



POWERLANDS

DIRECTED BY IVEY CAMILLE MANYBEADS TSO



VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



About The Guide

This guide is designed to accompany the film *Powerlands*. It uses the film as a starting point for integrating core concepts of media literacy, critical thinking and social advocacy skills in your classroom. The guide provides contextual information about the documentary subjects and themes, and includes post-viewing discussion questions and activities.

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use *Powerlands* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. This document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

Powerlands makes important arguments about Indigenous rights and corporate power, and forces



viewers to consider their position and culpability. Students should be encouraged to ask probing questions about what they see, and what they don't see, in the film. By asking these questions, students come through the movie as more media-literate viewers, able to separate intellect from emotion when evaluating their position on something they screen.

About Powerlands

A young Navajo filmmaker investigates displacement of Indigenous people and devastation of the environment caused by the same corporations that have exploited the land where she was born. On this personal and political journey she learns from Indigenous activists across three continents.

This film is in seven languages, including several Indigenous languages rarely captured on film: English, Diné, Spanish, Wayuu, Visayan, Blaan, and Zapotec.

Featured on [Democracy Now](#). Winner, Best US Feature, American Documentary & Animation Film Festival (AmDocs) 2022, Best Environmental Film, Arizona International Film Festival 2022. Winner, The 2022 Rigoberta Menchú Grand Prize.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Critical thinking skills
- Media literacy skills
- Heightened awareness of issues including Indigenous rights and environmental justice
- Opportunity for youth engagement

RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS

Indigenous Studies, Political Science, Ethics & Law, Environmental Studies, Media Studies, Latinx Studies, Philippines Studies, Sociology, Social Justice, Science, Science & Society, Engineering Ethics

KEY THEMES

Indigenous Rights, Consumerism & Capitalism, Environmental Justice, Activism, Community Organizing, Civic Engagement, Economic Inequality, Trauma, War and Conflict, Youth



Synopsis

Ivey Camille Manybeads Tso follows the trail of extractive industries that have exploited the land where she was born. She travels to the La Guajira region in rural Colombia, the Tampakan region of the Philippines, the Tehuantepec Isthmus of Mexico, and the protests at Standing Rock. In each case, she meets Indigenous women leading the struggle against the same corporations that are causing displacement and environmental catastrophe in her own home. Inspired by these women, Ivey Camille brings home the lessons from these struggles to the Navajo Nation.

The film begins in Navajo Nation, where Ivey Camille joins friends of hers—Cody, Selest and MT—who have founded a group called Indigenous Youth for Cultural Survival. The group collaborates with Kim and Makai, Navajo activists who have documented the chemical companies that have contaminated the land, including BHP and Peabody Coal.



In La Guajira, Ivey Camille visits the Indigenous communities displaced by the largest coal mine in Latin America, co-owned by BHP and Glencore. In a meeting at the mine, community members' concerns are dismissed by mine executives.



BHP and Glencore are also active in The Philippines, the deadliest place in the world to be a defender of the earth. Ivey Camille sees the risks first-hand, meeting with the families of those killed by soldiers, and seeing protests at the gates of Glencore. In one of the most striking scenes in the film, Ivey Camille meets with communist guerilla soldiers who are also resisting mining.

The threads of resistance combine at the 2016 protests at Standing Rock, where Kim, Makai, and Ivey Camille join with a united Indigenous movement.

From there, she travels to Oaxaca, Mexico, where she learns that even a green energy source, like wind power, can be harmful if it is done without consent and cooperation from Indigenous communities.

These lessons come home to Navajo Nation as the Indigenous Youth for Cultural Survival join with Kim and Makai to create art and convene a cultural gathering. The film ends on the steadfast resistance of Navajo elders, fighting colonialism by refusing to leave their land.

