



Media Education

# BROOKLYN CASTLE

A FILM BY KATIE DELLAMAGGIORE



## Educator Study Guide

Film Spark Volume 1

# BROOKLYN CASTLE



## THE FILMMAKER

**Katie Dellamaggiore** is a documentary producer and director whose work has appeared on MTV, A&E, HBO, Cinemax, and VH1. Over the course of her career, she has held various production and outreach roles on award-winning documentaries including *39 Pounds of Love*, *To Die in Jerusalem*, *51 Birch Street*, and *American Teen*. Katie co-produced *After the Storm*, a nonprofit theater and film project that used art to revitalize the lives of young people in post-Katrina New Orleans.

“Some people consider us the Yankees of chess.”  
—Mr. Galvin, Assistant Principal

## KEY THEMES

PERSEVERANCE  
POVERTY  
DEDICATION  
SACRIFICE  
ADVOCACY

RUNTIME	101 MINUTES
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	USA
RATING	PG
GRADES	6–12



## ABOUT THE FILM

*Brooklyn Castle* tells the stories of five members of the chess team at a below-the-poverty-line inner city junior high school that has won more national championships than any other in the country. The film follows the challenges these kids face in their personal lives as well as on the chessboard, and is as much about the sting of their losses as it is about the anticipation of their victories.

## PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION

- » Do you play chess? If so, what do you enjoy about it?
- » What type of extracurricular activities and after-school enrichment programs have you participated in? How have these activities impacted your academic and social life? Do you know how they are funded? Are there any extracurricular programs that you wish were available?
- » Share times when you have either faltered or flourished under the pressure of competition. How do you typically perform in the spotlight? Do you cherish this position or shy away from it?
- » Many people today think the attention span of students and their ability to concentrate deeply is shrinking. Do you agree with this perception, why or why not? Do you think more students today have ADD and ADHD or have the diagnoses just been increasing?
- » Describe experiences you have had with Student Body elections? Have there been any memorable student election platforms or campaign promises? Do elected student officers seem to hold real power?
- » Have you ever been involved in advocating for a cause or issue in your community? Have you attended public meetings, written letters to elected officials, or participated in a protest? Share your experience.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND ISSUES

**Castling**—A chess move that helps protect the king, and puts the rook in a more strategic position.

**Full ride**—A scholarship award that not only covers tuition and fees, but also books, room and board, supplies, and sometimes even living expenses.

**I.S. 318**—Intermediate School 318 is a public inner-city junior high school in Brooklyn. It's also known as the Eugenio Maria de Hostos School.

**Marshall Chess Club**—The second oldest chess club in the United States located in New York City.

**Chess Grandmaster**—The highest level a chess player can attain. A player must reach a rating of 2500 to be considered a Grandmaster.

**American Dream**—First coined in 1931 by writer James Truslow Adams, it is the notion that in America “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.

**Great Recession of 2007–2009**—Sharp decline in economic activity brought on by the crash of the US housing market.

**Title I School**—A school that receives additional government funds due to having a high percentage of students that live in poverty.

## CREATING CRITICAL VIEWERS

We live in a media-saturated world and students are constantly surrounded by an array of constructed messages. Media literacy skills (the who, how, and why behind media creation) are essential for students to be informed citizens, so they may successfully navigate and make sense of their world.

If students can be trained to view media through a more discerning lens, not only will they become more productive community members, but also more empowered consumers and critical thinkers. Prefacing each screening with this series of questions can help create a more active viewing environment and result in enhanced media literacy for your students.

**Medium**—How was this media constructed and the story told? What did you see? What did you hear?

**Purpose**—What motivated this media creation? Do you think the purpose was achieved?

**Subject**—What information, values, ideas, and emotions are presented in the media?

**Point of View (POV)**—Who created this media? What is their perspective?

**Audience**—Who was the target audience? How did it make you feel? How do you think it made others feel?



## DECONSTRUCTING THE STORY

- » In the beginning of the film you see I.S. 318 taking second place at the 2009 National Junior High Chess Championships but the players look deflated with long faces as they accept their trophy. Why do you think they were unhappy with this award?
- » Discuss the five lead characters (Justus, Pobo, Alexis, Patrick, and Rochelle) in the film and recall both their key challenges and triumphs during the school year and competitive chess season.
- » Who are some of your favorite characters from the film and what personality characteristics do they possess that makes them so likable? Which character do you most resemble and why?
- » We witnessed first hand what a school goes through in times of economic crisis. What scenes in the story showcase the budget struggle and what actions did the characters take to fight the budget-cut pressure?
- » Compare the differences and similarities of the students and school of I.S. 318 in Brooklyn, New York to your school. Consider the buildings and classroom settings, the way the students look and talk, and the challenges they are facing.



