

SEARCHING FOR **A M A N I**



LEARNING GUIDE

Encouraging students to make connections
and formulate their own questions

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A LETTER FROM THE SEARCHING FOR AMANI TEAM	01
OVERVIEW	02
INTRODUCTION TO THE FILM	03
FACILITATION GUIDELINES	04
LESSON 1: DISCUSS	05
Teaching Guide	
Activity Handout: Communities and Climate Change	
Discussion Questions	
Written Reflection Activity	
LESSON 2: RESEARCH	09
Teaching Guide	
Activity Handout: Research Question Development	
Discussion Questions	
Written Reflection	
LESSON 3: INTERVIEW	13
Teaching Guide	
Activity Handout: Interview Tips	
FILM SCREENING TIPS	15
FILM CREDITS	16

SEARCHING FOR AMANI

Dear Educators,

Welcome to Simon's story in our film, *Searching for Amani*.

Thank you for taking the time to review these materials. Whether you're in a classroom, community setting, homeschooling, or exploring independently, this learning guide offers discussion prompts and activities to deepen your exploration of the topics presented within the film. Rather than memorizing facts and figures, we hope these lessons provide students the chance to get curious, think critically, and practice new skills.

Searching for Amani brings to light the experiences of young people living on the front lines of climate change, with a special focus on Simon, an extraordinary young man we met when he was 13 years old. Simon and his best friend Haron embark on a journey of self-discovery, learning to understand how their world is changing and finding their own unique ways to take meaningful action. They learn new skills, ask lots of questions, enlist help when they need it, and they push past easy answers to uncover a deeper truth.

Simon and Haron do a beautiful job sharing their perspectives, respecting each other, and honoring their cultural differences. Please encourage students to follow suit, approaching their inquiry with open hearts and open minds.

All the Best,

The *Searching for Amani* Team

OVERVIEW



The lesson plans in this learning guide offer students a chance to emulate Simon and Haron. After students have watched the film, you can choose to embark on any one of the lesson plans, or take the lessons together as a larger unit that asks students to:



DISCUSS - LESSON PLAN 1

Hold nuanced conversations about the intersections of climate change, colonialism, and culture.



RESEARCH - LESSON PLAN 2

Develop a research question born from curiosities that arise while watching the film. Go a step further by relating Simon's story to your own community.



INTERVIEW - LESSON PLAN 3

Practice interview skills, like Simon and Haron do as they become young citizen journalists. Go a step further by connecting with and interviewing a person with knowledge of your research topic.

These lesson plans ask students to consider the consequences of climate change, the front line communities that pay the greatest price, and the peacebuilding work that could bridge us into a less extractive, more regenerative future.

We invite you to use whichever pieces of the learning guide are best suited to your curricular goals. **We have designed each lesson to cultivate strong habits of learning, specifically agency, autonomy, and complexity in critical thinking.** Please enjoy the film and the conversations it sparks!

INTRODUCTION TO THE FILM



A 13-year-old boy teams up with his best friend to investigate his father's mysterious murder at one of Kenya's largest wildlife conservancies. As young, aspiring journalists, they uncover complex truths about the area's persistent drought and history of colonization, expanding their investigation beyond the scope of one man's murder.

In *Searching for Amani*, Simon Ali is a 13-year-old boy searching for justice and closure after the murder of his father, Stephen. Had he done something wrong? Was he being targeted? Is there anything anyone could have done to prevent his murder or solve this case? As Simon searches for answers about his father, he uncovers the devastating ways that climate change is wreaking havoc on the region, while also confronting Laikipia's history of exploitation.

Simon and his family are driven by a need for justice and answers, but there are no easy answers. His journey reveals the complex relationship between economic forces and the natural environment. He learns about the conditions that fuel violence and the possibility for peacebuilding amidst the turmoil.

As an aspiring journalist, Simon interviews multiple people familiar with his father's case. He talks to people who knew his father at the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, where Stephen Ali worked as a tour guide until the day he was shot. While Simon grew up farther south, on a farm somewhat protected from the drought conditions spreading across his region, his investigative travels reveal a desperate competition over limited resources in a parched landscape. As the drought continues to rage across Laikipia, less and less pasture is available to local pastoralist communities, and tensions are rising.

As a result of this scarcity, many pastoralists are forced to bring cattle into fenced-off land that is now considered private, like the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, in order for their livestock (and their cultures) to survive. When local pastoralist families are denied grazing access, violent clashes erupt.

