***United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (2012)**

**Film background/summary:** *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* is a documentary directed by Jim Hubbard and produced by Hubbard and Sarah Schulman. The film chronicles the efforts of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), a grassroots activist network that used a variety of tactics to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and challenge discriminatory and harmful practices by the federal government, the Catholic church, the media, etc. The documentary primarily addresses ACT UP's New York chapter's work from 1987-1996. The film relies on archival footage from ACT UP's direct actions, as well as from interviews that Hubbard and Schulman filmed and archived on their website, the [The ACT UP Oral History Project](http://www.actuporalhistory.org/). All told, Schulman and Hubbard conducted 187 interviews with ACT UP members for this oral history project in order to preserve the legacy of this activist movement. Schulman and Hubbard also created a [website](https://www.unitedinanger.com/) for the film, which has many helpful resources for additional reading.

**Content warning:** *United in Anger* contains extensive discussion of death, disease, and grief, and several images of dead bodies.

**Running time:** 55 min

**Notes:**

* This set of lesson plans focuses on the history of ACT UP and the intersection between film and activism. It does not include extensive discussion of what HIV/AIDS is, or about HIV transmission, testing, treatment, or prevention. However, students may have questions about all of these things. If you have time, you may want to build in an additional day to build knowledge about this topic. [The Body](https://www.thebody.com/health/hiv-aids) has useful resources on these topics. [I Wanna Know](http://www.iwannaknow.org/teens/sti/hiv_aids.html) also has valuable resources directed at youth audiences.
* Another film that covers some of the same ground as this film and makes use of the ACT UP Oral History Project and archival footage of ACT UP's direct actions is David France's 2012 film, *How to Survive a Plague.* This film is more well-known, but I thought it would be best to include a different perspective, since France also directed *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson. United in Anger* and *How to Survive a Plague* are fascinating to compare; while they make use of much of the same footage, France's documentary is more narrowly focused on actions targeting pharmaceutical developments and more prominently features the perspectives of white gay men; Hubbard's film represents a broader set of concerns that ACT UP raised and features interviews with more women and people of color. If you have time, you could extend this week's work by asking students to watch at least part of \*How to Survive a Plague\* (available on Netflix) and compare the different narratives and perspectives that these films present. If you choose to extend the unit in this way, you may want to also bring in Jih-Fei Cheng's article, "How to Survive: AIDS and Its Afterlives in Popular Media," which critiques France's film.
* You might consider the extent to which you want to help students understand the HIV/AIDS pandemic by comparing it to the covid-19 pandemic. On the one hand, this might be a valuable way to help students understand the complex, emotional experience of living through HIV/AIDS, and explore the similarities and differences between these two pandemics. On the other hand, if your students are grappling with trauma, these questions could be extremely difficult to discuss. You may even want to consider swapping out this entire film for another documentary, if you think this topic could be triggering for students. Some alternative choices are listed in the unit response assignment.
* I included a brief excerpt from the Afterword of Roger Hallas’ book for students to read prior to Day 1’s class. This could be cut, if you’d like to cut down the reading material this week.

**Materials for this week:**

* Lesson plans
* Screening quiz
* Secondary texts:
  + Day 1: Hallas, Roger. *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. Durham, Duke UP, 2009. (Excerpt provided from "Afterword," pp. 241-247.
  + Day 2: Hallas, Roger. *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image.* Durham, Duke UP, 2009. (Excerpt provided from Chapter 2: "The Embodied Immediacy of Direct Action: Space and Movement in AIDS Video Activism")
  + Day 3: Juhasz, Alexandra. "Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 12, no. 2, 2006, pp. 319-328.

**Lesson 1 – Close Reading *United in Anger***

1. (7 min) Screening quiz.
2. (15 min) Student-led scene analysis on *United in Anger.*
3. (min) Start teacher-led scene analysis with screening clip. (

1. (6 min) Discussion prep.
2. (20 min) Whole-class discussion.

**Lesson 2: Examining *United in Anger* alongside Chapter 2 of *Reframing Bodies***

1. (5 min) Personal reflection. Choose one question to respond to:
2. What did you learn about AIDS and activism in the 1980s and 1990s that you didn’t know beforehand?
3. What questions do you have about this movement or this time period?
4. What effect did this film have on you?
5. (7 min) Discuss.
6. (7 min) Screen today’s clip (St. Patrick’s Cathedral demonstration 34:15-41:14)

1. (15 min) Study groups.
2. What are the most important ideas in Hallas’ chapter?
3. How does the footage we just watched from the St. Patrick’s Cathedral demonstration support Hallas’ claims? What formal choices—made by the filmmakers who filmed the planning and demonstration, as well as by the filmmakers who created *United in Anger—*are connected to these claims?
4. (20 min) Whole class discussion.
5. What are the most important ideas in Hallas’ chapter?
6. How does the footage we just watched from the St. Patrick’s Cathedral demonstration support Hallas’ claims? What formal choices—made by the filmmakers who filmed the planning and demonstration, as well as by the filmmakers who created *United in Anger—*are connected to these claims?
7. **Extension question:** This was one of ACT UP New York’s most controversial demonstrations. What is your opinion of the strategies the activists used?

**Lesson 3: Examining *United in Anger* Alongside “Video Remains” and the Afterword to *Reframing Bodies***

1. (5 min) Students write. Choose one question to respond to.
2. What connections can you identify between *United in Anger* and *Disclosure* or *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson?* In what ways do the formal elements or themes of these films differ? In what ways are they similar?
3. So far, has our study of documentary changed your understanding of the documentary form? If so, how?
4. Which film in this unit do you think you’ll remember the most? Why?
5. (7 min) Discuss.
6. (3 min) Screen today’s clip.