

D I S C U S S I O N G U I D E

C O M M U N I T Y

BEYOND THE BRICKS

A New Era of Education



Washington Koen Media Inc.

BEYONDTHEBRICKSPROJECT.COM



FROM THE PRODUCERS

Dear Viewer,

One of the segments that resonates most with me when I watch Beyond the Bricks is Erick Graham's epiphany at the end of the film when he says that he doesn't want to disappoint any more people or family members; that he is not going to "mess up" again. More than the traditional happy ending that Erick's statements provide is the realization that he is part of something bigger and that his actions and what he does with his life affects those around him. It is a very mature moment for this young man, a teenager at the time, considering the rough journey he had getting to that point in his life. Erick showed real strength in not only admitting that his choice to drop out of high school was a destructive one, but he also talked about the emotional pain he suffered from the actions taken by adults around him. That took courage. And it is a satisfying moment for me when I reflect about why I made this film.

I am a father. And Beyond the Bricks started out as a letter of sorts to my son. I asked him to define for me what it means to be a man. After many, many conversations and no concrete answers, I decided to make a film about manhood. Months of conversations and research continually led me back to education and our schools — the center of our communities. In the end, a film about manhood became a film about education. How we ended up with this powerful incarnation has everything to do with what young black men need to be successful and the role that communities play in ensuring that they can thrive. This is what makes Erick's evolution so satisfying. When he says that he will not fall off track again, we feel confident. Not only do we believe in him, but he has found educational organizations and institutions in his community that support his goal and have the resources to help him stay on track. Beyond the Bricks is our contribution.

We offer this documentary as an educational resource for all of those who want to promote positive academic outcomes for young black men and to help close the achievement gap they are facing in our nation's schools. Hopefully, people will watch the film and learn what it took — caring individuals, supportive organizations — to put the two subjects of the film on a forward path to graduating from high school. We need black men thriving if we want our schools, communities and our country to do the same. After all, when Erick says that he doesn't want to disappoint any longer, he is making a powerful declaration that he wants to be of value to those around him and ultimately to his community. He feels connected. And that can only be good for everyone.

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There was a very informative article published in *The New York Times* about a public school in New York City serving mostly poor and immigrant children whose teachers spent their late August days visiting the homes of each student as a way to make connections with their families and improve the students' chances for success. The article called to mind so many of the fundamental reasons why we created *Beyond the Bricks*. We believe the relationships between students and their communities, families, and teachers are crucial for their healthy academic life. To me, the importance of community cannot be stressed enough. I was raised by my community. My grandmother died when I was 11, and a neighborhood friend with five children already in her home took me in, raised me, gave me a place to grow and an environment to flourish.

Years later, as a filmmaker, I began to think about how I could help improve the quality of life in our communities, which seemed to be crumbling around us. Even though my producing partner, Derek Koen, and I had different inspirations for doing this film, we share a philosophy that schools and education are nonetheless a centerpiece of the community. So we imagined a media project that would not just highlight the problems in our current educational system, but would more heavily concentrate on solutions; *Beyond the Bricks* was the result.

We focused the project on young black males, because their achievement numbers are the most alarming. They are falling far behind their peers in school, and are risking the forfeiture of their future. The reasons are plenty, but again we are concentrating on fixes. We found two young men in Newark, New Jersey, who were successfully navigating all the potholes that too often we are told sink the educational aspirations of black youth. Through them, we found a powerful and revealing narrative for those committed to the educational gains of young black men and who are looking for ideas and ways to help students in their own communities. We are confident that this documentary will be a useful tool for teachers, students, administrators, communities and all of those who care about the future of our boys.

Erick and Shaquiel are two success stories. Producing *Beyond the Bricks* filled us with a great deal of joy and optimism. It is without a doubt a very hopeful film, and reflects how we feel about the prospects for improving the educational attainment of young black males and all of our students. We want the conversation to be positive and to move beyond what is missing and to move towards what is possible. We don't claim that *BTB* has the answers, but we want to be part of the solution. And we hope you do as well.

