

# WATCHING TV

Books, crooks, flocks, clocks, fishes, dishes, violins and even the eye of the camera are fair game for the sharpshooters of *Watching TV*. In the end, even the sun, moon and earth are not safe from gunfire. The film's preoccupation with television violence demands that viewers question the form and content of TV news, advertising and programming. You can love or hate *Watching TV*, but you can't ignore it. Its images and sounds will pique and provoke viewers to question what they view and the effects of their viewing.

The comprehensive discussion guide on the inside of this videojacket will help viewers of all ages engage the many issues raised in the film.

"...an excellent introduction to any unit on media — can play an important role in helping young people deal with the question of violence on television."

— John J. Pungente, Executive Director,  
Jesuit Communication Project

**Director:** Christopher Hinton

**Producer:** Marcy Page

A National Film Board of Canada production  
co-sponsored by Health Canada, Family  
Violence Prevention Division.

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Closed captioned.  
A decoder is required.

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Order number: 9194 067  
4 minutes 56 seconds

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# WATCHING TV



VHS  
9194 067

FROM THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA



# WATCHING TV

This film contains controversial material and should be previewed prior to viewing by children.



# WATCHING TV

Through a meaningful hail of bullets, flying glass and bloodshed, **Watching TV** poses many profound questions about watching and responding to TV violence. Its images and sounds are disturbing and provocative, forcing viewers to examine what, why and how they watch TV; and to examine the effects of television violence on themselves and others.

## Background Information

Unquestionably, there is a link between television violence and the behaviours and attitudes of children who watch it. Highly questionable, however, is the nature of that link. Children's pre-viewing experiences and states of mind are so individual that they must be considered when discussing the effects of television violence. A discussion leader must not presume a homogeneous audience.

Some children may perceive themselves as victims of violence, in which case their reaction(s) could be nightmares, fear of being alone, fear of strangers, etc.

Some children may see themselves as perpetrators of violence, in which case their reaction(s) could be aggressive play, vandalism or assault. Children who have experienced violence, either in their own homes or in war-torn countries, will respond to TV violence differently from those who have had peaceful personal lives.

Children whose daycare or playground experiences are frequently violent will also react differently from those with more congenial experiences.

In a discussion group the size of an average class, it is likely that most of these experiences will be present and it's equally likely that some children will never disclose their experiences.

## To maximize awareness of violence-related issues, a facilitator must take into account that:

There will be a spectrum of personal experiences represented: this may be the first time the viewers have ever discussed, or even considered, the personal impact of television violence, and sharing and examination may not occur until subsequent discussions; each viewer is bringing a very personal, and possibly uncomfortable, experience to the discussion; and, as a result, some issues may be raised but not resolved.

Beginning to talk, and comparing each others' reactions, perceptions and feelings, may in itself be a powerful moment in some viewers' lives, and may provide the context for further reflection and discussion.

## PULL OUT FOR MORE INFORMATION

A film by  
Christopher Hinton

Cel Production  
and Additional  
Colour Design  
Anne Ashton

Animation Camera  
Jacques Avoine  
Raymond Dumas  
Pierre Landry  
Lynda Pelley

Optical Design  
Susan Gourley

Optical Camera  
Barry Wood

Music and Soundtrack  
Normand Roger

Voice Recording  
Michel Chalut

Re-Recording  
Jean-Pierre Joutel  
Serge Boivin

Producer  
Marcy Page

Executive Producer  
Barrie Angus McLean



## Christopher Hinton

Christopher Hinton is a multi-award-winning animator who has worked extensively for the NFB, the CBC and several commercial animation studios.



Born in Galt (now Cambridge) Ontario in 1952, Hinton has animated, written, directed and produced nearly a dozen NFB films, including the award-winning **BLOWHARD** (1978), **LADY FRANCIS SIMPSON** (1978), **GIORDANO** (1986), the Oscar-nominated **BLACKFLY** (1991) and **WATCHING TV** (1994). Hinton is also an independent producer of animated short films.



## Using *Watching TV* to facilitate discussion

**Watching TV** does not have to be viewed in its entirety. It might be screened completely, followed by a discussion on just one of its five sections, guided by the appropriate topic(s) below. Portions can be viewed repeatedly at regular speed, or in slow motion for closer examination. Individual frames can also be frozen for discussion. Muting, or playing the video without sound, may also be useful in order to concentrate on some images. Because **Watching TV** is a dense and fast-paced film, each of these strategies is recommended at appropriate moments.