In order to better understand the pastoralists who may very well be responsible for his father's death, Simon turns to his best friend, Haron. While they wear the same uniform at school, Haron is actually a member of one of the pastoralist communities vying for access to Conservancy land. The boys' friendship sparks important conversations about the changing environment, conservation, and building peace in a time of humanitarian crisis.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES

Encourage students to engage in open dialogue and active listening.

Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to create an emotional experience for the audience. Screening *Searching for Amani* can ignite meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. Below, we have listed suggestions for promoting respectful and lively participation.



SHARE THE PLAN

Students do best when they know what to anticipate. Whether you will lead a short discussion or long-term research project, let students know the plan.



ENCOURAGE EMPATHY

Learning at its best happens when everyone can participate without the pressure to reach an agreement.



LISTEN WELL

If the discussion gets heated, acknowledge it. Allow students to pause, take a break, & come back to it.



MAKE ROOM FOR EVERYONE

Consider using a discussion protocol that promotes equal participation.



ACKNOWLEDGE MISSING PERSPECTIVES

Sometimes the group reaches a quick agreement or strong majority opinion. Pivot by asking students to consider whose voices are missing from the room. What might they say?



TAKE BREAKS

Violence, colonization, & drought are heavy topics. Assume students will need a short break mid-discussion!



FOLLOW STUDENTS' CURIOSITY

When possible, offer students the choice for discussion & research topics they'd like to pursue.



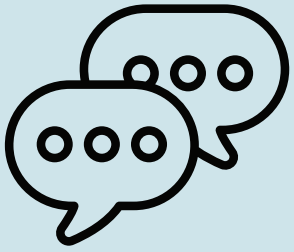
WORDS MATTER

Model being clear, direct, & kind, to encourage students to do the same.

THE 2 TURNS PROTOCOL

Students get two objects (twigs, coins, pieces of string, pencils, anything readily available) and leave them visible on their desk or in front of them. Each time they talk, they remove one of the objects. This helps the entire group see who has yet to participate and invite them to join the conversation.





LESSON 1: DISCUSS





LESSON 1: DISCUSS

TEACHING GUIDE

Debrief the film, make connections, follow curiosity



ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

Students will consider their personal reactions to the film, begin to articulate the roles climate change and colonization play in Laikipia's regional conflict, and begin to imagine steps towards peacebuilding.



After deciding on a discussion protocol—whether it's open conversation, the '2 Turns' Activity mentioned in the facilitation guide (Pg. 4), or another format for structured conversation—divide your discussion time in thirds:

DEBRIEF THE FILM

Ask students what about the film *Searching for Amani* moved them.

- What resonated?
- Why and how was the story effective?
- What parts were surprising?
- What parts felt familiar?

MAKE CONNECTIONS

Have students read Handout 1.

- This is a quick read, available on the next page of the learning guide.

Ask students to make connections between the film and climate change.

- How is climate change a factor in Simon's life?
- In Haron's life?
- In the regional conflict?

Ask students to make connections between the communities in the film and their own community.

- Why are these connections important to understand?
- Why is the role of climate change sometimes denied, hidden, or overlooked?

FOLLOW CURIOSITY

Reflect on Simon and Haron's friendship and their work as aspiring journalists.

- Simon and Haron have formed a friendship rooted in celebrating their social and cultural differences. How do you, in your life, connect across differences?
- How do Simon and Haron pursue their goals? What have you discovered by watching their process?
- Imagine Simon and Haron's lives in the future. What challenges will the face? What do you suppose they will try to accomplish?
- What issues mentioned in the film have yet to be solved? Propose a potential step towards solving them.

Finally, as a closing activity or as a homework assignment, students may deepen their inquiry in a Written Reflection. (pp.8)



LESSON 1: DISCUSS

ACTIVITY PRE-READ

Human industry is causing the climate to change, driving more extreme weather, including massive floods and prolonged droughts. In addition, ecosystems are damaged by pollution and resource extraction, like logging and mining.

Indigenous communities are often targeted with and threatened by violence as a means for silencing their concerns and continuing environmental destruction.

Climate change affects people, wildlife, and the environment. The impacts are often felt most keenly by those who are least responsible. Climate change greatly affects Indigenous communities who rely on and help care for healthy ecosystems. Oftentimes, these Indigenous groups have less power to decide what happens to the land due to ongoing norms, rules and systems set up during and after colonization.

For example, in *Searching for Amani*, we see the way that extreme resource inequality has hurt the Kenyan pastoralist communities. The conflict between conservationists with private land and pastoralists is front and center as Simon seeks to find out who murdered his father. These sorts of conflicts are common throughout the world, especially as healthy ecosystems decline and shrink.

Working to shift who has the power to make decisions about land and water could help us restore thriving ecosystems and build peace. Bringing people from all different branches of society together to build solutions is an important first step.





