



THEIR
NAMES ARE
GUILLEMETTE,
AUGER,
PERREAULT...

THE VAN DOOS IN AFGHANISTAN

A FILM BY CLAUDE GUILMAIN

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

ABOUT THE FILM

The Van Doos in Afghanistan (Dir. Claude Guilmain, 2011, 44 min)

In this documentary, we hear directly from the soldiers serving in the Royal 22e Régiment (nicknamed the “Van Doos” in English) in Afghanistan. Most of the featured soldiers are francophone and were filmed in March 2011. They speak with ease and candour about themselves and their work, whether out on patrol or performing their duties at the base. They see their mission as one of rebuilding and educating as well as that of protecting themselves and the Afghans. The film sets the stage for discussion of the feasibility of a democratic transformation of Afghan society and Canada’s role in Afghanistan.

RECOMMENDED AGE LEVEL

This film is recommended for learners in grades 9–12, post-secondary students and all adults. The film is realistic in that injuries, coffins and cemeteries are mentioned. Bloody incidents are not shown in the film, but they are verbally described when pertinent. Preview of film is advised.

RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS

- Social Studies, History
- Political Science
- Media Education
- International Relations and International Development
- Asian Studies
- World Issues
- Canada in the World Today
- Comparative Civilizations
- Development / Global Issues
- Media Violence
- Documentary Film
- Society and Technology
- Careers and Education
- Identity
- Leadership Development

ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guide accompanies the film *The Van Doos in Afghanistan* and promotes discussion of issues implied or raised in the film. The guide offers supplementary contextual information about Afghanistan and a glossary of terms used frequently in the film.

The section entitled “Discussion Questions and Suggested Activities” should encourage discussion and the development of appropriate lesson plans as needed. The “Resources” section gives paths to follow to learn more about Afghanistan and Canada’s involvement there. Relevant NFB films are listed to assist further study.



PREVIEWING

It is a good idea to preview a film before presenting it to secondary students and other audiences. It is recommended that you make note of discussion questions relevant to your viewers. You may want to note terms, concepts and historical references that might need clarification. There is some sensitive subject matter in the film—it is recommended that your audience be made aware of this before the screening. In your notes, you may want to mention ways to address these moments after screening.

GLOSSARY OF WORDS USED IN THE FILM

Afghan National Army (ANA) – the main branch of the Afghan army

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) – NATO forces are assisting in training the Afghan National Security Forces in order to gradually hand over all responsibility to the Afghans. Military, police and intelligence agencies are all part of the ANSF. Canada is a member of NATO.

Agrarian – agricultural

Bazaar – market

Cache – a hiding place, in this instance for armaments (military weapons and bomb-making equipment)

Drone – machine without a human on board, often an aerial vehicle

IED – an Improvised Explosive Device: homemade bomb, sometimes used roadside

Infantry – generally, land soldiers

Infrastructure – basic enabling works of a country: waterworks, roads, schools, etc.

ISAF – International Security Assistance Force: NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, established 2002

Malik – tribal chief

Nowruz – New Year

NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s fundamental purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means. NATO brings together 28 member countries from Europe and North America, consulting and cooperating in the fields of security and defence.

Platoon – usually two to four sections led by a lieutenant

Section – usually eight soldiers led by a corporal

ABOUT AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is a landlocked country bordering six other countries. Its population is 30,179,000 (as of 2012). About 23 percent of Afghanistan's total population is said to be urbanized in its four major cities, with the following population numbers: Kabul – 3.573 million (2009 estimate); Kandahar – 468,200; Herat – 397,456; Mazar-i-Sharif – 375,181 (2006 estimates). The country's official languages are Dari (50 percent of population) and Pashto (35 percent of population). There is a great deal of bilingualism in the country, and a variety of other languages are spoken, including Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen by 11 percent of the population) and many dialects. Eighty percent of the population consists of practising Sunni Muslims, while 19 percent are said to be Shia Muslims. Afghanistan's government consists of three branches: executive, legislative and judicial, headed by President Hamid Karzai, following 2009 elections.

