



A FILM BY AUDE LEROUX-LÉVESQUE & SÉBASTIEN RIST

LIVING WITH GIANTS

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

LIVING WITH GIANTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Living with Giants delves into the imaginative world of Paulusie Kasudluak, a young Inuk facing responsibilities as he transitions into adulthood. The film portrays his thoughts, his dreams, and his beliefs, and allows for an intimate immersion into his life. Paulusie is a caring son to his ailing father and a good boyfriend. But what begins as the story of an innocent teenager quickly becomes the struggle of a young man coping with the guilt of having made a huge mistake. Tragically, Paulusie takes the most dramatic decision, and commits suicide. *Living with Giants* remains a poetic journey of resilience that echoes issues that are far greater than Paulusie's personal story.

NOTE TO THE FACILITATOR

The torments of adolescence, the search for one's identity and resilience are universal themes. We can find these themes everywhere on earth as they transcend cultures. That's why we think the story of Paulusie and his family, the people at the core of *Living with Giants*, is relatable with audiences from everywhere. That said, the social cultural context of the story in which Paulusie evolves cannot be disassociated with his story and its tragic ending.

Canada is currently living through important questions concerning its colonial past. The political events (formal apologies, Truth and reconciliation commission, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) and the amount of fiction and non-fiction films on indigenous issues demonstrate the urgency to treat these issues so that the indigenous people can benefit of the same conditions as all Canadians.

Living with Giants is a poetic, immersive, and contemplative film. It is an atypical documentary that thanks to its privileged and rare access, brings the audience to live intimate moments that are charged with emotions. The documentary does not provide context through texts or statistics. It brings to light questions, rather than answers, and unearths issues more than it offers explanations.

That is why we created this document. Its goal is to offer any person who desires to screen the documentary the necessary tools to inform the public, young or old, about the basic contextual information that would allow bringing forth enlighten discussions. Far from being an exhaustive documentary, we hope nonetheless to offer leads that would allow the facilitator to deepen his research.

In spite of cultural differences, a young public will identify with the subjects, Paulusie and Nikuusie. They are at the dawn of adulthood and are living huge changes. They live through difficult event (sickness, violence, imprisonment, suicide, substance abuse) but are also refreshing examples of youth and hope. The documentary uses a cinematic language to push the narrative, which makes the film also interesting to film students.

We hope that *Living with Giants*, aided by this document, will help bring forth constructive discussions and that issues surrounding suicide, violence and cultural barriers, that are too often taboo, will be discussed and exposed. Our only goal is to pay tribute to Paulusie and his family and that his story, which has been told with respect, serves to better the fate of hundreds of other Inuit and of other Canadians.

ADDRESSED THEMES

- adolescence;
- imprisonment;
- suicide;
- judicial system and public services in Nunavik;
- colonial heritage, assimilation and their intergenerational repercussions;
- violence, domestic violence;
- post traumatic stress disorder;
- grieving process;
- substance abuse;
- cultural choc;
- religion and spirituality;
- Inuit traditions and culture;
- resilience.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Secondary students, 2nd cycle

Citizenship, History, Social realm

College students

Cinema, Anthropology, Sociology, Human sciences, Geography, Philosophy, Indigenous languages

Adult education

Social and political life, Collectivity and culture

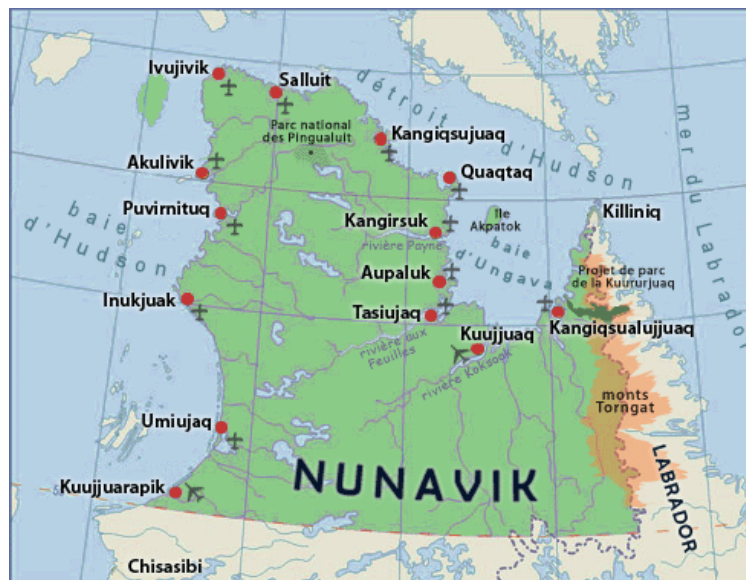
GEO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The territory

Three-quarters of Inuit in Canada live in 53 communities across the northern regions of Canada in Inuit Nunangat, which means "the place where Inuit live." Inuit Nunangat is comprised of four regions: Inuvialuit (NWT and Yukon), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (Labrador)¹.