— Ouida Washington

USING THIS GUIDE



“ WHERE ARE THE VILLAGERS? ”

PASTOR THOMAS REDDICK,
RENAISSANCE CHURCH AND
RENAISSANCE COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT CENTER
BEYOND THE BRICKS

The Beyond the Bricks Project (BTBP) is a media and national community engagement initiative that promotes and encourages solutions for increased educational outcomes for school age Black males. The BTBP and the short documentary *Beyond the Bricks*, produced by Washington Koen Media, are a part of a movement to bring diverse community members together to begin to effectively address the consistently low performance and poor graduation rates of young Black males. BTBP has gathered support for this Initiative by traveling around the country screening the film in an effort to build a network of individuals, organizations and communities who are committed and seeking real change for our young people and the communities in which they live. BTBP believes that all the stakeholders; teachers, parents, communities, policymakers, administrators and students themselves can contribute and help to make a difference in the educational outcomes of all of our children but most especially young black males, who are experiencing a crisis level gap in achievement. Nationwide, 53% of black males are not graduating from high school on time, and in 36 US states they are the lowest performing students. There are many reasons for this, many problems to site, however if we do not first acknowledge that this is unacceptable and then begin to effectively seek solutions, and work together we will see this problem worsen. For us, the key is action! We want viewers to be inspired to help push for local and national solutions after hearing Shaquiel and Erick’s stories, and the advice of top experts in the field. We strongly encourage that partnership, self-responsibility, and accountability be part of any agenda for moving this effort forward, because it will take all of us working together to create an environment that supports every child to succeed.

INSIDE

- 1 From the Producers
- 2 Using this Guide
- 3 From the Filmmakers
- 4 Community Groups & Policymakers

How to Use This Guide

This discussion guide is designed for use by three groups; teachers of students in 9-12th grade, teacher training programs, and community groups/policymakers. There is a separate section for each.

The film was created as a galvanizing tool, and the guides as extensions of the tool. The guide’s content is intended to facilitate meaningful group discussions before and after viewing the documentary, and to inspire viewers to get involved in promoting successful school experiences, community engagement, and strengthening policies that will lead to better educational outcomes for young black males, which we believe will ultimately benefit all students. We end each section with suggestions for concrete steps participants can take towards these objectives. We encourage viewers to think beyond the ideas presented in these lists; each community is different,

with access to varying resources and institutions. Please keep this in mind when considering ideas and action plans for your own community. We offer the film and this guide as a framework for initiating evocative conversation. Our primary request is that each person and every group who screens the film get involved and find best ways to contribute in their own way.

Please connect with us on beyondthebrcksproject.com for more resources and ideas around collaboration and common goals. And contact us on how to participate in our on-going national and international research around teacher/school and community support of school age black males.

USING THIS GUIDE

General Discussion

Beyond the Bricks stands in opposition to the popular notion that Black students in urban schools, particularly young Black men, resist education and that rejection of learning is an African-American cultural feature. Shaquiel and Erick fight through a very rough terrain of misfortune and despair, but push forward after initial failure and get back on track to finishing school. The discussion for each section addresses, as it pertains to each group, this dilemma of black male ambition in an environment soaked with stereotypical views that young black men don't care and are in fact outsiders in the school setting.

Before Viewing

"When you look at only the worse cases; when you look at the black males who are doing very poorly in school and who are engaging in serious disruptive behaviors; when that's what's driving the policies for the entire group, then you lose a lot of the normal black male kids who may not be the highest achieving individuals but at the core they're good and need very basic things to succeed." The questions presented in this section are designed to lay the table for viewing. Participants are queried about their views about black males and the prevalence of stereotypes. The education crisis of young black males is highlighted just enough to give attendees a context for viewing. *BTB* is not meant to be a passive experience. The documentary's purpose is to encourage as many people as possible to take thorough consideration of their own roles as it pertains to the education of young black males and to then take concerted action to ensure increased positive outcomes for these students.