LESSON 1: DISCUSS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Attention, teachers! There is no need to use all of these discussion questions. You may use one as a starting prompt, or share the list with students and allow them to choose. You can also rely solely on the example questions within the Teaching Guide (pp.5). Alternatively, you may use these questions to help students brainstorm research topics for Lesson Plan 2 (pp.9-12).

THE CLIMATE

- 1 Globally, who do you think is most responsible for climate change?
- 2 Which people are the most vulnerable to climate change?
- 3 What are some factors making life difficult for pastoralists in Kenya? Who else suffers when they suffer?
- 4 What do you suppose would be a more fair approach to sharing land? How do you account for the wellbeing of Pastoralists? Farmers? Wild animals? Trees? Livestock? Future generations?
- 5 How are conservationists, who are often well-intentioned protectors of nature, succeeding or failing? We all have biases and blind spots—what are the blind spots of the conservationists in *Searching for Amani*?

THE STORY

- 1 How does climate change worsen violence?
- 2 How do the effects of colonization persist in Kenya, impacting the film's characters?
- 3 Who has power in this region of Kenya, and why?
- 4 How does Simon find his own power throughout the story?
- 5 What role does education play in changing the circumstances? How are Simon and Haron different from their fathers?
- 6 What would you change about the approach to sharing land in Laikipia?
- 7 In a few spots in the film, we hear news coverage about conflict in Simon's region of Laikipia. Do they cover the story enough? Do they cover it the right way? How would you report the conflict?

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

Distribute an index card or slip of paper to each student. Ask them to write a single word that describes their experience watching *Searching for Amani*. Collect the cards and redistribute them to the class, so each student has a new card. Invite students to reflect on the word they see, comparing it to their own experience watching the film.



LESSON 1: DISCUSS

WRITTEN REFLECTION

What do you think?



Conflict over land is not unique to Kenya; it has a very long global story.

Take on the perspective of one of the characters of the film. In their voice, write about what caused this conflict and what might be done to stop it. Who might have the solutions for ending the drought? Who might have the capacity to bring different groups together to work on a solution? What would this character from the film want others to know?

CHOOSE FROM THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERS:

HARON

A young pastoralist who goes to school and befriends Simon

STEPHEN

Simon's father, a wildlife defender and tour guide at the Conservancy who wanted to increase cooperation with pastoralists

LUCY

Simon's mother, a woman responsible for the wellbeing of five children, mourning the loss of her husband

SVEVA

The owner of the Nature Conservancy who grew up in Kenya, but whose family is from Italy



LESSON 2: RESEARCH





LESSON 2: RESEARCH

TEACHING GUIDE

Turn Topics of Interest into Intriguing Research Questions



ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

Students will read about and name their own potential research topics. They will learn to distinguish the qualities of great research questions before focusing on a specific research question of their own. In doing so, they will emulate the autonomy, agency, and complexity of thought that Simon brings to his quest in *Searching for Amani*.

By following directions on this lesson's Activity Handouts (pp.10-12), guide students through the process of choosing a research topic and narrowing that topic into a specific "How" or "Why" question.

Students will alternate between working alone and working with a partner to identify issue areas and topics that interest them. You can limit their choices to a range of topics connected to your class subject, or leave it wide open. It is up to you whether to simply use this lesson to help students articulate their interests, or as a launching point for a more robust research project.

EXAMPLE RESEARCH TOPICS

If students are struggling to get started, you may choose to share a few of these examples to get their wheels turning:

- The history of farming in the region
- The history of pastoralism in the region
- The history of conservation in the region
- Traditions that connect us to the land
- Student's own cultural lineage and ties to the land
- Indigenous stories that shape culture
- Indigenous land stewardship practices
- Shrinking indigenous territories
- The causes and risk factors for drought
- Agroforestry models for drought prevention
- The media's coverage of violent conflict: exacerbating or countering hate?
- The government's role in preventing or fueling violence

- Exploitation of resources: who has the power to decide?
- Environmental degradation: who is the culprit?
- Impacts of foreign industry: physical, social, or political
- Endangered species, cultures, or ecosystems
- The perspective of conservationists
- Peace building: forging a new path together

Finally, in STEP 3 of the handout, completed as a closing activity or as a homework assignment, students may build a list of experts they would like to interview. Remind them to consider people with firsthand experiences as well as people with academic subject matter expertise or official credentials.



LESSON 2: RESEARCH

ACTIVITY

The Secret to Developing a Great Research Question

STEP 1: RESEARCH TOPIC BRAINSTORM

A research topic is a subject that you are genuinely interested in, that somehow relates to your area of study. After watching *Searching for Amani*, reflect on two or more of the following questions, alone or with a partner.

