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I UNDERSTANDING THE FILM

INFORMATION

Title: Adama and the World of Breathes  
Year: 2015  
Country: France  
Duration: 82 minutes  
Cinematic release: October 21, 2015  
A film by: Simon Rouby  
Original story: Julien Lilti  
Adaptations and script: Julien Lilti et Simon Rouby  
Voice actors: Azize Diabate (ADAMA), Pascal Nzoni (ABDOU), Oxmo Puccino (DJO), Jack Mba (SAMBA)
Simon Rouby, born in 1980, started with the aerosol before flirting with other mediums like sculpture and paint. He studied film in Gobelins in Paris and then in Calarts, LA. Many of his full-length films have been chosen for international film festivals like Cannes, Clermont, San Diego, Bucharest, Ottawa, and Taiwan.

Before 2002, Julien Lilti lived in France and Burkina Faso. After having completed a Master’s Degree in documentary film in 2003, he worked for many years as a video journalist at Télé/Canal+ and as cameraman for documentaries. He quit journalism for film in 2007 followed by his studies in the European Conservatory for Audiovisual Writing (CEEA). Since then, he writes for television and film. Known for HIPPOCRATE by Thomas Lilti, for which he won a Césars award in 2015.
“Adama invites you to see a story you once you thought you knew through new eyes”
Julien Lilti and Simon Rouby.

SYNOPSIS

Adama, 12 years old, lives in an isolated village in West Africa. Beyond the cliffs of his village lies the “World of Breathes”. When Samba, his older brother, suddenly leaves their village, Adama decides to leave the village in search of him. Accompanied by Abdou, a terribly lucid griot (or storyteller), and later by Maximin, a street kid and his own negative Doppelganger, they find themselves on a quest that will take him across the ocean and as far as the confines of a great war in Europe. Pushed by his own desperation and the poetry of his childhood, Adama goes to Hell and back to free his brother with great success.
THE ADAMA PROJECT

For the 80th anniversary of the “victory” of 1918, the French Republic and their president, Jacques Chirac, dedicated the Legion of Honor to all the survivors of the First World War.


A couple of weeks later, Julien Lilti, author of the film, meets in Burkina Faso, Abdoulaye N'Diaye’s grandson. This prominent elder always had difficulty in telling his story until his last moments when he told Lilti the story of his life. The story of a man forced out of his village to fight in a strange world alongside and against men whom he had never known about before.

This war was a crucial episode in Afro-European relationships. While traveling to France as indigenous soldiers, the “colonized” found themselves as observers, explorers, and ethnologists that learned to see the world through new eyes. Even if the First World War and its trenches were one of the worst episodes of contemporary barbarism, it was concurrently a paramount crucible when, for the first time in history, all the peoples of the world met. Although botched together, something burgeoned that remains a vital part of our day to day.
THE EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Between Africa and Europe, between magic and realism, between story and history: the film is inspired by the true story of the Senegalese sharpshooters who fought in the French ranks during the First World War but is unraveled by its side of fiction to tell the story of Adama, a 12-year-old African boy who has gone to look for his older brother in the trenches of Verdun, France.

By reversing the stereotyped perspective (here "the Other" is white and the continent to be explored is Europe), the film by Simon Rouby invites us to take a fresh look at our history, and universal tale about what connects us, through space and time.

Through the power and richness of its narrative, its formal inventiveness, the film delivers us a message of peace and tolerance, Adama, is a prime pedagogical medium because of its trans-versatility.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The idea of using troops from colonies in Europe dates back to the 18th Century. But it takes shape in the years preceding the First World War. For the French Empire, it is a way to compensate the numerical inferiority of its population compared to that of Germany.

Beginning 1914, two battalions of African combatants, known as “Senegalese Sharpshooters”
that designated the whole ensemble of black soldiers, regardless their origins, engaged on the fronts. However, from October 1915, when major drafting took place, often under difficult conditions, specifically in the west of the Haute-Volta, where a significant revolt took place. These drafts forged thirty-one Senegalese battalions on the French Front. Although the military imagery attributed to the colonial troops, notably the Senegalese troops, showed exceptional military virtues, it described them as lyrical and caricature-like, often penned with racist connotations that came with little shock from readers.