After Viewing

Beyond the Bricks is unique in urban school cinema. This documentary is not a showcase for a heroic teacher or a platform for school reform. The young men speak for themselves and pull back the curtain on what might otherwise be a story of black male truancy and high school dropout that, unfortunately, has come to be considered ordinary. Questions in this section are structured to encourage constructive and meaningful dialog that propels each group to action. Some questions are intended to measure if ways of thinking about black male students and their struggle to succeed in school have been affected after viewing the film.

Action Items

Whether or not minds are changed with respect to black male students and schools, *BTB* hopes that groups will nonetheless rally around them. In this section we offer some next steps, a list of actionable items that viewers can take to help promote and encourage solutions to the educational crisis of young black males, and to encourage viewers to come up with their own lists for actions they and their communities can take.

Please visit beyondthebricksproject.com for more information and to become a part of the national community working to improve our schools and the educational achievement of young black males.



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ADVICE THAT CAN
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ALICE WALKER ON THE MILLION
MAN MARCH, *ANYTHING WE LOVE
CAN BE SAVED*

COMMUNITY GROUPS & POLICYMAKERS



“YOU CAN’T JUST SAY KIDS ARE BAD AT FIRST. THERE’S NORMALLY SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS TO THEM THAT TURNS THEM INTO THAT TYPE OF PERSON THAT BECOMES, LIKE, ‘I JUST DON’T CARE ABOUT NOBODY.’”

ERICK GRAHAM
BEYOND THE BRICKS

General Discussion

The scholars and advocates in *Beyond the Bricks* remind us that quality of life is a determinative factor in the ability of young black men to achieve success in school. A well-rounded education for our young people requires more than what is offered in school. Education must continue at home and in our neighborhoods. The active participation of the community is vital if we are going to close the education achievement gap for young black men.

NOTE: Collaboration is key! Please invite a variety of community members; parents, community organizations, city council members, policy advocates, business owners, employers: The goal is to better understand how these groups can better work together.

SCREEN FILM (31 minute Run Time)

Before Viewing

- What is the High School graduation rate for black males in your state, city? (See Schott Report)
- Rate the quality of life for young black men in your community? What are the resources available and necessary for youth in your city, neighborhoods?
- Why are less than half of young black men in the U.S. graduating from High School?

After Viewing

- What does “community” mean to you?
- What role does the community play in the education of its youth?
- Reverend Al Sharpton says that the churches need to become the “male image.” What does he mean? And why is it necessary?
- Pastor Thomas Reddick mentions the adage “It takes a village to raise a child.” Who are the villagers? How can the villages work together?
- Reverend Sharpton says the men in the community have to step up; to whom is he referring; fathers, clergymen, business owners? Who is responsible for challenging these men to step up? What are some ways that men can step up?
- What positive role can each community member play in the lives of young people?
- What are some of the factors that keep black fathers absent from their communities? How can this be addressed?
- Dr. Toldson says that the community needs to be more “civically engaged.” What does he mean? How can this help to improve the educational prospects of young black men?
- What are some of the public policy issues (both good and bad) in your community affecting youth and their families?
- What does it mean to be a citizen?

Outcomes: Community members will gain an understanding of what hurts young black males’ chances of succeeding in school, but more importantly, what works to help them achieve. Community members should identify the resources available, which will provide for a better understanding of what is missing. Community members should be equipped with new knowledge and ideas about how to help solve educational deficiencies of young black males in their communities.

COMMUNITY GROUPS & POLICYMAKERS



“
I THINK I AM
A SMART KID.”