“ Once you cross the threshold from mediocre to great, people expect greatness all of the time.  
 –Justus’s mom Latisha ”

## MAKING THE FILM

- » What do you think the filmmaker’s purpose(s) was in making *Brooklyn Castle*? Can you summarize the message of the story in one or two sentences?
- » Rather than just getting to know one student and chess player, the filmmaker chose to track five main characters throughout the film. Why do you think this decision was made and was it effective?
- » Who do you think the primary intended audience is for this film? Do you think it was successful in reaching and affecting them, why or why not?
- » In watching the documentary you don’t ever get a sense of who is behind the camera or directing the action. If you were to meet the filmmaker, Katie Dellamaggiore, what questions would you ask her?



## CRITICAL RESPONSE

- » Why do you think the chess teams showcased in the movie were made up primarily of boys? What other activities do you see at school or in society that are dominated by boys or girls? Why is this the case?
- » Intermediate School 318 obviously prides itself in educating what Assistant Principal, John Gallivan, calls the “whole child.” Based on what you saw in the film, what does this term mean to you? Do you feel like your education community is doing a good job at nurturing the “whole child?” What areas are being addressed well and what areas can be improved?
- » Multiple parents in the film appear to be making great sacrifices to ensure that their kids receive high quality education and are prepared to succeed in life after high school. Do the students appear to be honoring their parents’ commitments? Why, or why not?
- » Justus arrives at I.S. 318 with very high expectations, but is often shown struggling to perform in competition. The Assistant Principal states “Pressure pays dividends in life later on.” Analyze Justus’s predicament and what seems to be impeding his performance initially and whether or not you agree with Gallivan’s “pressure” comment.
- » Did watching this film make you want to get involved in the competitive chess world? If not in the game of chess, did it inspire you to do something else? What impact did the film have on you?
- » The students in the film obviously feel a lot of pressure to perform well on their standardized high school placement exam. Describe the experiences you have had in school with similar yearly exams. Do you perform well under pressure on this style of tests? Evaluate whether you think these tools are accurate assessments of your intelligence and what you’ve learned. Is it fair that these results can potentially impact your future college and job choices?
- » Describe the various actions you saw students, parents, teachers and administrators taking when advocating against school budget cuts. What were the results of their actions and do you feel like them standing up and making their voices heard was effective?

## ACTIVITIES

- » **Making Art:** Search online for samples of historical political campaign posters and slogans and on one page in their portfolio, have students then design their own. On another page, and to accompany their campaign poster, have students write a 60-90 second campaign pitch articulating why their classmates should give them their vote.
- » **Making Media:** Based on students’ personal interests and passion, have them design a flier or brochure promoting their ideal menu of the extracurricular and enrichment opportunities they would like to see offered in their educational setting. Take this activity a step further by challenging the students to actually conceive one of their desired activities.
- » Education Funding Research Project—Research three years of school funding at either the school, district, or state level. Have students decipher the data, look for trends and priorities and share their findings by creating a class presentation.
- » Advocacy and Civic Engagement—Interview teachers and administrators at school to learn more about what critical issues face your education system and how students can add their voice to help find solutions. For example, this might mean writing letters to elected officials, attending public meetings, or supporting a local rally or protest.
- » Have students research the various state and national standardized tests that students in Utah are required to take and what they are attempting to assess. Then have students design their own aptitude tests that they feel would better represent their skills and intellect. Have the students share their test designs with the class, making sure that they also explain what each section of the test is attempting to measure.
- » Have students learn to play chess or improve their current chess skill set. See the More Information section on page six of this guide for multiple chess resources. Students can play online, on classroom chessboards, or by downloading a chess application. Research local chess competition options and consider starting an extra-curricular chess club or team.

