

TRUST

SECOND ACTS IN YOUNG LIVES

A TEACHING GUIDE
and
COMMUNITY SCREENING KIT



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TRUST

A TEACHING GUIDE
and
COMMUNITY SCREENING KIT

FUNDED BY:

The Columbia Foundation
The National Endowment for the Arts
Latino Public Broadcasting
Bay Area Video Coalition MediaMaker Fellowship

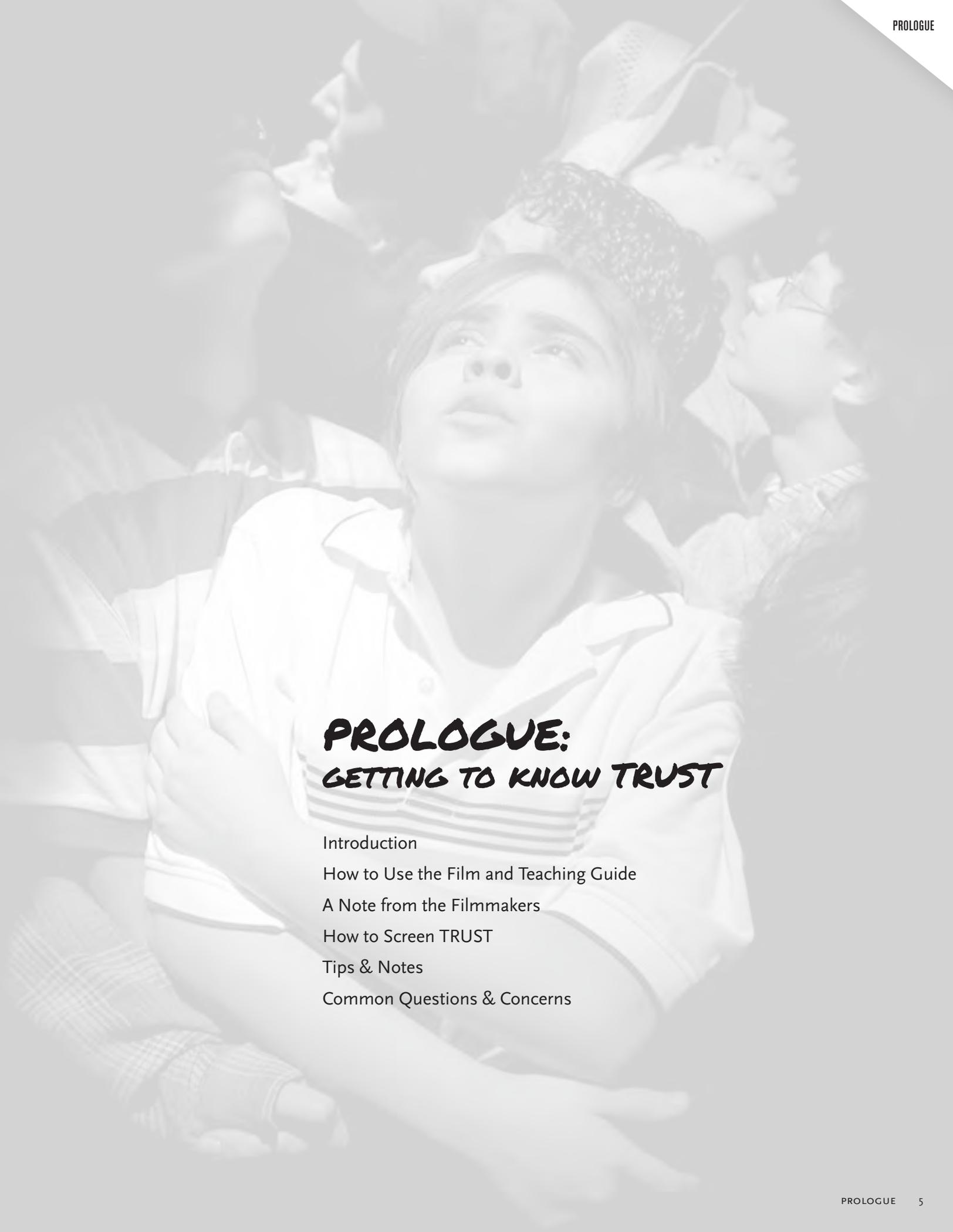




TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE: GETTING TO KNOW <i>TRUST</i>	5
Introduction	6
How to Use the Film and Teaching Guide	7
A Note from the Filmmakers	8
How to Screen <i>TRUST</i>	9
Tips & Notes	13
Common Questions & Concerns	14
SCENE ONE: CLASSROOM LESSONS	19
Warm-Up Activities	22
LESSON 1 Sexual Abuse of Children and Youth —Designing a Poster	24
LESSON 2 Identity —Making Recipes	31
LESSON 3 Trust —Trust Storytelling Montage	36
LESSON 4 Witnesses and Allies —Monologues	42
LESSON 5 Power —Group Sculpture	47
LESSON 6 Hidden Cargo/Immigration —Writing an Audio Feature	52
LESSON 7 Resilience —Resilience Poetry	60
Trust Activities and Additional Teaching Units	66
SCENE TWO: COMMUNITY SCREENINGS	71
SCENE THREE: SUPPORTING MATERIALS	75
Group Agreements	76
Handouts for Teachers and Facilitators	77
The Faces of <i>TRUST</i>	77
<i>TRUST</i> Workshop Evaluation	78
Sample Letter to Family	79
Lights! Camera! Action Steps!	81
Handouts for Youth	82
Speak Up and Be Heard!	82
<i>TRUST</i> Action Plan	82
SCENE FOUR: GOING FURTHER WITH <i>TRUST</i>	83
What Is Child Sexual Abuse?	84
Now That I Know, What Do I Do?	87
Resources	89
REFERENCES	92
NOTES	94
CREDITS	96
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	INSIDE BACK COVER

More information and resources are available online: www.trustdocumentary.org
Purchase copies of *TRUST* from New Day Films: www.newday.com/films/trustsecondactsinyounglives.html



PROLOGUE: GETTING TO KNOW TRUST

Introduction

How to Use the Film and Teaching Guide

A Note from the Filmmakers

How to Screen TRUST