SHAQUIEL INGRAM
BEYOND THE BRICKS

Action Items

- Identify Black male role models in your community and enlist them to engage with black male students.
 - Contact your local church and volunteer to tutor students; take boys on field trips; teach a skill.
 - Promote literacy. Start a book club for young black males. Begin with material that excites them — then progress from that point.
 - Find, help to build, or volunteer a space for young black males to organize, meet and talk freely about what is going on in their lives; a church, library anteroom, backyard, living room, or kitchen will do. Be sure to identify a committed leader for this activity.
 - Identify your local elected officials and local policy groups and check out upcoming items on their agendas that affect your community. Work with both entities to make changes in your community that will have a positive impact on young black males and their families. For example, advocate for the availability of fresh produce, challenge the presence of liquor stores near schools, and support extended library hours.
 - Provide opportunities for young black males to become involved in community service and leadership: Start a Community Service Initiative.
 - Organize community clean up days where young black males can contribute to beautifying their neighborhoods.
 - Organize sports activities and teams where critical thinking skills are developed.
 - Organize opportunities where etiquette, and gentleman behavior is emphasized.
 - Organize game nights, and supervised dances where young people can congregate in a controlled environment for fun.
- Start a fathers’ group. If there is already a fathers’ group in your community, fill its ranks.
 - Contact your local school or big brothers’ organization and volunteer time for a young black male.
 - Mentor a young black male in your community. Organizations offering mentoring services and guidance: **100blackmen.org**, 100 Black Men, Concerned Black Men Mentoring Initiatives, **caresmentoring.org**, National Cares Mentoring Movement, **cbmnational.org/programs/Capital-City-Cares-Mentoring**, 1-888-395-7816.
 - Please visit **beyondthebricksproject.com** for more information on initiatives for young black males and to become a part of the national community working to improve our schools and the educational achievement of young black males.

Written by Charisse Waugh, Ouida Washington and Derek Koen

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S T U D E N T S

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USING THIS GUIDE



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UNDERSTAND,
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INVISIBLE MAN, *INVISIBLE MAN*,
RALPH ELLISON

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- 3 From the Film
- 4 High School Teachers & Students, Grade 9 — 12

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General Discussion

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Before Viewing

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ERICK GRAHAM
BEYOND THE BRICKS

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS & STUDENTS

GRADES 9-12

General Discussion

So despite the obstacle that a problematic personal life presented to both Shaquiel's and Erick's ability to stay in school, neither teen received the support they needed and fell off track. We acknowledge that young black men's needs are not being fully met in school, and as Rev. Al Sharpton says in the film, are handicapped by policies that target them. This discussion centers around unconscious beliefs held by Teachers and Students. This is an opportunity to have a discussion about the very difficult issues of race and equity. The discussion should be drawn out over several class meetings to allow for introspection and depth in the dialog. The goal is for students and teachers to gain a better understanding of themselves and each other.

SCREEN FILM (31 minute Run Time)

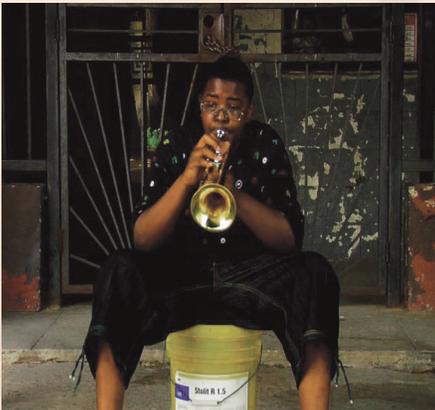
Before Viewing (Questions for Students)

- Do you believe that some one's race matters when it comes to education?
- Do you think that most young black men think education is important? Why? Why Not?
- What is the main reason that some young black men don't finish high school?
- Do you feel that most teachers want black males to succeed in school?

After Viewing

(Questions for Students)

- What did the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decide? Do you think it has accomplished its goal?
- In the documentary *Dr. Ivory Toldson* says that because policy makers focus on the "worse cases," normal black male kids are ignored. What is a "normal" black male youth?
- Dr. Pedro Noguera says the image of young black males is associated with violence. Do you think that's true? Why?
- What, if anything, surprised you about Shaquiel? Erick? Were they who you expected them to be?
- Who was the most important person in helping Shaquiel/Erick get back on track?
- Erick said that he wasn't "going by the knowledge that he had" but was going by the image that others had of him. What image do you think people had of Erick? Do you ever feel the need to live up to a certain image? How does it affect the ability to get help or perform well in school?
- Dr. Pedro Noguera points out that Black males are overrepresented in categories representing failure, and no one seems bothered by this. If true, why do you think no one seems bothered? Do you think failure by black men is normal?
- How do you think others view young black males?
- Who is the most important person in a young black man's life?
- Erick says that he was "young and dumb" when he gave up on school. Do you think he was completely to blame for falling so far behind in school that he dropped out? What are the areas of your own life for which you are completely responsible?



