30 – [Visual of cellphone] Cathy elaborates that the e-mail could be an indication of a problem, in which case she would send someone to check on her mother.

00:35 – TEXT info: Cathy has installed Wi-Fi-connected sensors in her mother's apartment.

00:37 – [Visual of Skype connection with mother] Cathy states that she was worried about her mother being on her own again and wanted some way of monitoring her.

00:40 – [Visual of Cathy in her garden] Cathy states that her perception of living in an apartment building is that one could become very isolated.

00:55 – [Visual of black-and-white family photo beside phone – "old media"] Cathy notes that she wanted a device that would update her every 24 hours about her mother.

1:05 – TEXT info: From her farm 2,000 km away, Cathy can turn on her mom's Skype program and webcam automatically.

1:15–1:30 – Cathy confesses that she finds herself in the position of having information about her mother that her mother doesn't necessarily know she has.

1:30 – [Visual of mother on Skype, Cathy on computer] Cathy mentions that the use of technology to observe her mother's activity is a "touchy" issue between them.

1:55 – Cathy notes that she doesn't watch her mother just for the sake of doing so.

2:00 – Cathy admits to feeling strange about observing her mother without her knowing.

2:15 – Cathy ends by admitting that the "Big Brother" aspect of the surveillance didn't sit well with her.

Students can be divided into small groups, do thematically organized pair work, or work individually to do online research BEFORE viewing the video.

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### Preview Activity: General Analysis of Communication Technology

1. What types of social media do you use? For what purpose?
2. What role does communication technology play in terms of developing awareness?
3. What are some of the challenges in using social media? Positives?
4. How do you meet people? How do you stay in contact?
5. Do you think social media needs to be regulated or monitored?
6. How do you feel about having your online (or other) activity monitored?

### Additional Preview Questions

1. What kind of technology do you use every day?
2. Do your parents/guardians also use technology? What type?
3. How do you communicate with your family? Friends? Classmates? Teachers?
4. What are some of your family traditions? What is expected of you at home?
5. What do you think of having your activities monitored?
6. What do you think your future role might be in terms of caring for your parents, guardians, grandparents?

Ask students to note, as they watch the episode, HOW information is presented using photographs, images and video. Have students prepare ONE critical question to initiate general observations and discussion post-viewing. In this particular video, there are shots of downtown Ottawa that contrast the rural location of Cathy, the primary storyteller.

### For Discussion

In this segment, students will encounter a woman who is in the difficult position of living away from her aging mother. Cathy explains why she opted for remote surveillance in this case, but also illustrates that she felt uncomfortable with this. This story is an opportunity for students to engage in discussion about family, cultural expectations, technology, and privacy, among other topics. Some students may prefer to reflect privately, while others may be more vocal. Activities can be organized to encourage either end of this spectrum.

Individual work to enhance writing, critical thinking, organization skills: Students can prepare written work independently and then workshop the writing with one other person or in a small group. Each student reads their composition to the group in order to get feedback and discuss the issues presented in the segment.

### General Writing Topics

- Individual journal writing – family roles and obligations. Who is responsible for what in your household? Is the work divided fairly? What is your responsibility at home?
- What do you think of Cathy's situation? How would you handle it?
- What rights to privacy do you think you should have?
- What are your expectations about being monitored at home, school, work, and other places?
- How have new technologies affected you at home? Work? School?

### Group Discussion: Elder Care and Family Responsibility

In small groups, ask students to develop a series of critical questions about what they have seen in the clip. If they could speak with Cathy or her mother, what would they ask? If they could advocate for Cathy or her mother, how would they do so? What is the critical issue here? What is the role of technology in addressing this issue? How are families adjusting to innovations in technology? Discuss possible generational differences among family members with regard to technology.

# UNIVERSE WITHIN

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### OUTLINING THE ISSUES – EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Online resources on caregiving in Canada:  
[eldercarecanada.ca](http://eldercarecanada.ca)

Privacy issues and corporate surveillance  
(American Civil Liberties Union):  
[aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology/internet-privacy](http://aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology/internet-privacy)

Changing demographic structures in Canada:  
[horizons.gc.ca/eng/content/changing-demographic-structure](http://horizons.gc.ca/eng/content/changing-demographic-structure)

### Study Questions

1. What is your family living situation?
2. Where do your grandparents live?
3. What is your responsibility to your parents?
4. What is your expectation of support?  
What is their expectation?
5. How do your parents monitor what you do?
6. What are the limits of technology?

### Enhanced Research Topics on Technology Development

- What are some innovations in technology in the home? Workplace? School?
- List some of the devices you use. Discuss their use.
- What are some of the statistics on access to digital technology?
- How is digital technology used (personal, professional, government)?
- How important is privacy to you? What is at stake?

### Ethical Issues in Communication and Surveillance Technology – Questions for Class Discussion or Written Response

1. What types of technology do you use at home?  
At school? At work?
2. Define surveillance. Discuss some of the implications.
3. What do you think of being monitored?
4. Would you use the technology as Cathy has?
5. How would you feel if it were being used to monitor your activity?
6. How do you think this type of technology needs to be regulated?

Break the class up into small groups of students and assign each group a particular area or concern to research (home, family, school, public spaces, borders, work areas, businesses, etc.).

Research some of the laws governing digital surveillance and privacy. What do you think? What are the consequences of being watched or watching others? When would it be appropriate or inappropriate? Consider the following issues:

- Ethical responsibilities
- Law enforcement
- Family caretaking
- Cameras in the workplace / monitoring online activity at work? At school / at home / public spaces and transit / borders?
- Privacy concerns (work, home, school, public spaces, businesses)

Share findings and views with the rest of the class.

# UNIVERSE WITHIN



## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### ADDITIONAL EXTERNAL RESOURCES PERTAINING TO SURVEILLANCE ISSUES AND PRIVACY

The Surveillance Studies Centre:

[sscqueens.org](http://sscqueens.org)

Privacy laws in Canada – Office of the Privacy  
Commissioner of Canada:

[priv.gc.ca](http://priv.gc.ca)

Privacy matters in public surveillance – *Canadian  
Security*:

[canadiansecuritymag.com](http://canadiansecuritymag.com)

International concerns – Privacy International blog:

[privacyinternational.org/blog](http://privacyinternational.org/blog)

### CREDITS

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This study guide was produced by NFB Education and prepared by Anne Koizumi, NFB Education Specialist.