

Film Discussion Guide

INVISIBLE: Diaries of New York's Homeless Youth

Broadcast Film length: 24 minutes

Synopsis

INVISIBLE provides an inside look at five American youth who are homeless but fall outside standard definitions of homelessness. The film traces the causes of homelessness and their strategies for coping with the barriers that prevent them from moving forward with their lives.



Before Viewing the Film

- Do you know how many homeless youth are currently living in America?
- What are the differences between runaway youth, throw-away youth and homeless youth?
- What are some of the causes of youth homelessness?
- What happens to youth after becoming homeless?
- What happens to youth after they turn 18 years old and “age out” of the shelters?

Film Discussion Guide

Lyssette:

- Could Lyssette have continued to live at home with her parents?
- If she did, what would have been the consequences?
- Should Lyssette be considered a homeless youth even though she not lived in a homeless shelter?
- Why do you think Lyssette practiced yoga and meditation? How might it have helped her?
- What other kinds of interventions helped Lyssette to heal and move on with her life? Why do you think they worked?

Eleet:

- What do you think was the actual cause of Eleet’s homelessness?
- Should she have tried harder to stay with her family? Why or why not?
- What kinds of unique challenges does Eleet face as a transgender youth?
- Why do you think there is a high incidence of prostitution within the transgender community?
- What has become the biggest barrier to Eleet’s desire to start a career in fashion?
- What can our society do to remove barriers that have prevented Eleet from becoming employed in her field of choice?

Dorian:

- Describe some of the feelings that Dorian might have experienced after learning that his mother was dying from the AIDS virus?
- Typically, we think about AIDS orphans living in Africa. How many young people are orphaned due to the AIDS virus in America?
- What kinds of housing and financial support are available to young people who lose their parents (and extended family)? Is it enough?
- What kinds of support and interventions were most critical to helping Dorian get back on his feet?

Aaron

- How many young people (under 21) are incarcerated every year in America?
- Why did Aaron feel homeless?
- What kinds of support might help avoid the feeling of homelessness amongst young people released from prison?
- Should people like Aaron be given a second chance? Should they be able to find employment? Go to college?
- Do you think Aaron will ever leave behind his identity as an incarcerated youth? Why or why not?

Selassie

- Why do you think Selassie's mother chose her boyfriend over her son? What kinds of social influences enabled her to make this choice?
- Should parents be allowed to abandon their children?
- What kinds of consequences, if any, should we impose on parents who shirk their responsibility to care for their children?
- Did Selassie fit the picture of a homeless youth? Why or why not?
- Selassie worked full-time and yet could not afford housing. What must change in our society for this situation—of employed homelessness—to be resolved?

Over-arching Themes to Explore

- 1. The role of the social service system in helping to end homelessness.*
- 2. The history of homelessness in America and how the homeless support sector has evolved over time.*
- 3. The high incidence of homelessness amongst LGBTQ-identified youth.*
- 4. The high return rates (to prison) for incarcerated youth.*
- 5. The lack of integrative support (psychological, intellectual, social, spiritual) in the homeless system.*
- 6. The need to heal from trauma prior to starting a career or going to college.*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- In one sentence, what do you think the film INVISIBLE was trying to say?

- After viewing the film, reflect on the title, INVISIBLE? How many homeless persons would you estimate are invisible in your community?
- Have you ever met an “Invisible” homeless person? Were you surprised to learn that they lacked a stable housing situation?
- What are your reactions and impressions after seeing the film? What new questions does the film raise for you?
- If you became homeless tomorrow, what kinds of services would be most important to you?
- How does the current homeless system compare to your wishlist of services? What can individual citizens do you bridge that gap?
- This film introduces a nonprofit organization called the Reciprocity Foundation. What makes them different from the homeless shelters? Why do you think they are able to help so many homeless youth?
- How can the images and ideas, the critiques and questions raised in this film call us to change? What needs to change?
- Who else in your life, and in your community, should see this film? What can you do to share this film with others?

Supporting Educational Resources

- To view INVISIBLE online (free), visit <http://vimeo.com/17831809>
- To view the INVISIBLE webpage and supportive resources visit <http://www.thefledglingfund.org/media/systemic-poverty/invisible-diaries-of-new-yorks.html>
- A full description of the “Whole Person Approach” employed by the Reciprocity Foundation to help homeless youth is available for free download at <http://www.reciprocityfoundation.org>
- To download additional copies of this Film Discussion Guide visit, www.reciprocityfoundation.org/invisible