Nunavik is in the arctic region of Quebec. This vast territory is above the 55th parallel is inhabited by 10 750 inhabitants, mainly Inuit, who live in 14 villages along the coasts of Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay. Only four of these communities have populations of more than 1000².

Inukjuak, village where most of *Living with Giants* was filmed, is at the junction of the Innuksuak River and the Hudson Bay and has about 1600 inhabitants. Like all other communities of Nunavik, Inukjuak is not connected by road to the rest of Quebec, but is accessible by plane year round. In Inuktitut, Inukjuak means "the giant".



Language and culture

The word "Inuit" means "people" in **Inuktitut**, the Inuit language. The singular of Inuit is **Inuk**. Throughout Inuit Nunangat, Inuktitut is spoken; however, each region has its own dialect(s)³. In Nunavik, 99% of the residents consider themselves fluent in Inuktitut⁴, which demonstrate the

¹ Source: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014187/1100100014191>

² <http://www.nunavik-tourism.com/Inuit-nunavik.aspx>

³ Source: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca>

⁴ Duhaime, G., S. Lévesque and A. Caron, *Le Nunavik en chiffres*, 2015, Chaire de recherche du Canada sur la condition autochtone comparée, Université Laval, Québec, 133 p.

rich cultural heritage. Many Inuit, especially the youngest ones, also speak English and sometimes French.

“Inuit and their ancestors have lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years. Even though the Inuit way of life is more diversified today than in the past, hunting, fishing and gathering activities for subsistence purposes remain central to life in Nunavik.”⁵

Overrepresentation in penitentiaries

According to Statistics Canada, Indigenous people are overrepresented in detention facilities in the country. Lacking local prisons in Nunavik, offenders like Paulusie are transferred to the South for preventive detention even before they appear before a judge. Moreover, it is not always easy for Nunavik residents to get services in their mother tongue, Inuktitut.

“In 2010/2011, 27% of adults in provincial and territorial custody and 20% of those in federal custody involved Aboriginal people, about seven to eight times higher than the proportion of Aboriginal people (3%) in the adult population as a whole.”⁶

Suicide in the Inuit Nunangat

The challenges facing Inuit today, including physical and mental health challenges, cannot be detached from Canada’s colonial past:

« Statistics and research paint a distressing picture of our society, in which too many people are struggling with violence and trauma. These challenges exist against the historical backdrop of Canada’s colonization of Inuit Nunangat, in which federal government policy directed the institutions and systems that have destabilized our society by undermining our ability to be self-reliant. »⁷

In Quebec, the suicide rate of Nunavik is the highest of the province and everywhere in the Inuit Nunangat, it reaches alarming proportions, way above the Canadian average. This is why the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami launched the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy (NISPS), setting out a series of actions and interventions to address the high number of deaths by suicide among Inuit. The documentation provides a lot of information about the origins of the crises, the risk factors as well as guiding for policy making at the regional and national levels:

<https://www.itk.ca/national-inuit-suicide-prevention-strategy/>

⁵ <http://www.nunavik-tourism.com/Inuit-nunavik.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.statecan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11715-fra.htm#a7>

⁷ <https://www.itk.ca/about-canadian-inuit/#nunangat>

THE FILM

Living with Giants

78 minutes, 2016

SYNOPSIS

Living with Giants delves into the imaginative world of Paulusie Kasudluak, a young Inuk facing responsibilities as he transitions into adulthood. The film portrays his thoughts, his dreams, and his beliefs, and allows for an intimate immersion into his life.

Paulusie lives with his adoptive parents in the remote Inuit community of Inukjuak (the Inuktitut word for “giant”). He’s a caring son to his ailing father and a good boyfriend. The extreme landscape of Inukjuak—where life and all its routines are controlled by the weather—determines if Paulusie is out doing what he enjoys most: hunting and fishing.

One summer night, alcohol gets the better of Paulusie. In a fit of jealousy he assaults someone with a knife, which results in his arrest. He’s released on bail a few weeks later, but his short time behind bars has left him with permanent wounds.

For a few months, Paulusie tries to return to the life he lived before his arrest. But his fear of facing trial, returning to prison, and letting down his loved ones is overwhelming. To everyone’s shock and surprise, Paulusie follows the same dark path as many in his community and takes his own life.