Tips & Notes

Common Questions & Concerns



INTRODUCTION



The documentary *TRUST: Second Acts in Young Lives* begins in a small neighborhood theater where a group of teenage actors receives a standing ovation. They are glowing. A long journey has brought them to this moment. With the applause, there are tears, smiles, and feelings of pride and accomplishment.

The journey they celebrate began eight months earlier when one member of the ensemble, 18-year-old Marlín, told her story to a circle of her peers. It is a traumatic account. Marlín endured rape as young girl, survived a harsh and difficult journey from Honduras to the United States, suffered further abuse at the hands of her own brother, fell into substance addiction, and finally began a process of recovery. The theater company, Albany Park Theater Project (AFTP), then used her story to create a play, *Remember Me Like This*, which ran for seven straight weeks to a full house. The process of creating the play is the subject of the film *TRUST: Second Acts in Young Lives*. The teens in *TRUST* talk about how important the story is to them and how dedicated they are to it, even while many do not tell their friends or family about their roles in the play.

Child sexual abuse (CSA), one of the three central storylines in *TRUST*, remains a taboo topic absent from the curricula that most schools and out-of-school-time programs offer their youth. Understandably, CSA is a difficult issue to raise with teens when most adults are uncomfortable discussing it. *TRUST* offers an opportunity for raising awareness and broadening the discussion through the authentic voices of young people themselves. Interviews with company members capture their experiences as they work through and develop Marlín's story for the stage. *TRUST* calls on young viewers to see themselves through a lens that values their lived experiences and their incredible capacity for survival.