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SHAQUIEL INGRAM
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HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS & STUDENTS

GRADES 9-12



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**I SAW THE DUDES
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DUAL STORY THAT
EVERYBODY HAS.**”

LUPE FIASCO, RAP ARTIST,
THORNTON TOWNSHIP HIGH
SCHOOL (CHICAGO)
CHESS TEAM ALUMNI

- Erick and Shaquiel made terrific progress despite huge obstacles in their way. Give us an example of a time when you successfully hurdled an obstacle to reach a goal or to achieve something that you thought you couldn't accomplish? How can this kind of determination and personal responsibility be applied to achieve success in school for students who may not have all the resources that they need?
- Why did Shaquiel stop going to school? Do you think it is a legitimate reason? Why did Erick decide to get his diploma? Shaquiel lists some incentives that might motivate students to do well: homework passes, movie passes, field trips, etc. Erick says school should be more interesting. Do you think incentives like the one Shaquiel mentioned are a good idea? What do you think would help young black men stay in school? What do you think makes any student remain engaged in school?

Outcomes: Teachers and students will be more informed about the variables that negatively impact the educational attainment of young black males as well as the practices that work to help them succeed. Both teachers and students should be better able to contribute new ideas to helping themselves and each other.

Action Items (for Students and Teachers)

- Enlist Black male role models to visit class and engage with students. Something as routine as a career day is valuable.
- Begin developing a life plan with black male students as an ongoing project. (Other students are free to participate as well!) (Example of entries: What are their immediate needs? What are their goals — and how will they get there? What do they want most in life? What do they need to stay on track?)
- Work with your principal to create a space in the school where young black males can give commentary on their lives and talk freely about their personal state of affairs. Name your group and social network it with other groups on the *BTB* website.
- Create support groups of peers for young black males.
- Introduce or strengthen culturally relevant activities — field trips, arts, sports.
- Commit to improving literacy by thinking about new ways to get young black males engaged in reading and writing. Involve all students by thinking beyond traditional texts and incorporating texts with black male characters at the center, opening new ground for the entire class and introducing works that they can all enjoy. Also think about new ways to approach literacy: media literacy, information literacy, social literacy, and physical literacy.

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T E A C H E R S

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FROM THE PRODUCERS

Dear Viewer,

One of the segments that resonates most with me when I watch Beyond the Bricks is Erick Graham's epiphany at the end of the film when he says that he doesn't want to disappoint any more people or family members; that he is not going to "mess up" again. More than the traditional happy ending that Erick's statements provide is the realization that he is part of something bigger and that his actions and what he does with his life affects those around him. It is a very mature moment for this young man, a teenager at the time, considering the rough journey he had getting to that point in his life. Erick showed real strength in not only admitting that his choice to drop out of high school was a destructive one, but he also talked about the emotional pain he suffered from the actions taken by adults around him. That took courage. And it is a satisfying moment for me when I reflect about why I made this film.

I am a father. And Beyond the Bricks started out as a letter of sorts to my son. I asked him to define for me what it means to be a man. After many, many conversations and no concrete answers, I decided to make a film about manhood. Months of conversations and research continually led me back to education and our schools — the center of our communities. In the end, a film about manhood became a film about education. How we ended up with this powerful incarnation has everything to do with what young black men need to be successful and the role that communities play in ensuring that they can thrive. This is what makes Erick's evolution so satisfying. When he says that he will not fall off track again, we feel confident. Not only do we believe in him, but he has found educational organizations and institutions in his community that support his goal and have the resources to help him stay on track. Beyond the Bricks is our contribution.