Whichever approach is taken, discussion leaders must assess and remain sensitive to the feelings and concerns of the discussion group. The greatest benefits will occur when group members feel they have some control over the direction and nature of the discussion. This includes the possibility of deferring discussion to a later time, after some private reflection.

The following are discussion topics created to help viewers make sense of **Watching TV**. Discussion activities are intentionally not labelled or divided according to viewers' ages or level of maturity. It is up to the discussion leader(s) to determine the most appropriate items for discussion. The topics are organized to suggest an approximate sequence. Choose only one or two activities at a time. Inform the group fully of the purpose and processes of a discussion activity before you begin.

### Feeling Log

Create a feeling log. Divide a piece of paper into three sections. Label the three sections 'very disturbing,' 'disturbing' and 'not disturbing.' Place your hand beside the middle section so you will know where it is without having to look at the paper. Watch **Watching TV**, placing a mark in one of the sections whenever you notice your reactions change between 'very disturbing,' 'disturbing' and 'not disturbing.' Mark above your hand for 'very disturbing,' beside your hand for 'disturbing,' and below your hand for 'not disturbing.'

This exercise may also be done by dividing the paper into five sections, depending on how finely the group wishes to distinguish the violent moments. On a five-section page, create a 1-to-5 scale, where "1" signifies 'not disturbing' and "5" signifies 'very disturbing.' Place your hand on the page, fingers spread, and mark between your fingers whenever you notice reactions change.



After screening the video, count the check marks in each section and compare your totals to other viewers' totals. Discuss the similarities and differences in the numbers. Discover if the same moments in the movie disturbed the same viewers and discuss why that might be. (Discussing why one section disturbed only a few viewers could be useful, but may be too personal and best avoided.)

### Laughter

Did anyone laugh during **Watching TV**? What images might be seen as funny? If so, why? How did the sound contribute to the humour of some events? What violent moments in other videos can you remember laughing at? Why did you laugh? How was the violence made funny?

### Key Images

List at least three images you found most disturbing. List at least three images you found least disturbing. Compare your list to other viewers' lists. Discuss why your images were more/less disturbing than others.

### Montage

**Watching TV** uses 'montage,' which involves selecting and combining images that would not normally be combined. Montages are created to communicate a specific message. **Watching TV** contains three montages, appearing at the beginning, between the newscast and the commercial, and after the commercial. What do you think the montages in **Watching TV** are telling you? Do you think those statements are accurate?

Many television newscasts and crime shows begin with montages. Watch the beginnings of some of these shows and see if you get a similar message about television violence.

### Gender/Morality Codes

Are the hands that hold the guns male or female hands? What might **Watching TV** be telling us about the people who use guns on television? Do you agree? Are the victims of the shootings heroes, villains or neither? How can we tell? Are the guns being held by heroes, villains or neither? How can we tell? Why does it make a difference to know whether the guns are used by heroes or villains? Is it OK for heroes to use violence? When? Why is it OK? What examples can you suggest of heroes using violence for good reasons?

### Desensitization

Some people believe that watching violence on television makes us more tolerant of violence. They call this increased tolerance 'desensitization.' Do you think some viewers become desensitized by TV violence? Did you find that the violence in the last part of the film was less disturbing than in the first part? Do you think you were desensitized? Do you think viewers who become desensitized are desensitized only to violence on television or to all violence, wherever they experience it? How might someone who had been desensitized to violence react to seeing someone being shot in their neighbourhood?

### Cartoon Codes

This movie is a cartoon. How does a cartoon style change the way we might feel about the violence in the movie? How would our reactions change if the violent moments were all portrayed using real stunt people and special effects? Would using real stunt people and special effects make it harder or easier to discuss issues surrounding television violence?

**PULL OUT  
FOR MORE  
INFORMATION**

**A film by**  
Christopher Hinton

**Cel Production  
and Additional  
Colour Design**  
Anne Ashton

**Animation Camera**  
Jacques Avoine  
Raymond Dumas  
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Michel Chalut

**Re-Recording**  
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Serge Boivin

**Producer**  
Marcy Page

**Executive Producer**  
Barrie Angus McLean



## Action News

The Action News portion might be suggesting that newscasts are made up of a collection of unexplained violent events. Test this hypothesis. Watch one or more newscasts. Count the violent events and the non-violent events. Decide whether or not the newscast explains the reasons for the violence to your satisfaction.