Afghanistan is made up of a heterogeneous agglomeration of ethnicities over its 34 provinces. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and numerous minor ethnic groups (Nuristanis, Baluchis, Turkmens, etc.) all call Afghanistan their home. Afghanistan's diverse languages and ethnicities help us understand the complexity and range of the country's 5,000-year-old culture, which encompasses art, music, poetry and traditional cuisine.¹

Years of civil and international conflict in Afghanistan have resulted in hardships, poverty and human-rights violations for civilian Afghans. According to the United Nations Human Development Index, and using data trends from 1980 to the present, Afghanistan is ranked as the 15th least developed country in the world.² The life expectancy of its citizens is anywhere between 47 and 64 years. Afghanistan is also one of the poorest countries in the world, with an unemployment rate of 35 percent (according to the CIA World Fact Book) and with 42 percent of the population living on less than \$1 a day (according to a 2009 report).³

Afghanistan has been at war for more than 30 years. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to support a communist-led coup. The Soviets withdrew after 10 years of costly fighting against Afghan insurgents armed by the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, but Afghanistan sank into civil war. Amid the chaos that followed, the Taliban, a militant Islamist group based in Kandahar, had taken control of most of the country by 1998.

The terrorists responsible for the September 11, 2001, attacks were financed and trained by al-Qaeda, a terrorist organization then based largely in Afghanistan and headed by Osama Bin Laden. The Taliban sheltered Bin Laden in return for financial and military aid in Afghanistan's ongoing civil wars. The Taliban's refusal to turn over Bin Laden and his followers following the events of September 11 led to a United Nations-authorized international military intervention, beginning on October 7, 2001.⁴

ABOUT CANADA'S ROLE IN THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Canada is involved in Afghanistan as a result of the September 11 attacks and the international military invasion of Afghanistan. Starting in 2001, Canadian soldiers were engaged in peace-building efforts in Kabul, and, from 2005 to 2011, they engaged in heavy combat with insurgents in Kandahar as part of an international effort to support the government of Afghanistan. In July 2011, the Canadian government ended its five-year commitment to Kandahar province. That summer, Canadian soldiers handed over their volatile areas of responsibility to incoming American units. Beginning in March 2011, more than 900 Canadians were deployed on a new mission to train Afghan National Security Forces, operating in the relative safety of Kabul, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif. This mission continues, and is scheduled to end in 2014.⁵

In December 2001, Canada became a signatory of the Bonn Agreement.⁶ A group of Afghan officials and world leaders met in Bonn, Germany, under the watch of the United Nations to reaffirm the independence and sovereignty of Afghanistan. This agreement was intended to support stability and security in Afghanistan in the wake of the fall of the Taliban in 2001.



ABOUT THE VAN DOOS (THE ROYAL 22^E RÉGIMENT)

One of three permanent infantry regiments in the Canadian Army, the Royal 22^e Régiment is the only exclusively francophone regiment in the country. The regiment's precursor, the 22nd French Canadian Infantry Battalion, was formed in 1914. Until then, French Canadian soldiers had been dispersed throughout the Army's English-speaking battalions, and were under-represented in the military. The 22nd Battalion was disbanded in 1919 after the First World War, and the Royal 22^e Régiment was created on April 1, 1920. Soldiers serving in the regiment were nicknamed "Van Doos" by English speakers—an anglicized pronunciation of the French "vingt-deux" (22). The regiment would have a significant impact on the place of French in Canadian society, in particular with respect to the use of the French language in the workplace.

1 For a comprehensive look at some of these cultural traditions and artifacts, please visit afghan-web.com/culture/

2 See hdr.undp.org for the full list of countries and to access data and statistics.

3 See irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83417

4 [Canadian War Museum](http://CanadianWarMuseum.org) – *Afghanistan: A Glimpse of War – Turbulent History*

5 See the Canadian government *Report of Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan* at Afghanistan.gc.ca

6 Full text of the agreement may be found at: un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

ABOUT MEDIA LITERACY

Now, more than ever, it is essential for students and adults to think critically about the films and videos they view, usually daily. Media education is the learning process whereby students come to understand how a media message is constructed and how it builds its meanings. Visual imagery can be persuasive, partly because of its photographic images, which appear to represent reality. The camera, however, is not an impartial eye. Students need to reflect on pertinent critical questions about the images they see—in films and videos, as well as in advertising and online texts.