Certainly the themes in *TRUST* are serious and can open up students, and their teachers, to strong feelings and emotions. This is not easy. It takes courage, creativity, and patience. It also takes a deep belief in the capacity of youth and a willingness to raise issues for which there are no clear answers. We believe that it is imperative for adults to create safe spaces for youth to explore the difficult issues in their lives. For many students, school is the only place to have these conversations. When introducing issues like sexual trauma, immigration, and suicide, you can prepare yourself and your students over time by building community in the classroom and by identifying and discussing coping skills and resources. At its best, education asks everyone in the room to be both teacher and learner. This guide is designed to support you in those roles, and leaves room for you to weave in your own strategies as well.

In cultural policy analyst Nick Rabkin's words, "Perhaps one of the most astonishing things about *TRUST* is how a group of kids, some barely teens, managed to deal with two intensely disturbing themes in American life and make something from them that was so solid and mature. That's testimony to their resilience."

"There is a point in your life when you see open doors, and this is one of them. I mean, I'm doing what I like. I like doing theater. I like music and I like dancing. That's what I want to do."

—MARLÍN, AGE 18, IN *TRUST*



HOW TO USE THE FILM AND TEACHING GUIDE

The lessons in this guide are primarily designed for high school–age students, to be used independently or as part of a larger unit in a health, English, social studies, psychology, or theater curriculum. They can also be used in community organizations, juvenile detention centers, after-school programs, arts programs, religious institutions, or recovery programs, or at a college or university. In a standard school or after-school classroom, we recommend the 57-minute version, screened in its entirety or in two segments, following the example on page 11. In a setting with adults or with both youth and adults, we recommend the theatrical 78-minute version.

Included in this guide is a detailed outline for how to screen the film, common questions and concerns, and seven arts-based lessons with handouts and links to supporting material. Additional handouts and resources are included in “Scene Three: Supporting Materials.”

All the lessons are connected by a thread of creativity, asking students to respond to very complicated, challenging issues through an artistic lens. As APTP demonstrates, the arts offer students a way to see things differently, to visualize possibility, and therefore to see new pathways to action in their own lives.

The lessons were developed with input from a national advisory committee of experts from the fields of child sexual abuse/sexual assault, somatic therapy, youth performance and theater, immigration, and arts education. Teachers in California and Massachusetts piloted the lessons and provided invaluable feedback.

“I go back to the day that we heard the story. And I use the emotions to show you . . . how I felt. I try to put it into my body and into my voice. And I try to put it into everything I do so that you can feel the way that I felt, because it’s important to me. The story’s really important to all of us.”

—STEPHANY, AGE 14, IN TRUST





A NOTE FROM THE FILMMAKERS

In 2004, Kenji Yamamoto and I began making a documentary about Chicago's acclaimed Albany Park Theater Project (AFTP). Located in one of America's most diverse communities, AFTP is a neighborhood teen theater company dedicated to helping young people reimagine their real-life experiences onstage. In choosing to make a documentary about AFTP, we hoped to capture how creating theater transformed company members' lives. Kenji and I are married, and working together as artists has brought us happiness and satisfaction.

As is the case with many creative projects, making *TRUST* took longer than planned, in part because it took four years to find the right story for our film. In August 2008, Marlín, a young woman from Honduras, sat in AFTP's sacred storytelling circle and told her real-life story to the ensemble. AFTP decided to create a play based on it. We knew that if we filmed AFTP in the months they spent as they made that play, we would capture AFTP's process of transformation, empowerment, and community building. Our documentary, *TRUST: Second Acts in Young Lives*, tells the story of how, through theater, Marlín reclaims power over her life story. The film is also the story of Marlín earning and retaining company members' trust and of the company members giving their trust and creative talents to the play, proving themselves worthy of Marlín's trust in them. Through those actions, they coalesce as a community.

Finding the story is always part of the challenge in making a documentary. With *TRUST*, we learned anew how much patience, instinct, and sheer crazy determination finding the story demands. Our intimate access to AFTP showed us the details of building empowerment among the powerless; it showed us that the face of America's future is immigrants and children of immigrants, and that resilience takes many forms.