Redoubtable in hand-to-hand combat
The Senegalese Sharpshooters often “cleaned” the trenches taken by the enemy. Moreover, this only further proved the mixed feelings towards the "Black Force," where admiration for the courage of the Africans was met with terror and racist prejudices. For many French metropolitans, who had only a confused idea of the colonies, the arrival of the Senegalese Sharpshooters was an opportunity to discover the Africans.

The adaptation process for African recruits to the military life was often difficult. Disturbed by a new way of life, affected by the climate, and often new diseases: pulmonary infections, frostbite, measles, not to
mention the horror of war. However, living conditions for the Senegalese Sharpshooter would change over time. The army tried to compensate for the disorientation and change of scenery by regrouping the fighters by ethnic group, and assuring their immediate supervision by traditional chiefs. The shooters were also allowed to retain their religions. Efforts were made, especially since 1917, to adapt food to their habits. Respected by “poilus,” a French West-African term that refers to French—similar to the term “Sammies” or “Doughboys” in American-English, or in British-English, “the Tommies”—the Sharpshooters were often surprised by their pleasant reception.

Regardless the present racial prejudices, infantile representations of the black man, the Senegalese Sharpshooters felt they were better regarding by white metropolitans than Africans. The participation of the colonies in the war effort thus constituted an important stage in the evolution of relations between the colonized and the colonizers. However, it would take another fifty years, and another international conflict, for a decolonization process to be initiated in Sub-Saharan Africa.
II IN CLASS DISCUSSION: BEFORE THE FILM

These pedagogic activities were prepared for students between the ages of 13 and 15 years of age in order to prepare them for the screening of the film in its entirety. The lesson plan can be done in the mother tongue or in French per the students’ linguistic profiles and the foreign language teacher’s objectives. The target level varies according to the proposed activities in the lesson plan.

In this lesson plan, language skills are abbreviated as followed:

- WC: Written comprehension
- OC: Oral comprehension
- OP: Oral production
- WP: Written production
- OI: Oral interaction
STUDENT WORKSHEET 1: DISCOVERING THE FILM

Level A2/B1

1) The poster under a magnifying glass

In groups of two, closely describe the elements present in the poster shown on the table below. In your opinion, what will be the importance of each image in the film?

2) The synopsis

a) In small groups, imagine a story based on the elements analyzed in class.

It's the story of a young boy that...
b) Read the synopsis and answer the following questions:

- What do we learn about the main character?
- Where does he go? Why?
- Who does he meet in his journey?

SYNOPSIS
In 1916, Adama, 12, lives in an isolated village in West Africa. One night he sees his big brother Samba suddenly leave the Land of the Cliffs for the World of the Breathes. Worried, Adama decided to go looking for him. More determined than ever he began his quest with the help of the griot Abdou and Maximin, a street child from Paris that took him to the front lines of the First World War in Verdun, France.

c) Compare your story with the film’s synopsis. Which version do you like best?
1) The poster under a magnifying glass (WP)

The main character
We see the face of a young African boy determined and with hope. His gaze is raised to the sky as if looking at a bird that is guiding him. He wears simple and light clothing and hold an object that appears to be dear to him.

The ship
The ship foreshadows a journey, a crossing between two worlds, Africa and Europe. It could also be a military fleet.

The ground
The color of the ground and its arid demeanor give us a clue as to the origin of the boy: Africa. The red, a metaphor for the bloodshed from the soldiers in the front.

The soldier
The soldier is turning his ack on us and faces a war scene. He wears a uniform different than that one the European soldier, it is the Black Force uniform and wears a turban on his head, a hooded coat, a broad red belt. He also carries a bayonet.

2) The synopsis (WC)

a)
   o The main character is called Adama, 12, he has an older brother and lives in a village in West Africa, the Country of Cliffs.
   o He leaves for Europe in search of his brother that left for a war in Verdun, France.
   o He meets Abdou, a griot, and Maximin, a street kid.
b)

Students will confirm their hypothesis and compare them to the synopsis. It is essential that the students understand the word "Nassaras" that is used several times. "Nassaras" means "strangers" and "white people" in an African dialect. The World of Breathes refers to the lands beyond Adama's village, a whole new world forbidden by the elders. Regarding the griot, in Africa, represents the storyteller, the genealogist, and historian. A griot is the memory of a family, a village and a country. This character guides Adama throughout his journey.