Examine the organization of the newscast(s). Are the violent moments presented first? Do violent moments take up more time in the newscast than the non-violent ones? After the newscast is over, which moments do you remember most clearly: the violent or the non-violent ones? Is your overall impression that we live in a violent or a peaceful world? What are the results of your tests?

## Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Code and *Watching TV*

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Voluntary Code on Violence in Television was implemented in January 1994, to limit violent events seen by children. Read the Code. Discuss whether or not the Code would allow **Watching TV** to be shown on television. Do you think **Watching TV** should be shown on television? When would be the best time to show it? Should the broadcast be accompanied by a warning or discussion? If so, what kind? Do you think **Watching TV** should be shown and discussed in classrooms? Which grades? Prepare a list of points for classroom discussion. To contact the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, call or write: 350 Sparks Street, Suite 306, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7S8. Tel.: (613) 233-4035. Fax: (613) 233-6961.

## Kinds of Violence

There are at least three different kinds of violence in society, including physical, verbal and institutional. There are also different tools of physical violence, including guns, knives, missiles, bombs, fists and feet. **Watching TV** focusses mostly on one tool: guns.

Do you think gun-related violence on television is the most disturbing kind for children? What other kinds of television violence do you think children find disturbing? Why? What kinds of violence are not shown in **Watching TV**? If another movie were made to help children understand other kinds of violence on television, what collection of images and sounds would you suggest? What other titles might better describe this movie than **Watching TV**? Why?

## Genres/Nationalities

List the names and/or kinds of television programs you are reminded of when viewing **Watching TV**. Are these programs fantasy-based (cartoons and live-action super heroes) or reality-based (crime dramas, news and documentaries)? Are they mostly American or Canadian programs? Are they mostly story programs or news programs? Which of these shows do you watch often? Which do you watch rarely? What conclusions can you come to about the kind of television programs

**Watching TV** is about?

## The Ladyslayer Commercial

The Ladyslayer commercial exaggerates the reasons why men shave and the reaction women have to men who shave. Examine television advertising and non-television advertising directed toward men. Try to find ads promoting shaving products. Compare them to the Ladyslayer commercial. What similarities are there between the ads? Do the ads suggest that men shave to attract women? Do they suggest that shaving helps men "hunt" and "slay" women, or that grooming (hair care, cologne, shaving, deodorant, clothing) is used as a "bait" to "hook" women? If so, how?

If another cartoon commercial were made about women using a 'Manslayer,' what product(s) would the commercial advertise? What images would it contain? What would the voice-over narration say? Would it be a male or female voice? Would it be acceptable for the commercial to end with the woman shooting a man in the head? How else might the commercial end? Can you find any example of ads that contain "manslayer" messages?

## The Ladyslayer Commercial Conventions

The Ladyslayer commercial is about a shaver, but makes the shaver look and sound like other machines. Discuss what other machines the shaver is like in the commercial (e.g., sports car, bulldozer, gun, power mower). Are these machines more appealing to men or to women? How would making the shaver seem like these other machines make it more attractive to men?

How would you describe the narrator's voice? Where else have you heard a man use that style of speaking? (One example is professional wrestler interviews.) How does that style of speaking match the images and visual style of the commercial?

Bring real men's and women's shavers to the class. Examine them to notice if their designs (shape, colour, size, name) appeal to specific genders and discuss why. What truth is there to the exaggerated message in the Ladyslayer commercial?

## The End

At the end of **Watching TV**, the sun, moon and earth are shot to pieces but a blank-screened television set drifts off into outer space. How might we interpret this scene? Were the sun, moon and earth real or TV images? Why is the screen blank? What might the drifting doll mean to viewers?

A lyrical violin solo plays through the closing credits of the film. What is the effect of the violin music after hearing all the gunfire? What message might we take from the music?

*Study guide and text by Neil Anderson, instructor in Media and English, author of Media Works and Learning and Computing, and past editor of Mediacy Magazine.*