As tragic as his death is to the community, *Living with Giants* shifts its gaze to Paulusie’s family and girlfriend Nikuusi, who now have to follow in their ancestors’ footsteps and become giants themselves. Nikuusi finds the motivation to return to school, while Paulusie’s mother welcomes his cousin Allie into her home. He becomes the new provider for their family.

Paulusie’s death helps resonate pressing issues that are far greater than his personal story, but *Living with Giants* remains first and foremost a poetic journey of resilience.

TRAILER : <https://vimeo.com/156597210>

TEAM

Directors

Sébastien Rist and Aude Leroux-Lévesque

Camera and sound

Sébastien Rist and Aude Leroux-Lévesque

Producer

Jean-Simon Chartier

Editor

René Roberge

Music

Jonathan Rist
Anthony Baird
Andres Vial
Warren Spicer
Jon Hopkins

PRIZES AND MENTIONS

- Best Canadian Documentary, Vancouver International Film Festival 2016
- Best Canadian Emerging Directors, Hot Docs 2016
- Nominated for IRIS prizes 2017 (Best Documentary, Best Editing, Best Cinematography)

MEDIA COVERAGE

“A great documentary leaves the storytelling to its subjects and captures the setting and context in which its characters live their lives without altering the landscape or inserting the filmmaker’s own voice into the narrative. *Living with Giants* does all of this, and while it doesn’t offer any solutions to the struggles faced by its Indigenous characters, it portrays their lives accurately and brings their reality to a mainstream Canadian audience.”

Joshua Grant, The nation

<http://www.nationnews.ca/living-giants-life-young-inuk/>

“In the hands of many directors, *Living with Giants* would be an explicitly political film. Here in Canada, we continue to grapple with a series of crises in many northern indigenous communities, where suicide rates among youth are 11 times the national average and people often despair in the face of the narrowing of prospects, isolation and lack of social support that constitute the colonial legacy. But while the film brushes the edges of the political, Rist and Leroux-Lévesque avoid taking the plunge — their film presents little analysis and provides no context in which to situate the particular story it tells. Yet it is perhaps this refusal to make the film about anything more than itself that makes its impact all the more devastating.”

Josh Eisen, Nonfics

<https://nonfics.com/living-with-giants-review-332bc35d591e>

Articles and reviews:

Review by Joshua Grant, The nation

<http://www.nationnews.ca/living-giants-life-young-inuk/>

Review by Josh Eisen, Nonfics

<https://nonfics.com/living-with-giants-review-332bc35d591e>

Interview with the directors and Nikuusi Elijasiapik

<http://povmagazine.com/articles/view/the-pov-interview-sebastien-rist-aude-leroux-leve-and-nikuusi-elijasiapik>

Interview with the directors and producer Jean-Simon Chartier

<https://www.hotdocs.ca/i/jots/living-with-giants>

Review by François Lévesque, Le Devoir (French only)

<http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/cinema/485671/chez-les-geants-une-empreinte-dans-la-neige>

Review by André Lavoie, Le Devoir (French only)

<http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/cinema/486121/colosses-aux-pieds-d-argile>

FAQ

Here are the most frequently asked questions the directors got after screening the film. The answers are not scientific; they are rather based on the directors' personal experience in Nunavik during the production that lasted several months. They can nonetheless be useful to the educator in facilitating a discussion with students or guide them for further research.

Q: Why was Paulusie adopted?

A: Adoption is more common in Inuit communities than in southern communities. It is often done within members of the family and is not generally seen as negative or harmful to the children. Paulusie was adopted by Lucie and Paulusie (they share the same name) when he was 4 years old.

Q: Why does Paulusie take the plane to go to prison?

A: Nunavik has its own police force (KRP, Kativik Regional Police) but has no prisons. Police stations are normally equipped with small temporary cells. Given the nature of the crime committed by Paulusie, he was transferred by plane to a prison in Amos, in Abitibi, in preventive detention. He was released on bail after 3 weeks of incarceration and was awaiting his trial hearing.

Q: What were Paulusie and Nikuusi hunting?

A: When in the boat, Paulusie and Nikuusi were looking for seal. The Inuit hunt different types of seal, the meat and blubber are eaten and pelts can be used for clothing and other uses. On land, they hunted a caribou. All the meat of the animal can be eaten and is often shared in the village. The caribou skin can also be kept and tanned.

Q: Why do they burn Paulusie's belongings after his death?

A: Paulusie's family members explained to us that burning the personal belongings of a deceased person helped them mourn. However, this practice is not extremely common and is done when the death is sudden or violent.

Q: Why does Nikuusi move to another community to pursue her education?

A: Wanting to pursue her post-secondary education in a college or Cegep in Montreal, Nikuusi needed to pass an equivalency exam after high school. Having failed the exam, she moved to Kangiqsujaq (Wakeham Bay) where she stays in residence at the end of the movie. They offer a preparatory program for any student residing in Nunavik. The program is locally referred to as the "pre-college".