We offer this documentary as an educational resource for all of those who want to promote positive academic outcomes for young black men and to help close the achievement gap they are facing in our nation's schools. Hopefully, people will watch the film and learn what it took — caring individuals, supportive organizations — to put the two subjects of the film on a forward path to graduating from high school. We need black men thriving if we want our schools, communities and our country to do the same. After all, when Erick says that he doesn't want to disappoint any longer, he is making a powerful declaration that he wants to be of value to those around him and ultimately to his community. He feels connected. And that can only be good for everyone.

— Derek Koen

Dear Viewer,

There was a very informative article published in *The New York Times* about a public school in New York City serving mostly poor and immigrant children whose teachers spent their late August days visiting the homes of each student as a way to make connections with their families and improve the students' chances for success. The article called to mind so many of the fundamental reasons why we created *Beyond the Bricks*. We believe the relationships between students and their communities, families, and teachers are crucial for their healthy academic life. To me, the importance of community cannot be stressed enough. I was raised by my community. My grandmother died when I was 11, and a neighborhood friend with five children already in her home took me in, raised me, gave me a place to grow and an environment to flourish.

Years later, as a filmmaker, I began to think about how I could help improve the quality of life in our communities, which seemed to be crumbling around us. Even though my producing partner, Derek Koen, and I had different inspirations for doing this film, we share a philosophy that schools and education are nonetheless a centerpiece of the community. So we imagined a media project that would not just highlight the problems in our current educational system, but would more heavily concentrate on solutions; *Beyond the Bricks* was the result.

We focused the project on young black males, because their achievement numbers are the most alarming. They are falling far behind their peers in school, and are risking the forfeiture of their future. The reasons are plenty, but again we are concentrating on fixes. We found two young men in Newark, New Jersey, who were successfully navigating all the potholes that too often we are told sink the educational aspirations of black youth. Through them, we found a powerful and revealing narrative for those committed to the educational gains of young black men and who are looking for ideas and ways to help students in their own communities. We are confident that this documentary will be a useful tool for teachers, students, administrators, communities and all of those who care about the future of our boys.

Erick and Shaquiel are two success stories. Producing *Beyond the Bricks* filled us with a great deal of joy and optimism. It is without a doubt a very hopeful film, and reflects how we feel about the prospects for improving the educational attainment of young black males and all of our students. We want the conversation to be positive and to move beyond what is missing and to move towards what is possible. We don't claim that *BTB* has the answers, but we want to be part of the solution. And we hope you do as well.

— Ouida Washington

USING THIS GUIDE



“
YOU’VE BEEN
TAUGHT THAT
YOU’RE INFERIOR
AND SO YOU ACT
AS THOUGH YOU
ARE INFERIOR.”

JAMES BALDWIN, A RAP ON RACE

The Beyond the Bricks Project (BTBP) is a media and national community engagement initiative that promotes and encourages solutions for increased educational outcomes for school age Black males. The BTBP and the short documentary *Beyond the Bricks*, produced by Washington Koen Media, are a part of a movement to bring diverse community members together to begin to effectively address the consistently low performance and poor graduation rates of young Black males. BTBP has gathered support for this Initiative by traveling around the country screening the film in an effort to build a network of individuals, organizations and communities who are committed and seeking real change for our young people and the communities in which they live. *BTB* believes that all the stakeholders; teachers, parents, communities, policymakers, administrators and students themselves can contribute and help to make a difference in the educational outcomes of all of our children but most especially young black males, who are experiencing a crisis level gap in achievement. Nationwide, 53% of black males are not graduating from high school on time, and in 36 US states they are the lowest performing students. There are many reasons for this, many problems to site, however if we do not first acknowledge that this is unacceptable and then begin to effectively seek solutions, and work together we will see this problem worsen. For us, the key is action! We want viewers to be inspired to help push for local and national solutions after hearing Shaquiel and Erick’s stories, and the advice of top experts in the field. We strongly encourage that partnership, self-responsibility, and accountability be part of any agenda for moving this effort forward, because it will take all of us working together to create an environment that supports every child to succeed.