Since October 2010, when *TRUST* premiered, it has screened in film festivals, conferences, and communities and been broadcast on public television's *America ReFramed* series. We've been pleased by the intensity and range of audiences' response. Watching the film, people are often deeply moved—sometimes to the point of utter silence. One group of high schoolers in Allentown, Pennsylvania, told me they were usually a boisterous audience, giving standing ovations to everything they liked, but after seeing *TRUST*, no one said a word. One young man said that he was feeling and thinking about so many things, he thought anything other than silence would cheapen the experience.

TRUST is not about one thing; it is about many things. Woven through *TRUST* are three main themes: the transformative power of art, the realities of life for young immigrants and children of immigrants, and the trauma of child sexual abuse. Like the legs of a three-legged stool, these themes are not prioritized. We encourage you to resist that prioritizing, to embrace the complexity. I also ask you to reflect upon the profound effect that arts education can have on crossing boundaries of all kinds.

Please share your experiences screening *TRUST* in your classroom, your after-school program, your community. www.trustdocumentary.org/reactions/.

Nancy Kelly
Writer/Director/Producer

Kenji Yamamoto
Editor/Producer



HOW TO SCREEN TRUST

Below is an outline for screening *TRUST* and following it with a general discussion. We suggest screening *TRUST* with a group you already know well, and preparing them ahead of time. In our experience, it is critical to leave at least 15 minutes for a facilitated general discussion after screening the film. After the discussion, use any of the seven lessons in this guide to continue exploration into the *TRUST* themes.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR PRESENTING *TRUST* TO A GROUP OF YOUTH

1. Prepare yourself. Preview the film and review the guide.
2. Prepare the group.
3. Introduce the film *TRUST*.
4. Screen the film *TRUST*.
5. Lead a brief movement or writing activity.
6. Lead a post-screening discussion.



IN MORE DETAIL

1. **Prepare yourself. Preview the film and review the guide.**

Watch the entire film, notice your own response to it, and plan your activities ahead of time. We recommend co-facilitating the discussion, preferably with a trusted school counselor or advocate for survivors of trauma and/or sexual assault.

2. **Prepare the group.**

We recommend preparing students a week or more in advance to manage the emotional content of the film. Let students know you will be presenting a unit that deals with trauma, and help them to identify healthy coping strategies for managing emotionally charged issues. The more prepared your students are, the more success you will have with the discussion and the lessons.

Then, on the day of the screening, do a brief activity to warm them up to the concepts in *TRUST*. For example, if you will be doing the Identity lesson (p. 31), ask students to think about the importance of food in their lives and how food connects to their family and culture. If you are doing the Power lesson (p. 47), have students brainstorm or draw about the concepts of “powerful” and “powerless.”

“I told the kids, “This is a sensitive issue. It’s about sexual abuse. You might feel uncomfortable. If you do, give me a signal and we can go out into the hallway.”

—KAREN MCCARTHY, HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER,
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

3. Introduce the film *TRUST*.

- Introduce the main themes, and let students know why you are watching the film, how it fits in with your curriculum or program goals. Using your own words, convey the following:
The documentary film you are about to see contains themes that are difficult for many of us to think about. TRUST is the true story of 18-year-old Marlín, from Honduras, who survives sexual abuse, immigration to the United States, and substance abuse. Most of the story takes place at APTP, the Albany Park Theater Project in Chicago. APTP is an after-school theater program that makes plays out of people's real-life stories. This is a documentary—the kids in the film are not actors. They are going about their regular lives, and the filmmakers have captured their story and turned it into a film. Marlín's story has difficult themes but nothing graphic. The focus is on how the other youth turn her story into a play.
- Give students a role as active, critical viewers of the film. You can say to students, *Watch the film critically. Listen to the themes and the story as if you are going to turn the ideas in it into something meaningful. Listen as a potter or a poet or a builder getting ready to shape your material.* Taking notes on themes while watching can facilitate this process.
- Consider allowing students to opt out or leave the room. If a student does want to leave, be sure there is a safe place to send him or her and follow up later. Students who opt out can still be engaged by doing one of the writing prompts on page 67 or by expanding on the prescreening activity. If students cannot leave the room, you can let them doodle, write, or draw while the film is playing. See page 15 for more information on common student responses.