Furthermore, it is possible to discuss story transmission from an intercultural perspective and to compare the methods for sharing family memories, a village's or a country's according to their culture or their generation (written more, or oral, artistic, mediatized, on social networks, etc.).
STUDENT WORKSHEET 2: UNDERSTANDING THE TRAILER

1) Reality of imagination?

   a) Listen to the music in the trailer. What do you hear?

   I hear ...

   A Fula Flute

   A kalimba

   b) Listen to the trailer again and complete the prophecy from the Mad Elder with the following words: nations – forgotten (x2) – statue – provinces – came – furnace – worship.

   « Of all the __________, of all the __________ / You come to __________ a golden __________ and money (...) / And when they collapse it will lead you into a __________/ Except those that will have not __________ / that will not have __________ / The place from where they __________. »

Created by Azadée Tolooie. Translated by Andrew A. Rosado. ADAMA by Simon Rouby
c) Watch the trailer. Separate between the **Historical narrative** and **The story** categories the visual and auditory elements in the trailer, and the movie poster that you may have noticed previously.

![Historical narrative vs The story](image)

**Historical narrative**

Ex: A soldier

**The story**

Ex: A small boy

d) What is the difference between **historical narrative** and a **story**?

e) Of the following, choose the correct answer and justify your answer:

- Adama is a fictional story.
- Adama’s story is historical narrative.
- Adama is based on a historical fact.
Teacher Worksheet 2: Understanding the trailer

1) Reality or imagination? (OC)

a) Students are invited to listen to the trailer without seeing the images the first time. Ask them to close their eyes in order to concentrate on what they hear and ask them to write down what they heard.

Correction: Music, voices and shouting (kids, adolescents, men), explosions, African instruments (kalimba, percussions), planes, the sea, a train.

Trailer link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-yTF_M1rhl

b) Students can hear the trailer several times all without seeing the images in order to concentrate to understand the Mad Elder’s prophecy.

Correction:

« Of all the provinces, of all the nations / You come to worship a golden statue and money (…) / And when they collapse it will lead you into a furnace / Except those that will have not forgotten / that will not have forgotten / The place from where they came. »

During the future screening of the film, students will discover, during Adama’s journey, the Senegalese Sharpshooter’s disillusionment that came to support France during the war. However, the elder’s prophecy poses, once again, a reflection on tradition and modernity. A complex theme that Africa and particularly its younger generations need to face.
Analysis questions for the prophecy:

- **At whom is the prophecy directed?** - > The African soldiers that leave for France.
- **What words render the prophecy menacing?** - > The future usage of the verbe “collapse”, the word “furnace” referencing Hell, the expression “statue worship” that evoke the sins of idolatry and greed.
- **Who will be saved from the “furnaces”?** - > Those that stay faithful to their country and that will not forget their origins.

**c)**

This activity aims to show students that this story shares traditional styles of writing as well as historical narrative styles of writing. It is important to make use of vocabulary from previous activities in this one.

**Elements from historical narrative:** A soldier, fighter planes, the trip, ships, a rifle, military fleets, explosions, the war, destruction, etc.

**Elements from storytelling:** A boy, a bird, ships, the trip, the quest, the griot, the prophecy, the sea, the African instruments, etc.

**d)**

**Corrections:**

- **Historical narrative:** Based on events tracing the course of history, the historical narrative is characterized by its realism, the true stories, as well as the everydayness that it recounts.
- **The story:** Stories are generally short, they focus on imagination. They contain supernatural and magical elements, such as objects or people, that play an imperative role in the story.

**e) Correction:** Adama’s journey is a story based on historical events.
Student Worksheet 3 – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1) The Battle of Verdun of 1916.

The film takes place in 1916. What important international historical event took place that year? What do you know about this historic event?

