**Viewing *Stories We Tell***

**LEQ: How can we determine the truth when storytellers manipulate the way the story is told?**

In order to answer the LEQ question, we must first examine HOW storytellers manipulate perspective and organization as they tell their tale. As you view this film, pay attention to how characters are viewed by other people and how the filmmaker shows them. Pay attention to who knew what and when they knew it.

As you view the film, keep in mind that it is rated PG-13. There are a couple instances of profanity, but honestly, you’ve heard worse in the hallways and at lunch. There are also a couple references to sex, but you have to examine the context of the reference and WHY the filmmaker would keep those references in the film. They are just REFERENCES – you don’t get to see anything. The movie has received a 95% rating on *Rotten Tomatoes* which indicates that people like this film.

**Let’s begin by examining a couple of ideas from the film:**

“The only people who know the truth are the ones who experienced it.”

“A truth like that opens up, [it] kind of [brings out] other truths and when you discover truths like that, how you think about truths within that are concealed changes”

“You know it’s a delusion. It’s all done with mirrors they used to tell me. The mirrors in which you can see yourself clearly. The mirrors through which you can see what you really look like.”

The film explores perspectives surrounding an event. How it is broken down looks like the following illustration. At the center of the film is Sarah Polley’s mother, Diane who has passed and cannot give her eye witness account.

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| --- |
| You have the surrounding circle of players who were affected tangentially.  You have the principal players to the event.  People all have different narratives shaped by their relationships to those who told them about the event, by the event, and by their loyalties.  You have the next layer of players who were told or heard of events by the principal players. |

In this inspired, genre-twisting new film, Oscar®-nominated writer/director Sarah Polley… is both filmmaker and detective as she investigates the secrets kept by a family of storytellers. She playfully interviews and interrogates a cast of characters of varying reliability, eliciting refreshingly candid, yet mostly contradictory, answers to the same questions. As each relates their version of the family mythology, present-day recollections shift into nostalgia-tinged glimpses of their mother, who departed too soon, leaving a trail of unanswered questions.

Polley unravels the paradoxes to reveal the essence of family: always complicated, warmly messy and fiercely loving. *Stories We Tell* explores the elusive nature of truth and memory, but at its core is a deeply personal film about how our narratives shape and define us as individuals and families, all interconnecting to paint a profound, funny and poignant picture of the larger human story. - Written by The National Film Board of Canada

Principal Characters

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Who? | How portrayed throughout film. | Perspective given on the event |
| Diane Polley |  | ? |
| Michael Polley |  |  |
| Harry Gulkin |  |  |

People were affected tangentially

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Who? | How portrayed throughout film. | Perspective given on the event |
| Sarah Polley |  |  |
| Mark Polley |  |  |
| Joanna Polley |  |  |
| Susy Buchan |  |  |
| John Buchan |  |  |
| Cathy Gulkin |  |  |

People who heard or were told of the events by principle players

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Who? | How portrayed throughout film. | Perspective given on the event |
| Geoff Bowes |  |  |
| Diedre Bowen |  |  |
| Tom Butler |  |  |
| Anne Tait |  |  |

What is the truth of what happened? What evidence presented in the film lets you know this?

How does Sarah Polley, as a filmmaker and not a character, make us question the truth?

Write your response on a separate piece of paper. Use the space below to brainstorm and organize. You will only earn credit for your response if you follow directions and answer the question.

**LEQ response: How can we determine the truth when storytellers manipulate the way the story is told? Respond using *Stories We Tell* as your evidence and examples.**