Media Literacy education in Canada incorporates the following key concepts. This version is from the Association for Media Literacy, Ontario (AML):

1. All media are constructions. The media present carefully crafted constructions that reflect many decisions and are the result of many determining factors.
2. The media construct versions of reality. Much of our view of reality is based on media messages that have been pre-constructed and have attitudes, interpretations and conclusions already built in.
3. Audiences negotiate meaning in media. Each of us finds or “negotiates” meaning according to individual factors.
4. Media messages have commercial implications. Most media production is a business, and so must make a profit. Questions of ownership and control are central.
5. Media messages contain ideological and value messages. All media products are advertising in some sense, proclaiming values and ways of life.
6. Media messages contain social and political implications. The media have great influence in politics and in forming social change.
7. Form and content are closely related in media messages. Each medium has its own grammar and codifies reality in its own particular way.
8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic form.



CRITICAL ANALYSIS

One way a group of 30 or so viewers can be helped to engage in critical analysis is through small group discussion, using a technique that has been called “jigsaw discussion.”⁷ Before the film is shown, the group of 30 is first divided into five groups of six. Six media-literacy-oriented questions are previously prepared by the educator. All six questions (topics) are given to each of the five groups, and each group member takes a question. She or he becomes the “expert” on that topic for their group. When the film is over, new groups are formed, consisting of the six “experts” on that group’s question, one from each original group. The learners discuss the topic of the group (for example, “What are the uses of music in the film?”). After 10 or 15 minutes, the learners return to their original groups, still the “experts” on a specific topic (in this case music) for their original group, to which they report on that aspect of the film, along with five other experts, each with a different distinct topic. The group will have learned about the construction of the whole film, and each learner will have had a particular responsibility to the group and gleaned insight from other groups. Whole-class discussion is not necessary.

TO GET STARTED, HERE ARE SOME POSSIBLE TOPICS/QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- ▶ For what purpose was this film made?
- ▶ In your opinion, does this film reinforce or dispel any stereotypes that you had previously held?
- ▶ How well do you think this film represents reality?
- ▶ In interviews, what is the camera angle used on the speakers? To what effect?
- ▶ How are short and long shots used? What is the effect of each?
- ▶ What is the mood of the film? Are technical elements used to create this?
- ▶ Were there issues concerning available light? How were these issues addressed in production?
- ▶ Was attention paid to the soundtrack (e.g., music)? What was the impact?
- ▶ In this documentary, were some elements edited out to exclude violence?
- ▶ What film techniques are used to construct the film’s setting(s)?
- ▶ What scene would you have produced differently from a technical standpoint?
- ▶ What are some challenges associated with using non-actors? What can be done to address these challenges?
- ▶ Do you think that it is important that films like this are created? Why or why not? Reflect on how this film is different from a story that you may have seen on the news about Canadian soldiers serving in Afghanistan.

7 For a discussion of this technique, see jigsaw.org and jigsaw.org/overview.htm.

WHOLE-CLASS DISCUSSION OF FILM CONTENT

To prepare for a class discussion, first divide a class of 30 into six groups. The educator assigns a different video clip from the film to each group. The clips can be found at the “War and Peace” playlist on the NFB website (nfb.ca/playlist/war-peace) (onf.ca/selection/guerre-et-paix).

The groups may be answering some identical questions, but they will each be examining the content of a unique clip.

HERE ARE SOME POSSIBLE TOPICS/QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

My Battalion

Does the Royal 22e Régiment appear diverse with respect to race and gender? In “My Battalion,” does it make sense that Émond-Pépin wanted to rejoin the infantry after suffering an injury? Was his argument convincing? Why?

The Patrol

How is the city portrayed in “The Patrol”? What is the mood? What are the children doing? What are some ways that tension and vigilance are depicted? Where might insurgents have hidden weapons? What must Captain Guillemette do on his daily patrols? Can we detect the Afghans’ range of attitudes toward the French Canadian soldiers? What is the function of poles in cemeteries? Are any of the Afghans insurgents?

