

Preparing for the Film

1. If you have been in the public school system, what are the best and worst aspects of your education so far?
2. If you have experience with a private, charter, or home school program, what are also your favorite and least favorites aspects of that experience?
3. If you *could* be superman and make *any* changes in the education system--regardless of cost or difficulty--what would you change and why?
4. What have you admired most about a favorite teacher?
5. Where do you think that the United States ranks when compared with other countries in math and language proficiency?

Reflecting on the Film

1. What is the goal of the director in following specific students and their parents in a quest to find and enter a school superior to their local public school? Describe a memorable detail about the lives of these children followed in the film: Anthony (DC 5th grader), Daisy (East LA 5th grader), Francisco (Bronx 1st grader), Bianca (Harlem kindergartner), and Emily (Silicon Valley 8th grader). Why is getting into a charter school so important to each of them?
2. How does the title of the film have personal significance to educator Geoffrey Canada and thematic importance to the entire film?
3. What are the characteristics of failing schools?
4. How have the director's priorities changed since he made an earlier documentary *The First Years* in 1999 about public school teachers and how they dedicate their lives to the children they teach? Why does he feel he is betraying the ideals he thought he lived by?
5. Why does the film focus on the teachers' unions and on the unions' position on tenure? In contrast to the film's depiction of unions, can you think of reasons that unions might be needed for the teaching profession?
6. Although U.S. schools "have failed to keep pace with the rest of the world" and rank 25th in math and 21st in science among the 30 developed countries, what is the one category that we ranked the highest in--and what is ironic about this?
7. While serving as Chancellor of the Washington, DC Public Schools, what has Michelle Rhee done to try to improve education in her district? How do you feel about her and her methods?
8. Although the film acknowledges that "only one in five charter schools are producing amazing results," what is the appeal of even the unsuccessful charter schools? Why have charter schools eliminated tracking and why is this seen as positive?
9. When Geoffrey Canada founded the 97-block Harlem Children's Zone, the Baby College Program, and the Harlem Success Academy, what did he promise the families of Harlem and what has he achieved?

10. What teaching techniques does the film demonstrate for engaging children from low-income families? According to the film, how successful have the Kipp Academies become in the last 16 years?
11. What are some disheartening realities that the audience can draw from this film?
12. Although the education "problem is complex," what does the film suggest are some "simple steps" to improving our school systems?

Writing about the Film

1. Using details from the film for support, write an essay exposing what you see as the most challenging obstacles in education today. Include specific quotations and statistics from the film to document your claims.
2. Write an essay comparing and contrasting your own experiences in school with the students and situations depicted in the film.
3. For a research assignment, you may want to read some of the reviews below that are critical of the film and write an essay arguing that *Waiting for Superman* provides a responsible or too limited view of the education problems and solutions facing teachers, parents, and students today. Be careful to include quotation marks and page numbers for all sources and to attach a Works Cited as well.

Works Cited

Waiting for Superman. Dir. Davis Guggenheim. Written by Davis Guggenheim and Billy Kimball. Paramount Vantage and Participant Media. 2010. DVD.

Select Film Reviews and Critical Analyses

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/24/movies/24waiting.html?pagewanted=all>

http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2010/10/11/101011crici_cinema_denby?printable=true¤tPage=all

<http://www.thenation.com/print/article/154986/grading-waiting-superman>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/24/inconvenient-truth-behind-waiting-for-superman_n_865962.html

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/11/myth-charter-schools/?pagination=false>

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/jan/13/myth-charter-schools/?>

[pagination=false&printpage=true](#)

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2010/0924/Waiting-for-Superman-A-simplistic-view-of-education-reform>