- What are you curious about?
- Which character did you relate to most? Who did you relate to least?
- Are there similar conflicts in your community? What about?
- What exacerbates violence in your community?
- What do you know about pastoralist communities?
- What do you think about protecting the environment?
- Who has the power to make decisions in Laikipia, and why?
- What would you change, if you could?

Sometimes you might not know much about a topic, so it's ok to phrase your interest as a question.

Examples: What are conservancies doing to work with pastoralists?
How does tourism affect the ecosystem? Can droughts be prevented?

Think of 4 or 5 research topics you are curious about:

Circle your two favorites.



LESSON 2: RESEARCH

ACTIVITY

The Secret to Developing a Great Research Question

STEP 2: FORMULATE A RESEARCH QUESTION

A great research question should be:

Interesting to you (because you'll be thinking about it for a while)

Clear (and concise)

Complex (knowable, but not easily answered with a yes or no; requiring analysis)

Narrow (if your focus is too broad – like, “how do we stop violence?” – you will not be able to thoroughly answer the question)

DIRECTIONS

Find a partner to discuss your preferred research topics and **choose one research topic** (even if you end up choosing one from their list!) to turn into a research question. Circle it on your paper.

We write research questions in order to **narrow our investigation** to one aspect of the topic. “How” and “Why” questions are best for this. Example: Instead of researching everything about journalism, research HOW television news coverage has influenced the conflict in Laikipia.

Brainstorm up to 5 “Why” and “How” questions about your chosen topic.

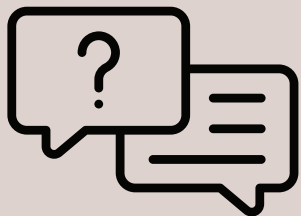
Use the knowledge and information you already have from watching *Searching for Amani* to help you. The narrower the question, the better.



The Secret to Developing a Great Research Question

A profile photograph of a young woman with dark skin and short hair, wearing multiple colorful beaded necklaces and armbands. She is looking towards the right against a blurred background of a savanna landscape.

[illegible]



LESSON 3: INTERVIEW





LESSON 3: INTERVIEW

TEACHING GUIDE

Practice your interviewing skills



ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

Students will follow in Simon's footsteps, learning to prepare for and conduct interviews by practicing with their classmates. Optionally, students may contact and interview an expert on their research topic to help answer their research question.

Preparing and practicing to conduct an interview can be a fun way to build skills. In this activity, students will pair up to interview each other. You can choose a topic that will work for your class, or let students brainstorm their own topic.

One of the backbones of a compelling story is a good interview subject. Join the Amani Storytelling Network to hear and share stories of youth inspired by Simon and Haron's work!

<https://www.searchingforamani.com/>

PART 1: OUTLINE THE ACTIVITY

First, have students reflect on **what made Simon a good interviewer** in *Searching for Amani*. (His patient listening, the way he asks follow up questions, his calm demeanor, to name a few.)

Outline the activity for students, so they know what to expect. If this is preparation for an upcoming opportunity to interview a real expert, let them know that context.

Activity overview: Students will build a list of interview questions about the given topic, refine their question list, welcome their classmate to the interview and ask their questions! They will each have limited time to conduct their interview. This encourages them to ask only the best questions!

PART 2: DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

Distribute Activity Handout 3 (pp.14) to students and have them take turns reading the tips aloud.

Ask students to brainstorm a list of ten questions for their classmate. When this is complete, have them re-read their list and choose the best 5 questions.

PART 3: CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

Limit students' interview time. We suggest something short, like 6 minutes each. Have them pair up and find a corner of the room so students may conduct their interviews simultaneously.

PART 4: DEBRIEF

After students finish their practice interviews, have them reflect on what went well and what was challenging. How did they navigate having limited time? What do they wish they had asked? How could they use this practice experience to improve their next interview?



LESSON 3: INTERVIEW

ACTIVITY

Interview Tips



TIP #1: BE WELL-INFORMED

Research the basic background information regarding the person or activity you intend to cover.



TIP #2: BE PREPARED

Write a minimum of 10 open-ended questions before the interview.

Sample open-ended questions:

- What do you think...
- Why do you think...
- How do you feel about...
- Can you tell me about...



Closed questions:

questions that can be answered with a single word or short phrase) are good for checking the facts.



TIP #3: BE PROFESSIONAL

- Be on time and dress professionally.
- Maintain eye-contact.
- Conduct your interview in person or through video or audio call, NOT via email or text.
- Take thorough notes or ask for permission to record the interview.
- Ask for clarification as needed.