Q: What parts of the film are real and what parts are fiction?

A: *Living with Giants* is a documentary. All the dialogues, actions and events are real and happened naturally. We were lucky to have an extremely privileged and intimate access into Paulusie's world. Our friendship enabled confidence and we were always transparent with each other. This is why the film shows scenes that are improbable, intimate and might seem unreal but that happened nonetheless exactly like portrayed in the film.

The wolf head, that we used to illustrate the night Paulusie committed his crime, was created with the skin of a caribou Paulusie hunted. The scene with the mask was part of a long process

of discussions we had with Paulusie. Our hope was to together find a way to explain what happened and for him to help forgive himself for the act he committed. He found it very difficult to accept what he had done.

THE DIRECTORS' NOTE

On December 28th, 2014, the project we'd been working on since 2013 took an unexpected and tragic turn. Paulusie Kasudluak, the young Inuk man and main subject of our film, committed suicide. Such a tragedy left everyone in pain and confusion. How could this happen?

We met Paulusie during the production of our documentary *Vue d'en Haut*. The standout in a group of twelve aboriginal youth we filmed during an expedition to Peru, once production was complete Paulusie jokingly told us, "You should come up north to Inukjuak one day and make a movie about my life!"

None of us would have guessed that this conversation was the beginning of a long and trusting relationship. In 2013, we were invited into his world, into his life, where we met his family, friends, and his girlfriend Nikuusi. Paulusie was a proud Inuk and a hunter that provided food for his family, something very few young Inuit still do today. We were amazed by his optimism, his joy, and his ability to find a balance between traditional values and culture and modern life.

It's with Paulusie that we discovered the arctic in its purest and rawest form. We saw beauty, but also darkness. Whether consciously or not, he wanted us to capture every nuance that the North had to offer. We insisted on filming the beautiful, the poetic, the magical. But, despite his lively and charismatic personality, he made a point to remind us through his actions and words that his world was not always an easy place.

The grieving process took time, but it was reassuring to know that his entire family and community supported our efforts to make the best film possible. They were aware we would be tackling some very hard and pressing issues, but trusted our approach and knew that we would make a positive film that they, as a nation, would be proud of.

Our project has now become more than a film. It carries weight and social responsibility. Although some may say the topics addressed in our film are sensitive, if not controversial, in the national context, we feel our film is necessary. Intimate stories like Paulusie's help us better grasp the beauty, the subtleties, and the complexities of life for today's aboriginal youth.

Paulusie will not have died in vain. The energy and love he put into his 20 years on Earth will live on. We told him that we chose him for our film because he could become a great representative of his community; that he was a role model, an inspiration, and had the potential to break cultural barriers. All of this remains true. His story speaks to that, while at the same time cruelly reminding us why we should care more about what's happening in the North. Through his charm and his ability to draw people from all walks of life into his story, Paulusie in his own way has become a legend.

Living with Giants has been a roller-coaster ride of emotions, with its fair share of risks and challenges. But after nearly three years of production, we feel that everything has finally come together. For us, this is the project of a lifetime. We're ready and feel confident about sharing this story with the rest of the world.

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL RESSOURCES

Avataq Cultural Institute, the Inuit cultural organization of Nunavik

<http://www.avataq.qc.ca>

A list of 75 indigenous films by the NFB and a complete PDF learning resource

<https://www.nfb.ca/playlist/unikkausivut-sharing-our-stories/>

Nunavik Tourism

<http://www.nunavik-tourism.com>

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (government of Canada)

<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca>

Duhaime, G., S. Lévesque et A. Caron, *Le Nunavik en chiffres*, 2015, Chaire de recherche du Canada sur la condition autochtone comparée, Université Laval, Québec, 133 p.

<http://www.chaireconditionautochtone.fss.ulaval.ca/fr/Publications.aspx#kw=chiffres&p=1>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy

<https://www.itk.ca/national-inuit-suicide-prevention-strategy/>

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

<https://www.itk.ca>

Reach Out

<https://www.facebook.com/reachoutnunavik>

Association québécoise de prévention du suicide (French only)

<http://www.aqps.info/nouvelles/prevenir-suicide-nunavik-projet-implantation-bonnes-471.html>

Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services

<http://nrbhss.gouv.qc.ca/en/departments/planning-and-programming/suicide-prevention>

Inuit, Inuk (Linguistic recommendation from the Translation Bureau)

http://www.btb.termiumplus.gc.ca/tpv2guides/guides/wrtps/index-eng.html?lang=eng&lettr=indx_catlog_i&page=91V1uxvxfEc4.html