## MORE INFORMATION

### TO READ

Official site of the US Chess Federation  
[new.uschess.org/home/](http://new.uschess.org/home/)

Learn to play chess  
[www.thechesswebsite.com/](http://www.thechesswebsite.com/)

### TO WATCH

*Searching for Bobby Fischer*

## FILM NEWS AND UPDATES

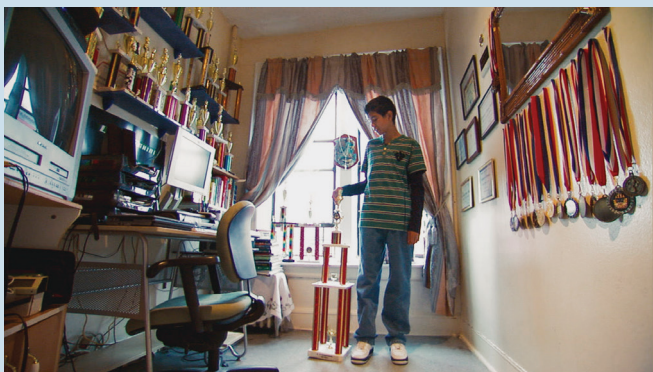
Intermediate School 318's website  
[www.is318.com/](http://www.is318.com/)

Where are they now?  
[brooklyncastle.com/#team](http://brooklyncastle.com/#team)

Find players' current ratings  
[www.uschess.org/content/blogsection/14/195/](http://www.uschess.org/content/blogsection/14/195/)

## TAKE ACTION

Write to your state legislator  
[openstates.org/find\\_your\\_legislator/](http://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/)



“ If you believe in public education, if you believe in kids, then you have to fight for it. ”  
 -Mr. Galvin

“ My role on the chess team is to be the rock by encouraging my teammates to become better human beings. ”  
 -Pobo, 7th grader



## RELEVANT UTAH AND NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Due to Study Guide space constraints, the following standards only include main “Anchor” and “Strand” Standards. For a complete list of detailed supporting Sub-standards and Objectives, please visit the website: [utahfilmcenter.org/filmspark](http://utahfilmcenter.org/filmspark).

### UTAH FINE ARTS CORE STANDARDS—SECONDARY MEDIA ARTS

#### Anchor Standards (grades 7–8)

**Respond**—Students will perceive and analyze artistic work and process. They will interpret intent and meaning, and apply criteria to evaluate artistic work and process.

**Connect**—Students will synthesize and relate knowledge from personal and collaborative experience to make and receive art. They will relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

#### Anchor Standards (grades 9–12)

There are three “Levels” and Anchor Standards of “Respond” and “Connect” are identical throughout each Level, but with differing sub-standards by ability.

#### LEVEL ONE

**Respond**—Students will understand, evaluate, and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer as well as the creator.

**Connect**—Student will relate artistic skills, ideas, and work with personal meaning and external context.

### UTAH CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS—SECONDARY

#### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening Comprehension and Collaboration

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

### UTAH STANDARDS FOR LIBRARY MEDIA—SECONDARY

#### Strand II Literacy: Information and Research

Students need the lifelong skills of selecting information from a wide variety of sources, assessing its worth, and applying newfound knowledge to problems, preparing them for learning, doing, and problem solving in college, career and throughout life. Teacher librarians will instruct students in a multi-step research process that is adaptable. As students gain research skills, they develop self-confidence in solving information problems in an environment where information resources and technologies have become increasingly complex.

**Standard 4**—Students will engage with and extract information.

#### Strand III Literacy: Media Engagement

In order to make informed decisions, students must successfully discern and interpret the messages surrounding them in media. Teacher librarians, in collaboration with classroom teachers, can integrate these skills into curricular units throughout a wide range of core and elective subjects.

**Standard 1**—Students will demonstrate that media literacy is a life skill integral to modern citizenship and informed decision-making.

### NATIONAL FILM STUDY STANDARDS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL BY THE FILM FOUNDATION

Standard 1.0—Film Language

Standard 2.0—Historical and Cultural Contexts

Standard 3.0—Production and Creative Expression

Standard 4.0—Viewers’ Response and Aesthetic Valuing

Standard 5.0—Cross-Curricular Connections





## About Film Spark

Documentary films are powerful, multi-sensory experiences that help students build social and emotional awareness and connect to current events, cultures, social and political issues, and beliefs beyond their own. The Film Spark documentaries, paired with standards-linked educator study guides, serve grades 6-12 and are curated to support the development of communication, critical thinking, media literacy, social action and media creation. Each Film Spark volume consists of 12 documentaries that help build understanding and empathy and showcase new voices and topics relevant to young people today. Ultimately, the Film Spark program helps lead young people to develop their own voices and become more successful students and productive citizens.



Curated Film • Media Education • Artist Support  
[WWW.UTAHFILMCENTER.ORG](http://WWW.UTAHFILMCENTER.ORG)