Director's Statement Ivey Camille Manybeads Tso

My grandmother taught me how to stand on the frontlines. She taught me about the ways that my ancestors have resisted displacement since colonial settlers came here. When thinking about how to tell the stories in this film, I think about the storytelling traditions I have learned from elders in my community. That is why this story is told through the stories, voices, and languages of Indigenous women.

“For too long, others have been telling our stories.”

I started making films at the age of nine, through the Native youth media project Outta Your Backpack Media. At the age of 13, I directed *In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman*, based on the true story of my great-great-great grandmother Yellow Woman, who lived through the Navajo Long Walk of 1864-1868. At the age of 19, I started *Powerlands*, which took six years to film and edit.

For too long, others have been telling our stories. As an Indigenous filmmaker, I have seen the ways in which our stories are co-opted and stolen. This film is an intervention, a chance for our stories to be told by us, in our own languages.



Organizations Featured in *Powerlands*

Powerlands was made in cooperation and solidarity with the following organizations:

- Frontline Defenders
- Black Mesa Indigenous Support
- Indigenous Youth for Cultural Survival
- Fuerza Mujeres Wayuu
- Witness for Peace
- Socxsargends Agenda
- Panalipdan Southern Mindanao
- Sacred Stone Camp
- Assembly in Defense of Land and Territory
- Ixtepec Committee in Defense of Life and Territory
- Community of San Dionisio del Mar
- Totopo Community Radio
- Grupo Yansa

People Featured in *Powerlands*

Powerlands features the following individuals (In order of appearance):

Dinetah

- marie gladue
- Gerald Blackrock
- Duwayne Blackrock
- Danny Blackgoat
- Selest Manning
- Cody Fetty
- MT Garcia
- Kim Smith
- Makai Lewis
- Louise Goy
- AJ Goy
- Monte White



La Guajira

- Angelika Ortiz
- Yazmin Romero Epiayu
- Maria Isabela
- Eneida Diaz de Barbosa
- Rogelio Ustate
- Samuel Arregocés
- Juan Carlos Restrepo
- Elda Gomez

Mindanao

- Felipe Freay
- Sening Freay
- Kiit Freay
- Erita Capion
- Eking Freay
- Lorna Mora
- Melanie Capion
- Ka Efrin
- Bador
- Che



Standing Rock

- Ladonna Brave Bull Allard
- Faith Spotted Eagle

Oaxaca

- Celestino Bartolo Terán
- Bettina Cruz
- Domitillo Velazquez Rodriguez
- Juanito Muriel Castellanos
- Carlos Sánchez Martínez
- Emma Coyolicatzin
- Fernando Guadarrama
- Nashieeli Valencia Núñez
- Gerardo de Gyves Ramirez

Filmmakers

IVEY CAMILLE MANYBEADS TSO | Director



Ivey Camille Manybeads Tso is an award-winning queer Navajo filmmaker, and a recent fellow with the Firelight Media Documentary Filmmaker Lab. She started making films at the age of 9, through the Native youth media project Outta

Your Backpack Media. At the age of 13 she made the award-winning fiction film *In the Footsteps of Yellow Woman*, based in the true story of her great-great-great grandmother Yellow Woman, who lived through the Navajo Long Walk of 1864–1868. The film screened in over 90 film festivals internationally and won 11 awards. Ivey Camille continued to refine her filmmaking craft with a full scholarship to Idyllwild Arts Academy in California. She later returned home to work on films in her community of Navajo Nation. At the age of 19, Ivey Camille began work on *Powerlands*, her first feature.

TIM TSAI | Editor



Tim is a Taiwanese American filmmaker whose feature documentary *Seadrift* chronicles the racial hostilities that erupted during the early days of Vietnamese refugee arrival on the Texas gulf coast. The film premiered at Slamdance Film Festival and was broadcast on PBS.