Mission Accomplished

As portrayed in the clip “Mission Accomplished,” what are some of the advantages of a francophone unit in Afghanistan?

General Questions:

Do you now feel you know more about Canada’s role in Afghanistan as a result of having viewed this documentary? What else would you like to learn about Afghanistan? What questions do you have as a result of seeing this film?

Are there some elements you would add to the film? What did you think of the portraits of the soldiers? Who else would you like to have seen portrayed in the film? Did the absence of Afghan injuries make the film less realistic? What do you think was the film’s goal?

After 15 minutes has elapsed, a spokesperson from each group presents to the whole class a summary of the film clip based on their discussion of their questions.



SUGGESTED CLASSROOM, SCHOOL-WIDE AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Create a timeline. Afghanistan’s history is vast and dense, and this film only begins to scratch its surface. As a class, create a chronological timeline using a variety of different resources and media (images, sound, print, video, etc.). You could possibly divide different periods of Afghanistan’s history up and distribute them to smaller groups of students. This exercise will also help demonstrate how understanding history is a collaborative activity that must draw upon varied resources and the experiences of different people.

Make a large map and display it in a common area. Indicate the geographical locations of events involving Canada. Also, post pictures and news clippings involving Canadians and local people implicated in important events. Brainstorm ways to encourage participation.

Organize a lunchtime or evening panel event open to all. Invite local persons involved in Afghanistan, including persons from Afghanistan, to tell of their experience. Encourage students to find representatives from community organizations to be panelists. In addition, show *The Van Doos in Afghanistan* documentary to the audience. It is recommended that someone, possibly a member of the military, be on hand to answer questions. Information sheets could be provided. Students will need to work with school administration to secure a date and location, secure equipment, and create promotional materials and invitations for the event.



RESOURCES

BILINGUAL FRENCH-ENGLISH

Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM), International Operations:
forces.gc.ca

Canadian Government Report on Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan:
afghanistan.gc.ca – History, geography, lesson plans.

Canadian International Development Agency:

Afghanistan.acid-cida.gc.ca/ACDI
CIDA.nsf/eng/JUD-129153625-S6T

NFB Education Guide for *The Boxing Girls of Kabul*; contact the NFB for online availability.

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

ohchr.org

ENGLISH

Asia Society: Homeland Afghanistan:

afghanistan.asiasociety.org

Canada in Afghanistan (2001–2010) Instructions for Teachers:
historica-dominion.ca/drupal/sites/default/files/afghan_learningtools_en.pdf,
Grade 10–12 Social Studies and History. Historica-Dominion Institute.

Links and Resources, printable Teachers' Guide, from the PBS Frontline film
The Return of the Taliban:

pbs.org

New York Times' The Learning Network, *The Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: Teaching Resources and Essential Questions*:

nytimes.com

NATO:

nato.int

CBC:

cbc.ca/crossroads-afghanistan/story/2009/07/22/f-afghanistan-glance.html

National Post:

news.nationalpost.com/category/news/world/kandahar-journal/

Canadian War Museum:

warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/afghanistan/afghanistan03e.shtml

FRENCH

Canada en Afghanistan (2001–2010), des instructions pour les enseignant(e)s au Québec: Institut Historica-Dominion

cms.juntos.ca

Radio-Canada:

radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/en/ProfondeurTimeline/international/afghanistan/blogue

RELATED NFB FILMS

Afghan Chronicles (2007, 52 m 33 s)

The Boxing Girls of Kabul (2011, 72 m 53 s)

Good Morning Kandahar (2008, 50 m 51 s)

The Many Faces of Afghanistan (2009, 8 m)

The Sweetest Embrace: Return to Afghanistan (2008, 74 m 4 s)

CREDITS

This guide was produced by NFB Education. It was written by Nina Hopkins Butlin, former Educator and NFB Education Coordinator for online Memory Projects and currently Content Coordinator, Acquisitions Division, Library and Archives Canada. Significant research on Afghanistan used in this guide was done by Claudia Sicondolfo for the learning guide on *The Boxing Girls of Kabul* (dir. Ariel Nasr, 2011, 72 min 53 s).