INSIDE

- 1 From the Producers
- 2 Using this Guide
- 3
- 4 Teacher Training Programs

How to Use This Guide

This discussion guide is designed for use by three groups; teachers of students in 9-12th grade, teacher training programs, and community groups/policymakers. There is a separate section for each.

The film was created as a galvanizing tool, and the guides as extensions of the tool. The guide’s content is intended to facilitate meaningful group discussions before and after viewing the documentary, and to inspire viewers to get involved in promoting successful school experiences, community engagement, and strengthening policies that will lead to better educational outcomes for young black males, which we believe will ultimately benefit all students. We end each section with suggestions for concrete steps participants can take towards these objectives. We encourage viewers to think beyond the ideas presented in these lists; each community is different,

with access to varying resources and institutions. Please keep this in mind when considering ideas and action plans for your own community. We offer the film and this guide as a framework for initiating evocative conversation. Our primary request is that each person and every group who screens the film get involved and find best ways to contribute in their own way.

Please connect with us on **beyondthebrcksproject.com** for more resources and ideas around collaboration and common goals. And contact us on how to participate in our on-going national and international research around teacher/school and community support of school age black males.

USING THIS GUIDE

General Discussion

Beyond the Bricks stands in opposition to the popular notion that Black students in urban schools, particularly young Black men, resist education and that rejection of learning is an African-American cultural feature. Shaquiel and Erick fight through a very rough terrain of misfortune and despair, but push forward after initial failure and get back on track to finishing school. The discussion for each section addresses, as it pertains to each group, this dilemma of black male ambition in an environment soaked with stereotypical views that young black men don't care and are in fact outsiders in the school setting.

Before Viewing

“When you look at only the worse cases; when you look at the black males who are doing very poorly in school and who are engaging in serious disruptive behaviors; when that’s what’s driving the policies for the entire group, then you lose a lot of the normal black male kids who may not be the highest achieving individuals but at the core they’re good and need very basic things to succeed.” The questions presented in this section are designed to lay the table for viewing. Participants are queried about their views about black males and the prevalence of stereotypes. The education crisis of young black males is highlighted just enough to give attendees a context for viewing. *BTB* is not meant to be a passive experience. The documentary’s purpose is to encourage as many people as possible to take thorough consideration of their own roles as it pertains to the education of young black males and to then take concerted action to ensure increased positive outcomes for these students.

After Viewing

Beyond the Bricks is unique in urban school cinema. This documentary is not a showcase for a heroic teacher or a platform for school reform. The young men speak for themselves and pull back the curtain on what might otherwise be a story of black male truancy and high school dropout that, unfortunately, has come to be considered ordinary. Questions in this section are structured to encourage constructive and meaningful dialog that propels each group to action. Some questions are intended to measure if ways of thinking about black male students and their struggle to succeed in school have been affected after viewing the film.

Action Items

Whether or not minds are changed with respect to black male students and schools, *BTB* hopes that groups will nonetheless rally around them. In this section we offer some next steps, a list of actionable items that viewers can take to help promote and encourage solutions to the educational crisis of young black males, and to encourage viewers to come up with their own lists for actions they and their communities can take.

Please visit beyondthebricksproject.com for more information and to become a part of the national community working to improve our schools and the educational achievement of young black males.



“
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TO BE ME; AN
INDIVIDUAL.
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BE THE NORM;
TRYING TO DO
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WHERE I CAN
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A GOOD WAY,
INSTEAD OF IN A
BAD WAY.”