DANIEL FRENCH | Music



Born & raised in L.A.'s diverse San Gabriel Valley, Daniel has toured the world with his band Las Cafeteras, gracing stages from WOMAD to Montreal Jazz, Bonnaroo to the Hollywood Bowl & beyond. Bridging purpose with party, Las Cafeteras' music continues to reach ears worldwide. You can hear Daniel's music featured in award-winning shows like Kamau Bell's United Shades of America, Party of Five, telenovela Bajo El Mismo Cielo, & even Bernie Sanders rallies. You can follow him at [@frenchismexican](https://twitter.com/frenchismexican).

MELISA CARDONA | Cinematographer



Mel is a first generation queer Latinx self-taught artist who grew up between Atlanta, GA and her parents native land of Colombia. Mel is committed to creating stories that empower Queer Women of Color while dismantling all forms of oppression through film, photography, acting and digital art for a beautiful new mañana.

JORDAN FLAHERTY | Producer



Jordan Flaherty is an award-winning journalist, producer, and author. He has produced dozens of hours of film and television, including for Al Jazeera's Emmy, Peabody and DuPont-award winning program *Faultlines*; as well as short and long-form documentaries for *Democracy Now* and *teleSUR*, reporting in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and writing two books based on his reporting. He began his producing career with the independent feature film *Chocolate Babies*, which was recently added to the Criterion Collection.

EMILY FAYE RATNER | Producer



Emily Faye Ratner is a media maker and lawyer based in New Orleans whose work focuses on state violence. She has organized with local groups to challenge law enforcement violence, incarceration, and occupation and imperialism. She has also co-convened Patois: The New Orleans International Human Rights Film Festival. Her criminal defense practice focuses on finding paths to freedom for people sentenced to life in prison, and her civil rights practice focuses on revealing the everyday violence implicit in American policing and incarceration.

EWA JASIEWICZ | Producer



Ewa Jasiewicz is a London-based writer and union organizer. She's been part of solidarity initiatives on the ground in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan as well as climate justice, anticapitalist and abolitionist movements in the UK, and no border struggles in Poland. Her first book *Podpalic Gaze (Raze Gaza)* was nominated for the Beata Pawlak Award. She has written for *The Guardian*, *Independent*, *Al Jazeera* and *Le Monde Diplomatique Polish Edition*.



Discussion Questions

1. The film explores multiple ideas of power. We see power that comes from coal or from wind. We see power that comes from corporations or the military. And we see the power of popular resistance. What does the name *Powerlands* mean to you?

2. How did you feel after viewing *Powerlands*? Did you feel helpless, inspired, stirred to action, or some combination? Do you think the message of the film was ultimately hopeful? Why or why not?

3. Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

4. *Powerlands* explores ways that even green energy, like wind, can exploit people. How can we make sure that power is generated in a way that does not exploit people?

5. What are the energy sources in your community or the communities surrounding you? Are these green or not? Who owns them?

6. The film travels to several countries: The US, Colombia, The Philippines, and Mexico. What connects these different communities? What do they have in common, and what are some differences?



7. What are similarities you can find with communities or people in the film, and your own community?

8. The Navajo elder Marie Gladue says, “We are not separate from our environment.” What does this mean to you?

9. Angelika Ortiz, in Colombia, says, “Coal Means Death for us. Just as it creates light there, for us it creates darkness. We live in this darkness in order to give light to other countries.” What does this statement mean to you?

10. If you had a chance to ask a person featured in this movie a question, what would it be?

11. If you had a chance to ask the director a question, what would it be?

12. How do you think media and cultural representations of Native communities have contributed to continued oppression of Native people? How can we challenge those representations?

13. This film was made by a Navajo filmmaker, and features almost entirely the voices of Indigenous people. What does it mean to you, to hear directly from members of these communities?



Suggested Activities

1. Discuss some of the major themes from the film. How are they interconnected? Pick one that resonates with you the most and discuss why.

2. Think back on the film. How are different voices we hear in the film (For example, the director, the activists, the corporate mining representatives) used to create meaning? How does each voice serve a different purpose?