⇒ In groups of two, associate the words with the images below: Verdun – a French soldier: a Sammie - No Man’s Land – French Western Africa (FWA) – A Senegalese Sharpshooter (Soldier of the Black Force) – the trenches.

1. _________________________ 2. _________________________ 3. _________________________

4. _________________________ 5. _________________________ 6. _________________________
2) Play out the scene!

a) Go out and interview!

Ask the people around you and/or your family what they know about the First World War from 1914-1918. What did you learn? Share it in class.

b) In small groups, pick one of the subjects from Activity 1 regarding the First World War and then research about the picked topic.

o Write down information you find interesting or that surprised you and share it with the class.
Teacher Worksheet 3: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Level B1/B2

1) The Battle of Verdun of 1916.

This activity aims to immerse students in the historical context of the film, namely that of the First World War and the Senegalese Sharpshooter from French West Africa that were sent to the front to reinforce French troops.

The teacher can write the date 1916 and brainstorm with the class in order to assess the group’s knowledge and make them aware of the historical context of the film.

The research portion can be done online, before or during class, depending on the available time and resources. The objective is to sensitize students about the historical context of the film, to retain as well as share key information.

Corrections:
In 1916 took place the First World War which began in 1914 and ended in 1918.


The trenches: During the war, trenches, sometimes fortified and consolidated by sandbags, branches and barbed wire, were used as defense lines and as battle roads. They were particularly used during the First World War, which some call "The War of the Trenches".
**No Man’s Land**: During the First World War, No Man’s Land was the area after the barbed wire between the two opposite trenches. No Man’s Land delineates the space where any human presence was received with aggression: any intruder would be shot down by either faction.

**FWA**: French West Africa (FWA) was a general government regrouping eight French colonies in West Africa between 1895 and 1958 within the same federation.

**Verdun**: Verdun is a French commune located in the department of Meuse, in Greater East found in the historical and cultural region of Lorraine. The Battle of Verdun of 1916 is one of the most important of World War I. With the large rotation of the French units (*two thirds of the “poilus”/Sammies fought there*), Verdun became the symbol of the war, and is known both in France and abroad.

**The Black Force’s Senegalese Sharpshooters**: See explications on pages 7, 8 and 9.

**Les poilus/Sammies/Doughboys/Tommies (Brit.)**: *Poilu (Fr. lit. “hairy”) is the nickname given to the French soldiers of the First World War who were in the trenches. “Poilu” also meant at the time, someone brave, manly in West African slang. A popular version of the meaning claims that the nickname was given during the Great War, due to the living conditions of the soldiers in the trenches. They let themselves grow beard and mustache and, back to the back, all appeared "hairy."
II IN CLASS DISCUSSION:

AFTER THE FILM

These pedagogic activities were prepared for students between the ages of 13 and 15 years of age in order to prepare them for a discussion after the screening of the film in its entirety. The study can be done in the mother tongue or in French per the students’ linguistic profiles and the foreign language teacher’s objectives. The target level varies according to the proposed activities in the lesson plan.

In this lesson plan, language skills are abbreviated as followed:

- WC: Written comprehension
- OC: Oral comprehension
- OP: Oral production
- WP: Written production
- OI: Oral interaction
STUDENT WORKSHEET 4: RECONSTRUCTING ADAMA’S JOURNEY

Level A1/A2

1) Adama’s journey

Trace a line to show Adama’s journey. From where did he leave? Where does he arrive?

2) The stages of Adama’s trip

a) In groups of two, match the words below with the images in the following page.
French port – A small French village on top of a hill – African village - Verdun - Paris –
African port village.
b) In each circle write the corresponding letter that represent each step in Adama’s journey in chronological order in the film.
1) Adama’s journey

a) Students must first find on a world map France and the African continent. The teacher can ask them what they know of these two places and if they have visited them.

b) **Correction:** The route starts on the coast of West Africa, it passes through western France then through Paris and finally, the north-east of France in Verdun.

**Correction:**
- A: African village
- B: French village
- C: African port village
- D: French village
- E: Verdun

**Correction:** A -> C -> D -> F -> B -> E -> A

The activity can be closed with a debate about the end of the film. How do the students interpret the ending?