TIP #4: BE FLEXIBLE

- It is important to have your questions written, but sometimes a subject's answers can lead you in new directions.
- Be flexible enough to follow the most interesting parts of the story.



TIP #5: BE PATIENT

- When your subject stops talking, don't immediately fire off the next question.
- Pause and give the subject time to think and perhaps add more detail.



TIP #6: BE COURAGEOUS & ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS.

- Establish rapport, then approach difficult or emotional topics carefully.
- Reestablish a friendly relationship by asking easier, more neutral questions afterwards.



TIP #7: BE GRACIOUS

Say thank you after the interview and send a follow-up thank you note.



SCREENING SETUP 101

Technical Tips for an Engaging Film Screening

GET READY TO HOST A GREAT SCREENING!

Here are some tried-and-true technical tips we've found helpful for creating a smooth and engaging movie-watching experience.

1. PICK THE PERFECT SPOT & SET UP RIGHT

Big Screen, Big Impact! Use a projector and a large, white screen, or a large TV, so everyone can see clearly.

Turn Up The Volume: Good audio is just as important as good visuals. Remember to use good-quality speakers, and test the speakers in advance.

Set the Mood: Dim the lights to create a true cinema feel. A dark room is especially necessary if you are using a projector.

Seating Arrangement: Make sure everyone will have a comfortable seat with an unobstructed view of the whole screen, including the bottom, where they may need to read subtitles.

Need a Hand? If you're unsure about setup, ask your school's AV Club or Entertainment Prefects for help—they're pros at this stuff!

2. DO A TECH CHECK BEFORE SHOW TIME

Test the Movie File: Make sure the film works on your playback device (MP4, MOV, DVD, etc.).

Check Those Subtitles: If you choose to play the film with subtitles, ensure they are on and easy to read.

Smooth Streaming: If playing online, check your internet connection to avoid awkward buffering breaks.

3. KEEP DISTRACTIONS TO A MINIMUM

Do Not Disturb: Close all unnecessary apps and mute notifications to avoid popups mid-movie.

Manage the Door: If there is a hallway leading to the screening room, dim those lights too. Someone seated at the door can help latecomers find a seat without disrupting the screening.

4. HAVE A PLAN B (JUST IN CASE)

Pack Extra Cables & Adapters: HDMI, VGA, or anything else you might need—better safe than sorry!

Download a Backup: If you're streaming, have an offline version ready in case of internet issues.

Power Up: Charge all devices or plug them into a reliable power source to avoid unexpected blackouts.

5. ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE

Set the Scene: Give a quick introduction before starting the film, so everyone knows what to expect.

Encourage Engagement: Let the audience know there will be a discussion afterward, so they should pay close attention!

Get Ready to Talk: Before showing the film, consider how the discussion will take place—whether in a large group, smaller breakout groups, or a mix of both. This is to ensure a smooth transition from viewing to conversation.

With these tips, you'll create an awesome, distraction-free screening allowing everyone to enjoy and engage with the film. Lights, camera, action—enjoy the show!

CREDITS

SEARCHING FOR AMANI

Nicole Gormley
Director, Producer, Cinematographer

Debra Aroko
Director, Impact Producer

Peter Goetz
Producer & Writer

Mungai Kiroga
Producer

Caryn Capotosto
Producer

David and Linda Cornfield
Executive Producer

Geralyn Dreyfous
Executive Producer

Randy and Christopher Gebhardt
Executive Producer

Janet Tittiger
Executive Producer

Gottfried Tittiger
Executive Producer

Peter Tittiger
Executive Producer

Paula Kahumbu
Executive Producer

Judy Kibinge
Consulting Producer

Lucy Ali
Consulting Producer

Ali Fujino
Consulting Producer

Laissa Malih
Impact Producer

Megan Friend
Impact, Web Design, Social Media

Campbell Brewer
Director of Photography

Simon Ali
Self, Cinematographer

Haron Lenges Mariri
Self, Protagonist's Friend

Gabriel Jackson
Additional Aerials

Tessa Maslam
Editor

Davis Coombe
Editor

Chris Naum
Editor

Dave Wruck
Editor

Christian Carvallo
Associate Producer, Assistant Editor

Vickie Curtis
Story Architect, Lead Writer

David Naro
Music

Monica Sonand
Music

David Fleming
Music

Ronnie Mugambi
Production Sound

Peter Albrechtsen
Sound Designer

Mai The-Vu
Animator

Morgan Fangué
Key Art,
Design Lead

Amna Vegha
Web Design,
Additional Design