3. Look up one of the organizations featured in the film, and find out more about their work and history.

4. Look up the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. How does this document connect with the themes in *Powerlands*? How does this document connect to you, and your community? Discuss ways that you and your community can support the implementation of this document.

5. Think about where you live. What are the industries that extract and/or exploit resources from your community? How does the fossil fuel industry affect the environment and health of your community? Are there some communities that are more or less affected than your community? Discuss why.

6. Think about the issues faced by communities in *Powerlands*. Determine one action you could take that would draw attention to the issue. Some examples could be: spreading the word to your friends and community; joining a protest; contacting an elected official; and/or writing about those most affected or displaced.

Additional Resources

COLOMBIA

Background on La Guajira: [A Colombian Tribe Fights Mining Multinationals With Bows And Arrows](#), J. Herrera, worldcrunch.com, 2012.

Update on Cerrejon: [Fear and loathing in La Guajira](#), R. Sally, londonminingnetwork.org, 2018.

Update on Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu: [New Death Threats Against Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu](#), frontlinedefenders.org, 2019.

A comic book about Wayuu people and their struggle: [The Magic of Responsibility](#), VV. AA., londonminingnetwork.org, 2021.

NAVAJO NATION

Displacement: [Collective Liberation: Lessons Learned in Allyship with Indigenous Resistance at Black Mesa](#), L. Bloom, H. Boas & B. Carnine, leftturn.org, 2011.

Impoundments: [Black Mesa communities continue stand against mine expansion](#), L. Bloom, wagingnonviolence.org, 2014.

Activism in Navajo Nation: [On Navajo Nation, Activists Use Citizen Science to Fight Pollution](#), B. Flin & A. Carelton, yesmagazine.org, 2022.

OAXACA

Legal struggle against wind farm: [Wind farm project halted after appeal](#), mexiconewsdaily.com, 2015.

Background on wind power in Oaxaca: [The Dark Side of Clean Energy in Mexico](#), R. Bessi & S. Navarro, truthout.org, 2016.

Bettina Cruz organizing: [Indigenous communities vs. AMLO: a standoff at the Tehuantepec istmus](#), R. Lira, opendemocracy.net, 2019.

Protests end wind farm contract: [Mexico cancels contract with controversial EDF wind farm](#), T. Azzopardi, 2022.

PHILIPPINES

Background on Erita Capion: [Erita Capion Dialang Threatened](#), frontlinedefenders.org, 2012.

The deadliest country for environmental activists: [Philippines 'deadliest' country for environmental, land activists](#), T. Regencia, aljazeera.com, 2019.



STANDING ROCK

On Ladonna Brave Bull Allard: [LaDonna Brave Bull Allard 'changed history'](#), A. Chavez & M. Pember, indiancountrytoday.com, 2021.

Update on pipeline: [US supreme court rejects Dakota Access pipeline appeal](#), N. Lakhani, theguardian.com, 2022.

GENERAL

"Powerlands": [Young Diné Filmmaker on Indigenous Resistance to Resource Colonization Worldwide](#), democracynow.org, 2022.

[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), un.org, 2007.

[An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#), R. Dunbar-Ortiz, beacon.org, 2014.

[Warrior Women](#), warriorwomenfilm.com, 2018.

[Standing Rock Syllabus](#), nycstandswithstandingrock.files.wordpress.com, 2016.

FURTHER RESEARCH

DOCIP, [docip.org](#)

Front Line Defenders, [frontlinedefenders.org](#)

Indigenous Environmental Network, [ienearth.org](#)

Power Shift Network, [powershift.org](#)

Movement Generation, [movementgeneration.org](#)

International Indian Treaty Council, [iitc.org](#)

NDN Collective, [ndncollective.org](#)

Urban Indian Health Institute MMIW Report, [uihi.org](#)

Water Protectors Community Oral History Project, [waterprotectorscommunity.org](#)

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