**Reflection questions:**

How does Adama return to his village?
Did you like the end of the film? Why?
In your opinion, is it a happy ending, poetic or dark? Why?
How did you feel when Adama returned to his village?
1) The living conditions in the battlefield

a) Read the excerpts of letter from soldiers below. What key elements explained in the letters explain the unbearable conditions?

**Excerpt 1:** Here’s what it’s like every night. At 20:30, the cannonade dissipated little by little. An impending silence finally takes over. The soldier’s steps and the wheels of supply wagons break the silence. No light, no fires. Food is cold and we even go to sleep on the floor. We sleep fully equipped. No sheets. Soldiers lay like rags, it’s unsettling. 01:00. Bang! A shot is heard. Bang! Another shot. A shootout breaks out. The enemy’s attacking again like every night to tire us out. What a nightmarish way to wake up!

*From Jean de Pierrefeu to a friend, 1914*

**Excerpt 2:** It’s been almost a month and I haven’t taken these clothes off yet; I’ve showered twice: once in a fountain and another in a creek next to a dead horse; haven’t once seen a mattress. I’ve spent all my nights on the ground. We sleep around forty-five minutes. People sleep standing, on their knees, sitting down squatting and laying down. We sleep on the roads, with corpses, in the trenches, on trees, in the mud. Even while under fire. Even silence seems to noisy and keeps us awake.

*André Fribourg for the newspaper L’Opinion, 1915*
Excerpt 3: It rains. Squatted in trenches, we await. After three hours and we’re frozen to the bone. It’s the cold water that gets to you. Coat, jacket, sweaters, and shirt all crossed. After fifteen hours, it still rains. The cold night freezes the water on our clothes. After twenty-four hours, it’s still raining. The cannonade doubles. I lay down, I lie at the bottom of the trench, it’s filled with water.

André Fribourg for the newspaper L’Opinion, 1915

Sources: Paroles de poilus, Tallandier, 1998, Extraits

b) Write down on the table expressions taken from the excerpts that reference the five senses.

Ex: The cold
2) Through Adama’s eyes: the horrors of war.

Adama has never left his village, isolated in the foot of the cliffs, protected from the outside world.

➤ Imagine what he felt when he arrived at the front. What does he see? How does he feel? What does he feel? What does he hear?

➤ Individually, write a short narrative text describing the scene when Adama arrives on the front through his eyes. Use the tables with the five senses from the previous exercise.
TEACHER WORKSHEET 5: NARRATE A SCENE FROM THE FILM

Level B1/B2

1) The living conditions in the battlefield (WC)

**Correction:** They eat very little and the food is generally cold, they barely sleep, and fight in terrible conditions. They are affected by the elements (the cold, snow, and rain), lack basic hygiene, deafening shots, and explosions.

- **Smell:** I've showered twice / corpses / dead horse.
- **Taste:** The food is cold.
- **Sight:** corpses / dead horse / rain / etc.
- **Touch:** I sleep on the ground / the night is cold / I lay on water / no sheets / we sleep (laying, standing, etc.).
- **Hearing:** shots / bang! / shootout / rain / deafening silence / steps / turning of wheels / the cannonade, etc.

2) Through Adama's eyes: the horrors of war.

This activity allows students to develop empathy as well as to practice the narrative text from an internal perspective.

Students can recount a confusing personal experience and ask them to describe how they felt as practice before starting the exercise. It is possible to reference the table with the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste)
Regarding the written production, it is possible to define the internal narrative point of view and to remind students they must adopt a subjective viewpoint of Adama’s story. For example, a small boy that left his village, his family and everything he knew and arrived in a cold country at war and lived under harsh conditions.

**Internal perspective**: The narrator views the scene from the eyes of the character. What they know from the story is limited to that which they see with their own eyes, what they hear and what they smell. They are aware of the past and the present of the character, *they sometimes enter the character’s conscience*.

**Example text:**

*I’ve made it to Verdun. The sky is gray. I see enormous birds flying everywhere and they make a terrible sound that hurt my ears... The air smells bad and it is very cold. I’m scared and I’m starting to get really hungry...*
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