SHAQUIEL INGRAM
BEYOND THE BRICKS

TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

General Discussion

Berkeley sociologist Dr. Samuel R. Lucas' findings show that the assumption that blacks prefer failure to upward mobility is indeed held by many teachers; approximately one-third of them believe Blacks' stubborn socioeconomic disadvantages exist because Blacks don't have the motivation to improve their lives. (Lucas, 2008)

This section for teachers is about self-reflection and seeks to encourage new ideas and solutions for teachers to contemplate as they shepherd young black males through school. The two subjects in *BTB* challenge some of the stereotypes universally held about black boys. Our questions attempt to piggyback on that; and to hopefully assist teachers who are interested and committed to finding ways to effectively serve their young black male charges by asking them to honestly look at their own personal views and to become more aware of the challenges that these students face inside and outside of the classroom.

SCREEN FILM (31 minute Run Time)

Before Viewing

- Why do you think that less than half of black men are graduating from high school?
- Are young black males stereotyped? What are some of the stereotypes?

After Viewing

- Shaquiel says that he is trying not to be “the norm.” To what “norm” is he referring? Are young black males burdened with the expectation of failure?
- After seeing *BTB*, is there anything you might do differently to consider the emotional state of students? Is it possible to do this while tending to the needs of other students in a full classroom? Should it be the teacher's responsibility? If not, whose?
- Are there any internal structures that can be built to help teachers address or to help teachers recognize issues that young black males may be dealing with outside the classroom?
- What are some of the ways we can begin to create a culture inside our schools that responds to the needs of young black males?
- Erick says that most young black males get upset when they don't know something. How can you help these students channel this into a positive emotion and constructive behavior?
- How has *BTB* affected your thinking about young black male students?
- Dr. John Jackson says that there is no measureable difference among races of people that can account for the achievement gap in educational attainment for young black men. He says the task is to identify the social policies and practices that are producing these results. Can we name some (zero tolerance policies, unnecessary dress codes, e.g.)
- With a partner, list all of the negative words, phrases, ideas you have heard about young black men. In a second column list positives words, phrases, and ideas you have heard associated with young black men. Which list is longer? How can you work to increase the “positive” list?



“
I WASN'T GOING BY
THE KNOWLEDGE
THAT I HAD. I WAS
GOING BY WHAT
OTHER PEOPLE
SAW ME AS.”

ERICK GRAHAM
BEYOND THE BRICKS

TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS



“AN IMPORTANT STEP TOWARD ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE OF BLACK YOUTH IS TO DEAL WITH THE REALITY THAT SOME TEACHERS DO NOT BELIEVE IN BLACK STUDENTS; THEY STEREOTYPE AND ATTEMPT TO AVOID THEM.”

ANGEL KIDS DON'T WANT TO FAIL (2011)

- What do students need in order to be successful both inside and outside of the classroom? Are young black men needs different?
- Should cultural competency be a part of the curriculum for pre-service and in-service teachers? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Do teachers need support from school administration in order to find ways to practice cultural competency inside the classroom?

Outcome Statement: After viewing the 30-minute documentary and subsequently engaging in discussion, pre-service teachers will have the opportunity to discuss approaches and methodologies that can benefit pre-service teachers before they enter the classroom. In-service Teachers will have an opportunity to address some of the issues they face in the classroom and receive support and advice from others in their field.

Action Items

- Advocate for the elimination or easing of the zero tolerance policies that disproportionately affect young black male students and interrupt their schooling.
- Commit to paying attention to the entire person: A student may suddenly show up to class angry and belligerent, for example. Was he stopped and frisked by police on his way to school? Young black males suffer this indignity and infringement on their constitutional rights daily. They bring this reality into the classroom.
- Re-exam your own classroom rules and disciplinary policies to determine if they unintentionally and/or disproportionately target black males, e.g., sanctions on certain types of clothing that when violated removes a student from class and learning.
- Advocate for diversity among teaching and professional staff in your school.
- Introduce *Beyond the Bricks* to fellow teachers.
- Seek training to understand external pressures that black male students face and devise ways to help them to counter negative external pressures.
- Make sure that black male students know you expect them to excel not fail. List some of the ways that a teacher can do this.
- Explore ways to focus on building positive relationships with black males in your classrooms and/or enhancing existing ones.

Written by Charisse Waugh, Ouida Washington and Derek Koen