“In my class, I explained the APTP context, named the key issues, and defined terms like sexual abuse and rape. Students were engaged and ready to go. I chose not to have an opt-out option.”

—LAUREN STOWER, HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER, HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA

4. **Screen the film *TRUST: Second Acts in Young Lives* (educational version is 57 min., theatrical version is 78 min.).**
 - Screen *TRUST* all the way through, followed by a discussion, or screen it over two class periods with discussion at the end.
 - Suggested break points for the 57-minute version: On the first day, screen the first 25 minutes to the end of Maggie’s story. On the second day, pick up at the First Rehearsal scene (beginning of DVD Chapter 5) and screen the last 32 minutes.
 - Let the credits run all the way through before turning on the lights. Your audience may need a few minutes to collect themselves. Try to limit distractions, and have tissues and water available.
5. **Lead a brief movement or writing activity.**
 - Take a minute to allow the group to stretch, freewrite, or draw, to give them a chance to connect their emotional and physical selves before moving on to the discussion. Everyone in your group may not feel comfortable participating in a discussion; a silent writing or drawing activity gives each one a chance to express what s/he is feeling after viewing *TRUST*.
6. **Lead post-screening discussion.**
 - Set a safe environment. Refocus the group and remind students of the Group Agreements (p. 76) you have set in your classroom. In your own words you can say: *Discussing a film like TRUST and the issues in it can be very personal. It’s important that people feel safe in our discussion, which is why we have our Group Agreements. All questions and comments are welcome as long as they are respectful of others. Finally, if anyone mentions something that is happening now, a situation where you know of someone being hurt or hurting others, we will take whatever steps we need to, to get the person help. If it is something I need to report to others, I will talk with you about how best to do that.* For more on mandated reporting, see page 88.
 - The discussion can be completely open or based on specific themes. Some teachers prefer splitting the group by gender if there are two teachers to facilitate discussion.

Ideas for discussion starters.

You may want to use the following questions to get a discussion going in your class or group. Allow for moments of silence as students collect their thoughts.

Opening questions:

- Why do you think the film was called “TRUST”?
- Why do you think the filmmakers decided to produce this film?
- Where is Marlín from? Where does the story take place?
- What do you think is the most important thing about the film? What matters to you the most?

- What was the hardest thing to watch? What was the coolest thing?
- *TRUST* raises some difficult issues. What are healthy strategies for coping with the painful feelings that youth experience?
- Would you recommend this film to others? To whom and why?
- If we followed up on some of the themes from *TRUST*, which ones would you like to discuss further?

Questions for going deeper. These questions depend on a higher level of safety and trust in the group:

- What did you think about the scenes where Marlín was telling her story to the company? How was she able to do that?
- How do you think the kids felt when they first heard her story? Are any of you feeling that way now? (If students are feeling helpless or disempowered, remind them that you will be doing a lesson to follow up on *TRUST*, and check in later with anyone who appears distressed.)
- Raise your hand if any of these feelings came up for you: sadness, pain, fear, joy, excitement, anger, confusion, relief. Take a moment to notice where you feel these emotions in your body.
- What is the importance of telling your story in a safe place?
- How common do you think sexual assault is among children? Do you think Marlín's story is unique?
- What does Marlín's story say about girls? About immigration? How does this documentary connect to what you already know about those things?

7. Close the discussion. Take a few minutes to close the discussion, especially if you are not using one of the lessons suggested in this guide.

- Ask students to complete an Action Plan (p. 82) or a *TRUST* evaluation (p. 78).
- Let students know that if they want to write a letter to Marlín or anyone else from the film, they can send it to info@trustdocumentary.org.
- Going around the group, ask each person to share one word representing what is on his/her mind. Encourage everyone to participate.
- Offer handouts with resources and support for survivors of sexual assault or trauma.
- Include a closing exercise, like the lighting of a candle or a moment of silence to honor those who have suffered violence or abuse.
- After the day you show the film, find ways to refer back to the *TRUST* themes, particularly child sexual abuse, so that they are not silenced and can live in the broader reality of how you interact with your students.